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Reputation, Risk, and Race: Exploring Racial and Ethnic Difference in Personal Contact Use and Receipt of Proactive Assistance

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Reputation, Risk, and Race:
Exploring Racial and Ethnic Differences in Personal Contact Use
and Receipt of Proactive Assistance

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ABSTRACT

I used the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality to explore whether and to what extent reputation, measured as spotty work history, job-hopping, and previous incarceration, helps to explain why blacks are less likely than Latinos and whites to find work through personal contacts and why the assistance they do receive from job contacts is less proactive on average. Results reveal that racial differences in reputation are relatively minor, and so these do little to explain why the odds of personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance are lower among blacks. There is evidence, however, that a stigma of race is operating during the job matching process and leading to lower rates of assistance for blacks. For instance, Latino and white job-hoppers are more likely to be matched to their jobs by personal contacts than their black counterparts, suggesting that blacks are less likely to get help than their white and Latino counterparts with similar reputations. The one exception to this is with regard to ex-offender status where black ex-offenders are more likely than their white counterparts to be assisted. This finding, however, can also be explained through a racial stigma framework. Finally, although reputation also helps to explain the odds of receiving proactive assistance, and although Latino ex-offenders are significantly more likely to be assisted proactively than are blacks, reputation does little to explain why blacks are less likely to receive proactive assistance. The implications of these findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Most black, Latino, and white jobseekers look for work through friends, relatives, and acquaintances (Falcon 1995; Green, Tigges, and Browne 1995; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999; Smith 2000), but blacks are less likely than Latinos and whites to get jobs this way (Elliot and Sims 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999; Holzer 1987; Smith 2000), and even when they do, their contacts are less likely to help proactively (Elliot and Sims 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999). Typically, researchers explain these racial differences in terms of blacks' poorer access to social capital—they either lack working friends and relatives who can tell them about job opportunities and put in a good word on their behalf (Loury 1977; Wilson 1987), or they choose formal methods to find work because kith and kin yield poorer quality job opportunities (Elliot and Sims 2001).

Studies that examine the black poor's process of finding work, however, suggest that racial and ethnic differences might be due to something else. In *No Shame in My Game*, Katherine Newman (1999) notes that among the low-wage workers she studied, blacks did have access to working friends and relatives, but they did not always receive the help they needed from them. Instead, because job contacts feared that poorly-regarded referrals would compromise their own reputations with employers, they refused to help. Similarly, Sandra Smith's (2005) interviews with poor blacks revealed that jobholders mostly responded to requests for help with great skepticism and distrust, because they perceived that many jobseekers they knew were too unmotivated, too needy, or too irresponsible to assist. To determine whether they would help and how much help they would offer, most of Smith's jobholders looked to jobseekers' reputations. Without hesitation, they helped the well regarded, but those with bad reputations were frequently forsaken.

This new perspective points not to social capital access, but to its activation, and in so doing, it highlights the central role that reputation plays. Just as important, it raises the following set of questions: Are blacks less likely than Latinos and whites to get help, proactive or otherwise, because they are more likely to have reputations that make assistance less likely? Or is it that, because of racial stigma, black jobseekers of ill-repute are less likely to receive assistance than their Latino and white counterparts? Although economists have discussed the role that reputation plays in the job search process (Rees 1966; Rees and Schulz 1970; Saloner 1985; Ullman 1966), few sociologists have, and to my knowledge, no study has addressed these

specific questions empirically. Answers to these questions, however, might go a long way toward clarifying the complex structural, cultural, and social psychological processes that affect how jobseekers get matched to jobs and why for blacks, persistent joblessness remains a troubling concern.

To fill this gap in the literature, I analyze data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality using logistic regression to explore whether and to what extent reputation helps to explain why blacks are less likely to use personal contacts to find work and why the assistance they do receive from job contacts is less proactive. I also examine whether a stigma of race, or more accurately a stigma of blackness, is operating such that blacks are less likely to get help than Latinos and whites with similar reputations for bad behavior.

JOB SEARCH, JOB FINDING, RACE, AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL CAPITAL

Blacks are just as likely as Latinos and whites to search for work through friends, relatives, and acquaintances, but they are less likely than either Latinos or whites to find work this way (Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan 1980; Elliot and Sims 2001; Falcon 1995; Green, Tigges, and Browne 1995; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999; Smith 2000). Even when they do, the assistance they receive tends to be hands-off. They most often get information about job openings, but their contacts are far less likely to influence the process more directly.

Compare the experiences of blacks and Latinos. Seventy-five percent of blacks search for work through friends and relatives, but less than half actually find work through these informal channels. Furthermore, when blacks do receive help, two-thirds report that their contacts told them about the job (Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999), a form of assistance that Granovetter (1974 [1995]) equates with formal methods of job search because it lacks the element of influence that makes personal contact use advantageous. Just one-third of blacks are helped proactively. Eighty-five percent of Latinos search through kith and kin, and in sharp contrast to blacks, 75 percent find work this way (Elliot and Sims 2001). Furthermore, the assistance they receive is largely proactive in nature—almost sixty percent have contacts who talked to employers on their behalf or hired them (Elliot and Sims 2001; Falcon and Melendez 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999; Smith 2007).

Gaps between black and white jobseekers are smaller, but they too are noteworthy (see Falcon and Melendez 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999; Holzer 1987; but also see Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan 1980; Falcon 1995). Whereas 48% of whites found their current or most recent job through a personal contact, 44% of blacks did. Although relatively small, this difference is accentuated by the following: A higher percentage of white personal contact users were assisted proactively. While 50% of whites were aided by a personal contact who talked to the employer or hired them, just 36% of blacks did (Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999). The question, of course, is why don't blacks get helped as often and as proactively as their Latino and white counterparts?

Two types of explanations are typically offered. The most prominent is structural in nature and tends to focus on blacks' relatively poor access to personal contacts who have information and influence to assist. The economist, Glen Loury, was one of the first. He drew from sociological research on intergenerational mobility and inheritance of race to assert that even if we could equalize racial differences in quality and quantity of human capital, and even if we could encourage employers to eliminate their discrimination against blacks, racial inequalities would persist because, on average, blacks have poorer connections to the labor market and so lack information about job opportunities. Relative to whites, Loury asserted, blacks lacked "social capital."

Drawing from the theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1985), William Julius Wilson (1987) also incorporated ideas behind the social capital theoretical framework into his analysis of persistent, black joblessness among the black poor. Wilson explained that when the black middle- and working classes moved away from what were once vertically integrated, black communities, those left behind became residents of neighborhoods steeped in poverty.¹ As a result, lacking regular and sustained contact with individuals having strong attachments to mainstream institutions, residents became socially isolated. Relative to poor residents of low-poverty neighborhoods, the number of people to whom residents of high poverty neighborhoods are connected is small, and the connections they do have are also disadvantaged. Consequently, they know few who can act as role models, socializing them about appropriate workplace behavior and, most importantly,

¹ See Jargowsky (1997) for evidence of the shift to higher concentrations of poverty in inner-city neighborhoods throughout the 1970s and 80s.

providing them with links to jobs. Thus, Wilson argued, absent access to personal contacts who are able to provide job information—absent social capital—even during strong economic times, members of this group would still have great difficulty finding work.

Empirical support for Wilson's argument is not difficult to find. Studies by Fernandez and Harris (1992) Rankin and Quane (2000), and Wacquant and Wilson (1989) all show that when compared to black residents of low poverty neighborhoods, residents of high poverty neighborhoods do indeed have fewer steadily employed friends and more friends on public assistance. And to explain the almost total exclusion of black residents from 3,600 private sector, blue-collar jobs in their own community, the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, Philip Kasinitz and Jan Rosenberg (1996) point to black jobseekers' lack of connections to and references from contacts that might serve as credible gatekeepers on their behalf.

But Wilson's influence also extends beyond the parameters of urban poverty studies. For instance, in *Race and the Invisible Hand*, Deirdre Royster (2003) argues that working-class black men do not experience the same type of employment trajectories as their white counterparts because they are often excluded from and thus disadvantaged by whites' racially insular job referral networks. In other words, like the black poor, the black working-class is also disadvantaged by their lack of access to friends, relatives, and acquaintances who have information and, most importantly, the ability to influence hires. Findings from Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel's study also indicate that blacks are disadvantaged in getting middle-class jobs—specifically in the high tech industry—primarily because they lack insider referral who can inform them about job openings at the firm (2000).

The second most popular explanation combines structural and rational choice perspectives. Compared to Latinos and whites, blacks earn significantly less when they find work through their network of relations than they do when they use more formal matching methods. As a result, the argument goes, blacks have a financial disincentive to rely on their network of relations to find work, and so they are more likely to forsake their network for help in an effort to maximize their earnings potential. For instance, Elliot and Sims (2001) make this argument and show that among black residents of high poverty neighborhoods, those matched to their jobs by neighbors earned 25% less than those who employed other methods of job search

(also see Green, Tigges, and Browne 1995). Among Latinos, Elliot and Sims found no such wage disadvantage for personal contact use, which led them to conclude that “there is a stronger financial incentive for ghetto residents...” (356). However, when Luis Falcon (1995) examined the wage effect of having been matched to one’s job by a personal contact, he found that Latino personal contact users earned significantly less than Latinos who did not, but among blacks and whites, he found no net effect of personal contact use. Sanders Korenman and Susan Turner (1996) report that when compared to their same-race counterparts who used formal matching methods, disadvantaged black and white youths who used contacts earned more, on average, not less. Finally, Sandra Smith (2000) found that white men matched to their jobs by personal contacts earned significantly less than white men matched by more formal methods. So did Latinas. White women, in contrast, garnered slightly higher wages while blacks and Latino men were no better or worse off. Differences in study findings are likely due to a number of factors, including differences in the populations studied and how variables were operationalized, but what these studies indicate is that blacks do not seem to have any greater financial disincentive to use personal contacts to find work than do Latinos or whites. Personal contact use among blacks does not appear to yield lower quality jobs any more than it does among Latinos or whites.

Given this, how else might we explain lower rates of personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance among blacks when compared to Latinos and whites? Emerging research points not to social capital access, but to its mobilization, highlighting in particular that the extent and nature of assistance that jobseekers receive from job contacts is in great part a function of jobseekers’ reputation.

REPUTATION, RACE, AND THE JOB-MATCHING PROCESS

Essentially, reputation is the opinion that people hold of another based largely on the latter’s past behavior (Bailey 1971; Werner, and Weesie 1990; Wilson 1985). Mark Granovetter (1985) contends that when given competing alternatives about whether or not to assist and with whom to do so, reputation is critical for determining action. This is because reputation acts as a signal, in the formal economic sense (Spence 1974). Because of information asymmetries, quality is not often known before an exchange occurs (Shapiro 1982;

Podolny 1993), contributing to the uncertainty of the situation. To reduce perceptions of risk associated with uncertainty, actors look to reputation on the assumption that past behavior is indicative of how individuals will act in the future. Reputation, then, leads to an expectation of quality from which calculations of risk can be made and decisions about whether and how to act determined. All else being equal, the greater one's reputation, the lower the perceived risk of loss, and the greater other's willingness to partake in reciprocal exchanges.

The job-matching process is a bit more complicated, however. Unlike the description above, which illustrates a two-party exchange, the job-matching process is more accurately described as a three-party exchange where one party, the job contact, acts as an intermediary between two others, the jobseeker and the employer. In situations like this, a job contact's decision to assist a jobseeker by matching him with an employer is not only based on whether or not the jobseeker is reputable. Drawing from Robert Wilson (1985), attention to long-term consequences requires that the job contact consider the state of her own reputation with the employer because the outcome of her matches will undoubtedly affect her reputation and thus her future opportunities (also see Rees (1966) and Saloner (1985)). Whether or not she is allowed to assist again, to receive promotions, or to get raises may all hinge on the reputation she develops as a result of the matches she mediates. Thus, job contacts have a disincentive to assist jobseekers of ill-repute, and so, all things equal, they will not likely refer such jobseekers to employers. However, if the word is that jobseekers are reliable, job contacts have greater incentive to assist and to do so proactively.²

² There are, of course, contingencies to this. For instance, as Smith (2005) found, job contacts with reputations built on a long history of positive behavior may very well suffer little from a botched referral and thus may have a greater willingness to assist jobseekers whose reputations are shaky, perceiving that their future reputations, and thus future opportunities, will be relatively unharmed by one or two blemishes. Ill-reputed job contacts concerned with long-term consequences will have a narrower range of options from which to choose, however. Bad referrals will only weaken their standing in the firm, reducing the likelihood that they will be able to take advantage of opportunities that arise in the future. To optimize outcomes, then, those held in low regard could only hope to improve their reputations, and thus their competitive edge, by aiding only jobseekers who are themselves held in high regard. Job contacts' willingness to assist may also be affected by their own status. Those in truly disadvantaged situations may be willing to take the risk of assisting a jobseeker of ill-repute for the potential financial and social benefits doing so may provide.

Reputation and Job-Finding among the Black Poor

Recent studies that examine the job finding process of young, low-income blacks find that those in possession of job information and influence often make decisions about who to assist and what form that assistance will take based on jobseekers' reputation, with particular emphases placed on jobseekers' prior work history and their propensity for delinquency in their personal lives. In *No Shame in My Game*, for instance, Katherine Newman (1999) notes that among the low-wage black and Latino workers of Harlem that she studied, some jobholders feared that their referral would prove unreliable and would compromise their reputations with employers, and so they were hesitant to provide help. In reference to one of her respondents, Newman reports, "Larry trains a critical eye on the people in his own family and realized that though he loves them, they are not always good bets as referrals. He thinks his sister is lazy and doesn't want to work. His mother doesn't work either and hasn't for as long as Larry can remember" (1999: 82). Thus, Larry denied them both assistance, based on their reputations for laziness and nonwork.

Employing in-depth interviews of low-income African-Americans from one midwestern city, Smith (2005, 2007) also found that jobholders overwhelmingly treated requests for jobseeking help with great skepticism and distrust. Over 80% of the respondents in her sample expressed great concern that jobseekers they knew were too unmotivated to accept assistance, required great expenditures of time and emotional energy, or acted too irresponsibly on the job, thereby jeopardizing contacts' own reputations in the eyes of employers and negatively affecting their already-tenuous labor market prospects. To determine whether or not they would assist, then, 75% of Smith's respondents looked to jobseekers' prior actions and behaviors both on the job and in their personal lives. For instance, jobholders were displeased with jobseekers who transitioned in and out of jobs frequently, who were habitually absent or tardy, and who had poor work attitudes. Furthermore, jobholders were concerned about whether or not their jobseeking ties would "bring the street to the job," which included, among other things, showing the effects of alcohol and drug use, acting raucously and boisterously, stealing, and intimidating authority figures and co-workers. As one of Smith's respondents commented, "I got friends, you know, that's thieves, that want to rob and steal, you know what I'm saying? How would I be like trying to get them a job where I'm working at, you know what I'm saying?"

Then, the boss's car come up missing or something, or you know a computer come up missing" (2005:24). Jobholders refused to assist jobseekers with these characteristics because they calculated the risk associated with making bad matches as high since so many of their friends, family members, and acquaintances were known to be of such ill repute that job contacts felt that they could not trust them to behave appropriately. However, jobholders readily assisted jobseekers held in high regard, including those who were deemed to be dependable, dedicated, and productive because such jobseekers constituted a low risk of ending badly.

Jobholders are not the only actors to make decisions about whether or not to cooperate during the job-matching process. Jobseekers, too, have choice, and they do not always choose to seek assistance. Indeed, Smith (2007) has found that a significant minority of jobseekers in her sample, roughly one-quarter, routinely forsook assistance from their jobholding network of relations because they feared that their requests for assistance would be rejected. Some jobseekers were more likely to share such concerns than others, however. Specifically, jobseekers with prior alcohol and drug addictions, ex-offenders, and those who had been fired from their last job were more likely than their less delinquent counterparts to report that they were reluctant to seek job-finding assistance from their network of relations. In other words, jobseekers based decisions about whether or not to be assisted on their own reputations, on and off the job. Given previous research on the job-finding process among the black poor, which indicates that concerns about jobseekers' reputations play a major role in explaining noncooperation among blacks during the job-matching process, I make the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Blacks have lower odds of personal contact use because they are more likely than Latinos and whites to have poor reputations.

Hypothesis 2: Black personal contact users have lower odds of being assisted proactively than Latino and white personal contact users because they have are more likely to have poor reputations.

It may also be the case, however, that black jobseekers of ill repute are less likely to be assisted, and assisted proactively, by their job contacts than are similarly-reputed Latino and white jobseekers. Why might this be? I suggest the stigma of race.

The Stigma of Race

Stigma, according to Erving Goffman (1963) is “an attribute that is deeply discrediting,” one in which an individual is “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (3). To put it simply, stigma is a devalued social identity (Crocker, Major, and Steele, 1998: 505), an “undesired differentness” from “normals” (Goffman 1963: 5) created when attributes become married to stereotypes. Goffman identified three categories of stigma—the physically deformed, those of ill-repute, and those who have inherited their stigma as a result of being born into certain racial and ethnic groups.³ The marriage between attributes associated with each of these “gross” categories and corresponding negative stereotypes then justifies patterns of differential treatment, or discrimination, against those who have been discredited. For social psychologists Bruce Link and Jo Phelan (2001), the process of stigmatization unfolds as five components—labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination—converge.

To be clear, stigma is context-specific and a matter of degree. A social identity may be discredited in one context but prized in another, and its extent and nature can vary across groups. In the labor market context, however, blackness tends to fall in the former, discredited category. According to Roger Waldinger, in the labor market, there is a racial or “ethnic queue” where “entire groups of people are *ordered* in terms of desirability for preferred jobs, with skill-relevant characteristics serving as additional weights” (1996: 18). As a group, blacks are at the end of this queue, whites are most often ranked first, and Asians and Latinos fall somewhere in between. They, too, are stigmatized, but to a lesser degree than blacks.⁴ Previous research indicates that when compared to labor market competitors of other racial and ethnic groups, employers perceive black workers to be less competent, less productive, less dependable, less pliable and obedient, and,

³ Link and Phelan (2001) critique Goffman’s categorization for not being mutually exclusive and for not taking into consideration the social experiences that underlie them. Instead, they discuss stigma along two axes—visibility and controllability.

⁴ As Link and Phelan point out, groups can and do differ on each of the five components that make up the stigmatization process. As they explain, “The labeling of human differences can be more or less prominent. A label can connect a person to many stereotypes, to just a few or to none at all. Moreover, the strength of the connection between labels and undesirable attributes can be relatively strong or relatively weak. The degree of separation into groups of “us” and “them” can be more or less complete, and finally the extent of status loss and discrimination can vary. This means that some groups are more stigmatized than others and that some of the components we have described can be used analytically to think about why differences in the extent of stigma experienced vary from group to group” (377).

in the case of black women, much more distracted by familial obligations (Browne and Kennelly 1999; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Shih 2002).⁵

Studies of employers' perceptions and preferences are consistent with audit studies, which reveal that differential treatment does occur, most often to the detriment of black job candidates. Black testers are two to three times less likely than white testers to receive callbacks or formal interviews (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991), and among those who receive interviews, black testers wait longer to be interviewed, receive shorter interviews, are interviewed by fewer members of personnel, and receive fewer positive comments. They are also half as likely to receive offers (Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991).

The additional stigma of a prior conviction only makes matters worse.⁶ In an audit study designed to examine the effect of having a criminal record on hiring, Devah Pager (2002) shows that employers are twice as likely to call back nonoffenders than equally qualified ex-offenders, and the effect of race only magnifies

⁵ Drawing from in-depth interviews of employers in the Atlanta metropolitan area, Irene Browne and Ivy Kennelly (1999) investigated how applicants' race and gender affected employers' perceptions and hiring preferences. They discovered that employers either viewed black women as poor, single mothers who struggled to balance work and family obligations and so were prone to absenteeism and tardiness, or as poor, single mothers who, in an effort to support their children, were desperate to take any position available. Neither image fed a greater desire to hire them, however. Employers either considered them too great a risk, or they chose not to hire them because they contemptuously viewed black women's desire to work as a means of survival, not a belief in work as a moral good. Interestingly, Browne and Kennelly also contrasted employers' images of black women with the characteristics of Atlanta's actual labor force. They found employers' images to be nothing more than stereotypes. Although a higher percentage of black women workers were single mothers, less than one-fifth were. Furthermore, they found that although a higher percentage of both black and white women reported tardiness, absences, and changes in work schedules due to familial obligations, a higher percentage of white women (54%) than black women (43%) did, contradicting employers' stereotypic notions.

⁶ According to economists Harry Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael Stoll (2002a), less than 13 percent of employers would definitely hire ex-offenders, and almost two-thirds indicated that they probably would not or definitely would not. From a supply side standpoint, this resistance could at least in part be attributed to the time offenders spend in prison, since incarceration takes away from time that could otherwise have been spent accumulating much valued education, work experience, and/or training. Employers may also be disinclined toward hiring ex-offenders because ex-offenders are far more likely to be high school dropouts and illiterates (Holzer, Offner, and Sorenson 2005). Even if human capital deficiencies were not an issue, however, ex-offenders would still have difficulty securing work. Employers have many concerns, and they are difficult to resolve (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2002a). First, the law prohibits employers in certain occupations or industries from employing ex-offenders, especially those with felony convictions (Hahn 1999). Second, under the theory of negligent hiring (Glynn 1988), some states hold employers liable for the criminal actions that their employees commit. Employers may fear that if they hire ex-offenders who then harm their coworkers or customers, they will be held liable and forced to pay excessive damages and court fees. Third, depending on applicants' prior offenses, employers may not trust that their merchandise and lives are safe with ex-offenders (Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996).

this gap. While white nonoffenders are two times more likely to receive callbacks than equally qualified white ex-offenders, the ratio among blacks is 3-to-1.⁷

Given the extent to which employers' views of applicants and workers are affected by stigmas of race and ethnicity, it makes sense that this would infect relations between these two sets of actors in ways that would influence the extent and nature of assistance that jobholders would be willing to provide black jobseekers relative to Latinos and whites. As Goffman theorizes,

When normals and stigmatized do in fact enter one another's immediate presence...these moments will be the ones when the causes and effects of stigma must be directly confronted by both sides. The stigmatized individual may find that he feels unsure of how we normals will identify him and receive him...This uncertainty arises not merely from the stigmatized individual's not knowing which of several categories he will be placed in, but also, where the placement is favorable, from his knowing that in their hearts the others may be defining him in terms of his stigma...Thus in the stigmatized arises the sense of not knowing what the others are "really" thinking about him. Further, during mixed contacts, the stigmatized individual is likely to feel that he is "on," having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impression he is making, to a degree and in areas of conduct which he assumes others are not. Also, he is likely to feel that the usual scheme of interpretation for everyday events has been undermined. His minor accomplishments, he feels, may be assessed as signs of remarkable and noteworthy capacities in the circumstances...At the same time, minor failings or incidental impropriety may, he feels, be interpreted as a direct expression of his stigmatized differentness" (13-15).

Jobholders who perceive that their employers have a distaste for hiring blacks may be more stringent in their criteria for determining who to assist than similar Latinos and whites in an effort to reduce the risk of making a bad match. And this may be especially so for black jobholders who might not only fear that they will be perceived to have poor judgment, but who may also be concerned about being viewed through negative stereotypic lens by association (see Aronson et al 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995, 1998).

This consideration is consistent with Elijah Anderson's interpretation of black jobholders' reluctance to assist.⁸ According to Anderson, the careful deliberations that *black* jobholders undertake are

⁷ The likelihood of their hire increases, however, if employers conduct criminal background checks. Harry Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael Stoll (2002b) investigated the extent to which the race of the most recently hired employee was affected by whether or not employers conducted criminal background checks on applicants. They found that employers who were unwilling to hire ex-offenders were more likely to do so if they conducted criminal background checks than were employers who did not. This is hopeful news. The only problem is that most employers—two-thirds—do not conduct criminal background checks.

⁸ In telling "John Turner's Story," a tale of a young black man struggling with the desire to be "decent" and the call of the "street," Anderson speaks of Curtis, whom he describes as "a sixty-year-old black union steward at a local hospital whom I had know for about five years" (1999:252). Anderson approached Curtis for job-placement assistance on John Turner's behalf. About this interaction, Anderson states, "Curtis said much by saying only, 'Tell that boy not to mess me up!' Black people like Curtis who consider sponsoring someone like John Turner may be concerned on several levels.

at least in part a reflection of their understanding that the stigma of blackness makes all the more difficult the task of earning employers' trust and respect, and in the face of black jobseekers who "mess up," that much easier to lose. Given this, I would add the following set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Blacks with poor reputations have lower odds of personal contact use than Latinos and whites of ill-repute.

Hypothesis 4: Black personal contact users with poor reputations have lower odds of being assisted proactively than Latinos and whites of ill-repute.

DATA AND METHODS

To determine the effect of reputation on racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance, I analyzed the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI) dataset. MCSUI is a multistage area probability sample of 8,916 individuals twenty-one years old and older randomly selected from households in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles that seeks to improve understanding of issues related to urban inequalities, such as changing labor market dynamics, racial attitudes and stereotypes, and racial residential segregation. Cross-sectional in nature, the MCSUI was collected between 1992 and 1994 using personal interviews. The overall response rates by cities are Atlanta, 75 percent; L.A., 68 percent; and Boston, 71 percent.

I analyzed data only for a subset of all MCSUI respondents. My subsample included black, Latino, and white residents of Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles. Because the Detroit survey did not address issues of job contacts' characteristics, it was excluded from these analyses. Asians, American Indians, and respondents specified as other were also excluded because their numbers were too small to conduct reliable analyses. In addition, the number of cases analyzed excludes retired persons, individuals deemed too old to be working, those who had not looked for work in more than six years as they were not asked questions about how they found their jobs, and those who reported never having searched for work. These exclusions

Because of their understanding of the history of racial prejudice in our society, they may sense that their hold on their own position is somewhat tenuous. They have often had to wage a vigorous campaign for the trust of employers and fellow workers. For them to sponsor someone for a job, they must be able to view him or her as fully trustworthy. Furthermore, a common feeling is that a black person who is judged incompetent on the job may easily make other black people look bad. Curtis, as a union steward, was not seriously afraid of losing his job. But he was concerned about being messed up, about looking bad, particularly to relatively powerful whites. In response to these insecurities, black men like Curtis are usually extremely careful when recommending other blacks for jobs" (253-4).

resulted in a sample size of 2,353 to examine the effect of reputation on racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use and 1,271 cases to examine the same on receipt of proactive assistance.

Variables

Primary dependent variables under consideration are personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance. In the MCSUI, respondents were asked, “Did you find your (last/present) job through friends or relatives, other people, newspaper ads, or some other way?” *Personal contact users* were coded 1 if they had found work through friends, relatives, or other persons. They were coded 0 for personal contact use if they had used newspaper ads and other methods.

For those who found their jobs through personal contacts, a series of questions followed. Personal contact users were asked the main way their contact helped them find the job. Responses to this question include 1) told me; 2) hired me; 3) talked to employer; 4) gave a reference; 5) or other. In this study, I categorized *recipients of proactive assistance* as those who report that their contacts assisted by hiring, talking to employer, or giving a reference (coded 1 for proactive assistance); these are the applicants who received both information *and* influence during the job-matching process. Those who reported that their contact aided by telling them about the job or providing some other form of assistance are NOT considered to have received proactive assistance as the intervention they obtained lacked influence (coded 0 for proactive assistance).⁹

Besides respondents’ race, included in analyses as a categorical variable for which blacks are the reference, the primary predictor variables under consideration are those dealing with jobseekers’ reputation. Previous research indicates that potential job contacts determined whether or not they would provide assistance and how much assistance they would provide based on jobseekers’ work reputation, such as how

⁹ This variable construction differs slightly from the one employed by Green, Tigges, and Diaz (1999) who determined that recipients of proactive assistance were those whose job contacts hired them or talked to the employer on their behalf. In my variable construction, I include those whose contacts acted as references as well because these contacts attempted to influence the process directly. Applicants receiving “other” forms of assistance were included among those not receiving proactive assistance because recent evidence suggests that assistance falling in the “other” category is most often of the in-kind nature, such as providing needed transportation or childcare. The “other” category of assistance tends not to include attempts to influence the job-matching process more directly. In any event, I conducted analyses employing both measures: proactive assistance constructed such that “other” methods of assistance were coded 0 (lacking proactivity) and proactive assistance constructed such that “other” methods were also coded 1 (proactive). Findings did not differ substantively. These results will be provided upon request.

steadily employed jobseekers had been and the extent to which jobseekers moved frequently from one job to the next. To capture these, I included two variables in the analyses. In MCSUI, respondents were asked, “Altogether, since the time you left school, how much of the time have you worked? Would you say all or nearly all of the time, about three-fourths of the time, about half of the time, about a quarter of the time, or none or nearly none of the time?” Responses to this question were recoded as the dummy variable *spotty work history*. Respondents who indicated that they had worked about half of the time or less were coded as having a spotty work history (coded 1) while those indicating that they had worked nearly all or three-fourths of the time since leaving school were categorized as not having a spotty work history (and coded 0). Drawing from prior research, we would expect reduced odds of personal contact use and receipt of proactive aid from respondents with spotty work histories.

The MCSUI also asked respondents how many employers they had had in the last five years. This continuous variable, *number of employers*, captures the extent of respondents’ job-hopping. Drawing from previous research, the greater the number of jobs in the five-year period, the lower the odds that jobseekers would have used a personal contact to find work or received proactive assistance.

Previous research also indicates that potential job contacts were less likely to help their job-seeking relations if they were believed to be active criminals. Jobseekers have also been found to forsake personal contacts for job-finding if they had been incarcerated. MCSUI does have a variable that measures whether or not respondents have received money from activities that some people might consider to be illegal, which would get at potential job contacts’ concerns, but so few respondents replied affirmatively that this variable would have been of little use.¹⁰ Thus, for this purpose, I rely solely on a measure of previous incarceration based on the following MCSUI question: “Have you ever been held in reform school, a detention center, jail, or prison?” Respondents who have been are coded as 1 for the variable *ex-offender*. Those who had not been previously held are coded as 0. These three variables—spotty work history, number of employers, and ex-offender status—represent the “reputation” variables that will be used in these analyses.

¹⁰ Of the 7,373 respondents in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles asked this question, just 61 indicated that they had received money from activities that some might consider illegal.

Included in the analyses are four sets of controls. The first set consists of demographic characteristics measuring respondents' gender and age. I included a dummy variable for being female ("male" reference). In addition, I include age since previous research has shown that younger jobseekers are more likely to rely on personal contacts to find work than older jobseekers, and I add its square since this relationship tends to level off over time.

The second set of controls include measures of human capital, specifically workers' educational attainment, English fluency, citizenship, and previous work experience. I include a categorical variable for degree status. High school *dropouts* and respondents with *some college or more* are compared to high school graduates, the omitted category. MCSUI also queried respondents about their *English fluency*, a factor that has been found to affect the odds of personal contact use in that those who lack proficiency are more likely to receive assistance. Indeed, some argue that this is the primary reason why Latinos are more likely to receive aid during the job-finding process than whites or blacks. To control for this, I recoded a variable whose categories of response range from speaking no English at all (1) to speaking it very well (5) into a dummy variable (1=fluent in English; 0=not fluent). I also include dummy variables for *U.S. citizenship*—citizens are coded one, non-citizens are coded zero—and *previous experience*—coded as one if respondent had experience in the type of job for which they had applied and 0 if they did not have such experience.

The third set of controls measures job and labor market characteristics and context. I included dummy variables for respondents in *managerial and professional occupations* and those in *service industries* (whether professional, business/repair, personal, and entertainment/recreational). Reference categories include all other occupations and industries, respectively. As a proxy for working in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Boston labor markets, I included dummy variables for respondents who resided in the *Atlanta* and *Los Angeles* metropolitan areas; Boston is the reference category. I also included dummies for whether or not personal contact users are *union* members and *government* employees.

The latter measure, government job, is of particular importance. It could be that blacks are less likely to use personal contacts and receive proactive assistance because they are far more likely to be employed by the government. Recruitment and screening processes in the public sector are far more formal in nature,

requiring written applications and tests of ability, for instance, and thus offering fewer opportunities for contacts to intervene in the hiring process. To the extent that blacks are less likely than Latinos and whites to use personal contacts to find work, it may be because they are more likely to work in the public sector. Public sector employment may also explain why blacks are less likely to receive proactive assistance. Even if told that the post office is hiring, for instance, because the hiring process in the public sector is more formalized, there are fewer opportunities for contacts to assist proactively—to hire or to speak to employers on jobseekers' behalf.

In some work contexts, blacks may be and feel less stigmatized by race, and so black jobseekers may be more likely to receive job-finding assistance from personal contacts in those settings than they do in others. Previous research indicates that black employers are less likely to discriminate against black applicants (Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991; but see Wilson 1996 for a discussion of black employers' negative views of inner-city black workers), and, related, Elliot and Sims (2001) show that minority workers with coethnic supervisors are significantly less likely to perceive discrimination on the job than those with non-coethnic supervisors. As a result, in work settings with black employers or supervisors, jobholders, especially black jobholders, may be far more willing to assist black jobseekers and to do so proactively. Thus, I also include controls for the race of the supervisor and the race of most of the employees at work. MCSUI asked respondents with an immediate supervisor, "What is your immediate supervisor's race or ethnic origin—would you say White, Black/African-American, Hispanic, Asian, or something else?" With regard to the race of most of the employees at work, MCSUI asked, "What is the race and ethnicity of most of the employees doing the kind of work you do at this location?". The former was entered as a dummy variable, *same-race supervisor*, indicating whether (1) or not (0) the supervisor is of the same race as respondent. Included among those coded 0 are respondents who did not have an immediate supervisor. The race of most coworkers was also entered as a dummy variable, *same-race coworkers*, indicating whether (1) or not (0) most of respondents' coworkers were of the same race or ethnicity.

The final set of controls is intended to control for jobseekers' access to social capital and is primarily used to estimate the odds that respondents received proactive assistance. In addition to querying respondents

about how their job contacts assisted in the job-matching process, MCSUI also asked respondents to describe their relationship to the job contact (relative, friend, acquaintance, or someone else), the contact's race or ethnicity (non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, Asian, or other), gender (man or woman), and whether the contact resided in their neighborhood and worked for the firm (yes or no). From these questions, I created five dummy variables. While respondents matched by relatives or friends are considered *strong ties* and coded one while those using acquaintances or someone else are coded 0. Respondents are also coded one for using a *same-race/ethnicity* contact (0 for different-race/ethnicity), a *female tie* (0 for male), a *neighborhood tie* (0 for non-neighbor), and an *insider referrals* (0 for contact who did not work for the firm).

Methods

First, I employed one-way analysis of variance to test hypotheses that a higher percentage of blacks than Latinos or whites have poor reputations. Then, to estimate the odds of personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance, I used logistic regression, the most appropriate method to use when dependent variables in question are dichotomous. As I explained earlier, *personal contact use* is a dichotomous variable where the value one refers to respondents who used a personal contact to find work and the value 0 refers to respondents who did not. Receipt of proactive assistance is also dichotomous variable with 1 representing those whose personal contacts talked to the employer on their behalf, hired them, or gave them a reference; those coded as 0 did not receive this type of assistance.

To determine whether and to what extent blacks have lower odds of personal contact use than whites and Latinos because they are more likely to have poor reputations (Hypothesis 1 & 2), I estimated three models. The first estimates the effect of race on personal contact use; the second includes controls for demographic characteristics and the labor market and job context, including the race of the supervisor and most of the workers doing the same kind of work; and the third includes my primary predictor variables, proxies for reputation. To determine whether and to what extent blacks have lower odds of receiving proactive assistance because they are more likely to have poor reputations, models one and two are identical to those estimated for personal contact use. Model three, however, includes controls for social capital access

(characteristics of the job contact); model four adds my measures of reputation. If racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance are at least in part a function of racial and ethnic differences in reputations, then the inclusion of reputation variables should either diminish or eliminate the effect of being white and Latino (relative to being black).

To determine whether or not racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use are the result of ill-reputed blacks receiving less assistance than ill-reputed Latinos and whites (Hypothesis 3 & 4), I estimate fourth and fifth models of personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance, respectively, with reputation and race interaction terms. Specifically, I include the following: spotty work history*Latino and spotty work history*white; job-hopping*Latino and job-hopping*white; ex-offender*Latino and ex-offender*white. If racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use and proactive assistance are at least in part a function of ill-reputed blacks receiving less aid than ill-reputed Latinos and whites, then the inclusion of these interaction terms should either diminish or eliminate the effect of being white and Latino (relative to being black).

The proactive assistance measure is primarily composed of two measures—contact hired jobseeker or talked to employer on jobseeker's behalf. Although both indicate that job contacts intervened in the process directly, these interventions are very different in nature. Indeed, they likely represent a hierarchy of information and influence, one in which hiring contacts are located higher in social structure and contacts who talk to employers and provide references located beneath them. There is little more that contacts can do for applicants than to hire them. As a prerequisite to being able to hire, contacts must be structurally well placed; they must occupy positions that offer some power and influence. However, talking to employers or acting as a reference, what I will refer to from this point forward as *brokering*, does not require great social structural location. Instead, brokering contacts are largely attempting to influence from a position of subordination, using their name, reputation, and/or status as currency. Assuming access, any contact can broker, if he or she chooses.

To determine if racial and ethnic differences in being hired or having a broker versus only being told about an open position is at least in part a result of jobseekers' reputation, I used multinomial logistic

regression, which allows for the estimation of models with polytomous dependent variables. The variable under study here is *job contact's method of assistance*, which has the following three categories: having a contact who hires jobseeker; having a contact who talks to employer or provides a reference on jobseeker's behalf; having a contact who tells jobseeker about the job opening.

Finally, although blacks, Latinos, and low-income households were oversampled to produce sufficient numbers to analyze black-white-Latino differences in Los Angeles and Boston, I limited race comparisons in Atlanta to black-white differences because of the extremely small sample size of Latinos in that city. For descriptive analyses, data were weighted to compensate for non-response so that weighted counts of persons by age, gender, and race reflect the distribution of the adult population from the 1990 census.

Strengths and Limitations

To address the research questions under study, the MCSUI has several advantages. First, it allows links to be made between reputation, social capital, and labor market outcomes because multiple questions were including concerning respondents' prior behavior, job contacts' characteristics, and the specific methods of assistance that respondents received during the job-matching process. Second, whereas the samples of many studies of this kind are drawn from a particular city or region, the MCSUI sample is drawn from three major metropolitan areas in three of the four major regions of the country representing cities unique in history, economy, geography, and demography. Third, because blacks, Latinos, and low-income households were oversampled, there are sufficient observations to analyze racial differences, especially in Los Angeles and Boston where all three racial groups are sufficiently represented.

These variables, however, are not without their problems, especially in terms of representing jobseekers' actual reputation. As stated earlier, reputation is the opinion that people hold of another based largely on the latter's past behavior (Bailey 1971; Werner, and Weesie 1990; Wilson 1985), and in prior research, it has primarily been measured through surveys of others' opinions (Lang and Lang 2001) and not, as I do here, as measures of respondents' actual behavior. My measures of reputation assume the others

know of respondents' work and personal history and that these would be defining characteristics of jobseekers for potential job contacts in the process of deciding whether or not to assist. In other words, the variables I employ here only represent proxies of jobseekers' actual reputation.

RESULTS

As figure 1 shows, a significantly higher percentage of Latinos found work through personal contacts than did either whites or blacks. Whereas 73 percent of Latinos were job-matched with the help of a friend, relative, or acquaintance, just 47 percent of whites and 41 percent of blacks were. A significantly higher percentage of Latinos and whites were also matched by job contacts who helped proactively. Whereas 58 and 51 percent of Latinos and whites, respectively, received help from a personal contact who hired them, talked to the employer on their behalf, or provided a reference, just 39 percent of black personal contact users received this type of assistance. The central question is why.

Racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance might in part be attributable to differences in demographic, human capital, and labor market characteristics. In the case of receipt of proactive assistance, it might also be due to the characteristics of the job contact. Table 1 displays mean sample characteristics by race and ethnicity. From these, we might explain Latinos' greater use of personal contacts in terms of their lower levels of human capital. Compared to blacks and whites, a much higher percentage has dropped out of school, and significantly lower percentages speak English fluently and are citizens. Each of these factors is positively associated with receiving help from personal contacts to find work. Working in the service industry is negatively associated with personal contact use, and a lower percentage of Latinos work in this industry compared to blacks or whites.

Blacks, however, do have characteristics that might explain why a lower percentage of them finds work through personal contacts. First, when compared to Latinos, a higher percentage of blacks work in the public sector, whose recruitment and screening practices are far more formal in nature and thus offers fewer opportunities for personal contacts to intervene in the hiring process. Furthermore, a much lower percentage of blacks than Latinos and whites work in firms in which the supervisor and the majority of co-workers doing

the same work are of the same race or ethnicity. Whereas 81 percent of whites and 41 percent of Latinos work in firms where the supervisor is of the same race/ethnicity, just 26 percent of blacks did. Similarly, whereas 79 percent of whites and 71 percent of Latinos worked in firms where the majority of their coworkers were white and Latino, respectively, just 36 percent of blacks did. To the extent that personal networks are racially and ethnicity homogeneous, and to the extent that most black, Latino, and white personal contact users find work through co-ethnic personal contacts, a lower percentage of blacks might use personal contacts to find work because they have fewer opportunities than either Latinos or whites to gain employment in predominantly co-ethnic work settings.

When considering blacks' lower receipt of proactive assistance, there is little about the characteristics of the personal contact user that would seem highly explanatory. As the lowest panel in Table 1 indicates, blacks, Latinos, and whites do not differ significantly in terms of the access to insider referrals. Most of each group uses these to get matched to jobs. Most also use same-race contacts. And although we would correlate the use of strong ties and neighborhood ties to greater receipt of proactive assistance, a lower percentage of whites, who receive more proactive assistance, use strong ties and neighbors to get work than blacks. Significantly fewer blacks, however, receive help from neighbors than do Latinos. In addition, higher percentage of blacks were matched to their jobs by female job contacts, and women are less likely to provide assistance that is proactive in nature.

Controlling for demographic and human capital characteristics of the worker, characteristics of the labor market, and characteristics of the job contact, blacks might be less likely to get help and to get help proactively because they are more likely to have poor reputations. Means tests of racial differences in reputation, however, do not provide much support for these hypotheses. While blacks and Latinos are more likely than whites to have spotty work histories (see figure 2: 27 and 26 percent of blacks and Latinos, respectively compared to just 15 percent of whites), there are no significant differences between these groups in terms of the average number of jobs held in the last five years (see figure 3). If anything, at 2.7, blacks seem less likely to be job-hoppers than either Latinos who average 2.9 jobs per five years and whites who

average 2.8.¹¹ Furthermore, among those in this sample, blacks do not differ significantly from Latinos or whites in terms of the percentage held in reform school, a detention center, jail, or prison (see figure 4). Ten percent of blacks and whites and eight percent of Latinos reported having been incarcerated. This first stab suggests that racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance are likely not attributable to blacks having poorer reputations. Multivariate analyses, however, provide a more stringent test.

Race, Reputation, and Personal Contact Use

To determine the effect of reputation on racial and ethnic differences in the odds of personal contact use, I estimated five models. In the first I included only the variable race. As shown in Table 2, this reveals that the odds of personal contact use are almost four times greater for Latinos and 24% greater for whites. The latter difference, however, is of only marginal significance.

Model two adds controls for demographic and human capital characteristics of the individual as well as characteristics of the labor market, with the exception of variables same-race supervisor and same-race coworkers, which are added in model 3. With the inclusion of these controls in model two, Latinos' odds are now only greater than those of blacks by 2 ½ times. Among whites, however, the odds of personal contact use *increase* to 48 percent, and its effect, which had been of marginal significance in model 1 is now strong. These findings suggest that while these controls explain away some of the differences in personal contact use between blacks and Latinos, whites are actually far more likely to use personal contacts to find work than are blacks with similar levels of human capital and working in similar labor market contexts.

In model three, I include controls for supervisor's race and the race of most of the coworkers. Here we find that having a same-race supervisor and same-race coworkers increase the odds of personal contact use by 20 percent and 26 percent, respectively. The former finding is of marginal significance and diminishes

¹¹ Furthermore, if we categorize job-hoppers as those who work five or more jobs in a five-year period, just 4 percent of blacks fall into this category compared to 7 percent of Latinos and 8 percent of whites. Here, the difference between blacks and whites is significantly different. If we employ a more liberal definition of job-hopping—those who work in three jobs over a five-year period—19 percent of blacks would be so categorized compared to 22 percent of whites and 25 percent of Latinos. Here, the difference between blacks and Latinos is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. These descriptive findings suggest that blacks are no more likely than Latinos or whites to move from one job to the next. Indeed, if anything, they seem somewhat less likely to.

in significance in models to follow. The latter finding, however, is significant at the $p < .05$ level and remains so. With the inclusion of these variables, Latinos' odds of personal contact use relative to blacks changes little (from 2.6 to 2.5). Whites' odds of personal contact use, however, declines to 23 percent and becomes statistically insignificant. In other words, while the racial context of the workplace does little to explain differences between black and Latino differences in personal contact use, it does help to explain differences between blacks and whites.

In model four, I estimate the odds of personal contact use including my reputation variables. The expectation here is that the odds of personal contact use will be lower for workers with spotty work histories, job-hoppers, and ex-offenders. This, however, was necessarily not the case. Workers with spotty work histories—those who since leaving school worked half the time or less—have 22 percent *greater* odds of personal contact use than those with steady work histories, and the number of jobs held in the past five years seemed to have little bearing on the odds of personal contact use. Ex-offender status, however, did. Ex-offenders had 46 percent lower odds of personal contact use than did non-offenders. The inclusion of these measures of reputation did not change in any meaningful way the odds of personal contact use among Latinos or whites relative to blacks, which indicates that blacks' lower likelihood of personal contact use is not attributable to more of them having poor reputations. Thus, we must reject hypothesis one that relative to Latino and white workers, black workers are less likely to find work through personal contacts because they are more likely to have problematic reputations.

This does not mean, however, that reputation does not matter for understanding racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use. Clarity around racial dynamics emerges with model five and the inclusion of reputation and race interaction terms. With the addition of these terms, the odds of personal contact use for those with spotty work histories, job-hoppers, and ex-offenders decline to insignificance. Thus, among blacks, to whom these odds ratios are now in reference, reputation has no effect on the odds of personal contact use.

Relatively speaking, though, they do matter in some cases for Latinos and whites. Relative to blacks, whites and Latinos with spotty work histories have higher odds of personal contact use (37 and 22% higher,

respectively), but these differences are statistically insignificant. When compared to blacks, however, job-hopping increases the odds of personal contact use among Latinos (by 16%, $p=.056$) and strongly increases the odds among whites (by 23%). Ex-offender status, on the other hand, significantly *decreases* the odds of personal contact use among whites by 90%. The odds are lower among Latino ex-offenders as well, but insignificantly so.

With the inclusion of these interaction terms, the higher odds of personal contact use among Latinos decline to 69 percent and is only of marginal significance relative to blacks; whites' insignificant 25 percent advantage declines to an insignificant 14 percent disadvantage. We can interpret this to mean that when we compare blacks, whites, and Latinos *without these reputational issues*, differences in the odds of personal contact use are insignificant. It is among those of ill-repute that racial and ethnic differences in the odds of personal contact use emerge. White and Latino job-hoppers are significantly more likely to get help than black job-hoppers, and so I find partial support for hypothesis three that black jobseekers are less likely than their Latino and white counterparts to get help from personal contacts when they have poor work reputations. White ex-offenders, however, are significantly less likely to get help than black ex-offenders, a finding that does not support my hypotheses but that can be explained in terms of racial stigma nonetheless. I will elaborate on this point in the discussion section.

Race, Reputation, and Receipt of Proactive Assistance

What of racial and ethnic differences in proactive assistance? To determine this, I estimated the odds of receiving proactive assistance. As shown in Table 3, I estimated six models. Model 1 includes only the race variable and shows that the odds of receiving proactive assistance are over two times higher for Latinos and 62 percent higher for whites when compared to blacks. In model two, I include controls for individual and job characteristics, which reduce Latinos' advantage to insignificance and decreases whites' advantage slightly. In other words, differences between blacks and Latinos appear to be solely a function of demographic and human capital characteristics of the worker as well as characteristics of the job (with the

exception of same-race supervisor and coworkers), but these same factors do little to explain differences between blacks and whites.

In model three, I include variables measuring whether or not respondents worked in firms with same-race supervisors and mostly same-race coworkers. While having a same-race supervisor had no effect on receiving proactive assistance, working in a firm where most of the other workers were of the same race significantly *decreased* the odds of receiving proactive assistance. This is likely the case because gaining employment at a firm where most of the other workers are of a different race or ethnicity necessitates that the applicant gets vouched for, and so the job contact is more likely to put in a good word to the employer. The inclusion of these variables, however, do not change Latinos' or whites' odds of receiving proactive assistance relative to blacks in any substantive way.

In model 4, I estimated the odds of receiving proactive assistance by including my social capital access variables—job contacts' characteristics. Results reveal that jobseekers who used insider referrals had odds of receiving proactive assistance two times greater than jobseekers matched by contacts who did not work for the hiring firm. Jobseekers matched by neighbors also had 33 percent greater odds of receiving proactive assistance. The odds of receiving proactive assistance, however, were significantly reduced by 64 percent for jobseekers who used same/race ties¹² and by half for those using strong ties. Using a female tie instead of a male tie mattered little. The inclusion of these access variables explained some small part of the black-white differential since whites' advantage declined to an insignificant 46 percent.

In model five, I included my reputation variables. As before, these variables have little effect on the black-white, black-Latino differential, and so racial and ethnic differences in receipt of proactive assistance cannot be explained in terms of blacks' poorer reputations. However, these variables do affect the odds of receiving proactive assistance generally, although not always in ways anticipated. Specifically, as expected, jobseekers with spotty work histories have 35 percent lower odds of receiving proactive assistance. But the

¹² I also estimated this model including the interaction term white*same-race contact to determine if whites were also disadvantaged by using white contacts. They were not. Though insignificant, their odds increased by some 67 percent while those of blacks and Latinos were reduced by 32 percent and 52 percent, respectively.

odds of receiving proactive assistance increased by 6 percent higher for every job a worker holds over five years. They are also 60 percent higher for ex-offenders relative to non-offenders.

The inclusion of the reputation and race interaction terms in model six also does nothing to explain racial differences in receipt of proactive assistance. First, among blacks, the odds of receiving proactive assistance are lower for those with spotty work histories, but only marginally so. Compared to blacks, Latinos with spotty reputations have lower odds and whites with spotty reputations have higher odds of receiving proactive assistance, but in neither case are these differences significant. Among blacks, receipt of proactive assistance is seven percent higher for every job held in the last five years, a finding that is insignificant and differs little for Latinos and whites. Among blacks, ex-offender status does not significantly alter the odds of receiving proactive assistance, but when compared to blacks, Latino ex-offenders have odds of receiving proactive assistance that are over 3 ½ times greater. This is the only finding that provides some measure of support for the hypothesis that blacks are less likely to receive proactive assistance because their contacts are less likely than the contacts of Latinos and whites to assist proactively when they have poor reputations, but this interaction does not explain black-Latino differences in the odds of receiving proactive assistance.

Proactive Assistance Decomposed

As shown in Figure 5, there are significant racial and ethnic differences in how job contacts aided jobseekers during the job matching process, with patterns of job-matching assistance among Latinos that look significantly different from those of blacks and whites. For instance, a higher percentage of blacks were helped by job contacts who told them about the position. Whereas 60 percent of blacks were helped in this way, 53 percent of whites and 42 percent of Latinos were, and the differences between Latinos on the one hand and blacks and whites on the other are statistically significant. This is also the case for having hiring and brokering contacts. Three percent of Latinos were helped by contacts who hired them compared to eight percent of blacks and 11 percent of whites. And while 54 percent of Latinos reported that their contacts talked to employers or provided a reference, just 30 percent of blacks and 32 percent of whites reported the same.

To further examine the effect of reputation on racial and ethnic differences in the odds of having job contacts who hire and broker on jobseeker's behalf, I conducted multinomial logistic regression. Specifically, I estimated the odds of being hired versus told and of having a brokering contact versus being told. I show the results in Table 4. The first panel of results refers to estimation of the odds of being hired versus being told. In model 1, I estimated only the effect of race. These reveal that Latinos have 50 percent lower odds of being hired than told when compared to blacks, and whites have odds being hired than told that are two times greater than blacks.

Model two includes controls for demographic, human capital, job, and job contact characteristics. With these variables, we learn that having a same-race supervisor increases the odds of being hired than told by 5 ½ times. Access to social capital also matters. Aid from insider referrals increased the odds of being hired versus told by eight times. Interestingly enough, using strong ties was associated with a 70 percent reduction in the odds of personal contact use, and using a same-race tie was associated with reduced odds of about 88 percent. However, the effect of same-race tie is mediated by the race of the jobseeker and contact. Whites who used same-race contacts *increased* their odds of being hired versus told by over 3 ½ percent, and so the disadvantage related to using same-race ties is a disadvantage experienced by blacks and Latinos. With the inclusion of these controls, whites' greater odds of being hired relative to blacks evaporates, and they have instead reduced odds by 77 percent of being hired versus told, which tells us that whites experience a disproportionate advantage relative to blacks by having racially insulated relations. Latinos' disadvantage increases to 73 percent.

The third model includes my reputation variables as well as reputation and race interaction terms. The only finding of note is that Latinos with spotty work histories are significantly less likely to have been hired than told relative to blacks. Their odds are reduced by 83 percent. With the inclusion of these terms, however, racial differences in being hired versus told become insignificant.

The second panel refers to the estimation of the odds of having a broker versus being told. Model one indicates that Latinos and whites have significantly greater odds of having a contact talk to the employer

or provide a reference than do blacks. Latinos have over 2 ½ times greater odds, and whites' odds are greater by half, although this finding is of marginal significance.

With controls for characteristics of the individual, the job, and the job contact, racial differences become insignificant. Having a same-race supervisor or coworkers seems to have no significant effect on the odds of having a brokering contact, but these odds are greater if the contact is an insider referral and a neighbor. The odds also increase if the jobseeker is white and uses a same-race job contact. For blacks and Latinos, however, using a same-race contact leads to reduced odds of having a contact broker during the job matching process. Strong ties also have a negative effect on the odds of receiving this type of assistance.

Model three includes my reputation and reputation*race interaction terms. The only significant finding of note here is that the odds of having a brokering tie is almost six times greater for Latino ex-offenders than they are for their black counterparts. In similar circumstances, Latinos with a felony record are much more likely to be assisted by their personal contacts than are blacks. For white ex-offenders, the odds are greater as well, but insignificantly so.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For at least 20 years, researchers have attempted to explain racial and ethnic differences in personal contact use, with much of that attention focused on understanding why blacks are less likely to use personal contacts to find work than either whites or Latinos. The most popular explanation is that blacks lack of access to contacts who can provide information and influence hires. A few also contend that blacks have a greater disincentive to use personal contacts because for them, personal contact use yields significantly lower wages than more formal methods. Among whites and Latinos, the argument goes, wage losses related to personal contact use are not as large, and so whites and Latinos have less of an incentive to use formal means of job matching.

Interestingly, no study that I am aware of seeks to explain why blacks get help less in terms of reputation—that black jobseekers are more likely to have reputations that make assistance, proactive or not, less likely, or that given similar reputations, blacks are less likely than Latinos and whites to receive help. To

address this gap in the literature, I used the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality to explore whether and to what extent reputation helps to explain why blacks are less likely to use personal contacts to find work and why the assistance they do receive from job contacts is less proactive. I also examined whether a stigma of race, or more accurately a stigma of blackness, is operating such that blacks are less likely to get help than Latinos and whites with similar reputations for bad behavior. I hypothesized that when compared to Latino and white jobseekers, black jobseekers would be less likely to find work through personal contacts and they would be less likely to receive proactive assistance because they are more likely to have problematic reputations. Racial differences in having poor reputations did not explain why the odds of personal contact use and proactive assistance were lower among them. This is mostly because racial differences between blacks, Latinos, and whites were relatively minor.

There is some evidence, however, that a stigma of race is operating during the job matching process. Specifically, Latino and white job-hoppers are more likely to be matched to their jobs by personal contacts than their black counterparts. Also, although statistically insignificant, the finding that Latinos and whites with spotty work histories have higher odds of being matched to their jobs by personal contacts than blacks with similar work histories is suggestive. Both of these findings suggest that with similar reputations blacks are less likely to get help than their white and Latino counterparts.

The one exception to this is with regard to ex-offender status. Whites have significantly lower odds of being matched to personal contacts than black ex-offenders. The same is true of Latinos, but insignificantly so. Although this finding goes against our expectations, it does make sense. Drawing from Devah Pager's audit study of the effect of race and a criminal record on hiring, we know that black ex-offenders are significantly less likely than white offenders and nonoffenders and black nonoffenders to get callbacks from employers. Indeed, while over 30% of white nonoffenders, 17% of white offenders, and 14% of black nonoffenders receive callbacks, just 5% of black ex-offenders received callbacks. In other words, the odds of getting hired for black ex-offenders are dismally low. It is likely the case then that when looking for work, one of the only ways to get hired as a black ex-offender is to have a personal contact help. Without

this help, the odds of getting the job are likely very low compared to Latinos and especially whites with a similar mark. Here, the stigma of race leads to greater odds of personal contact use, not less.

Not surprisingly, reputation also affects the odds of being helped proactively, controlling for access to social capital, but it does not always have the effect that we would expect. As I predicted, having a spotty work reputation reduces the odds of receiving proactive assistance. Job-hopping and ex-offender status, however, are associated with increased odds of receiving proactive assistance. Although both of these findings go against what we would have predicted, it is not difficult to understand these relationships. Again, in order to be hired as an ex-offender, one probably requires that another vouch for their credibility to assure employers that the ex-offender will work out. The stigma that would otherwise lead employers to distance themselves is likely also the stigma that requires proactive assistance by job contacts on the ex-offender's behalf.

Job-hopping requires a somewhat different explanation and is probably best discussed with reference to the effect of having a spotty work reputation. The latter reduces the odds of receiving proactive assistance. This is likely because job contacts would have a difficult time explaining to employers why they should hire a jobseeker who had worked so infrequently. A job contact, however, would not have the same difficulty justifying the hire of someone who worked a number of jobs within a short period of time. This pattern, too, is problematic to many employers, but at the very least it shows some degree of labor market attachment and suggests that jobseekers have accumulated some skills of note. And indeed, for employers hiring for high-turnover positions, job-hoppers may actually be a plus, justifying low wages and no benefits. In these ways, the higher odds of proactive assistance for job-hoppers and ex-offenders make sense.

Even though reputation does affect the odds of receiving proactive assistance, it does little to explain why blacks are less likely than Latinos and whites to get this type of help, and so at this point it appears better suited to explain why blacks do not get matched to jobs through personal contacts than it does explaining why they don't get helped proactively. This study, however, represents just the beginning of an attempt to tease out the effects of reputation, in its different forms, on racial differences in personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance. In future data collection projects, researchers should identify better measures

of reputation, measures that represent others' views of jobseekers as well as actual measures of jobseekers' prior behavior. In the future, researchers should unpack the extent to which the odds of personal contact use and receipt of proactive assistance are the result of decisions made by jobseekers or job contacts. Thus far, the assumption that underlies these types of studies is that job contacts have chosen not to assist. It may also be the case that jobseekers, cognizant of how they may be perceived, forsake personal contact use or only accept assistance in the form of information because they deem themselves to be unworthy of it (Smith 2007). This study represents a first stab in this general direction.

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Figure 1. Personal Contact Use and Receipt of Proactive Assistance, by Race and Ethnicity

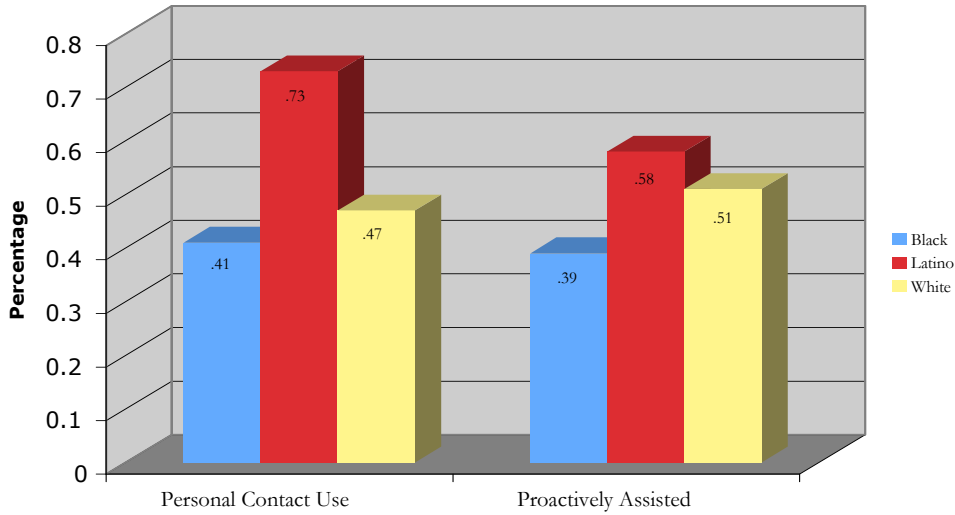


Table 1. Mean Sample Characteristics, by Race and Ethnicity

	Black N=343	Latino N=765	White N=1476	Total N=2585
Demographic Characteristics				
Female	.53	.44	.48	.47 ^a
Age	32.7	32.5	35.2	34.1 ^b
Human Capital Characteristics				
Educational Attainment				
Dropout	.06	.44	.05	.16 ^c
High School Graduate	.55	.35	.35	.38 ^f
Some College or More	.39	.22	.60	.46 ^g
English Fluency	.98	.44	.99	.83 ^c
Previous Experience	.56	.46	.62	.57 ^g
Citizenship	.86	.36	.97	.78 ^g
Characteristics of the Job				
Managerial/Professional	.16	.11	.39	.28 ^a
Service Industry	.40	.30	.41	.38 ^c
Union Member	.16	.09	.11	.11 ^f
Government Job	.14	.09	.13	.12 ^d
City				
Atlanta	.29	0	.17	.13 ^g
Los Angeles	.57	.95	.41	.59 ^g
Boston	.14	.05	.43	.28 ^g
Same Race Supervisor	.26	.41	.81	.62 ^g
Same Race Coworkers	.36	.71	.79	.71 ^g
Characteristics of the Job Contact (Determined for Personal Contact Users Only)				
	N=140	N=555	N=675	N=1370
Coworker	.68	.75	.70	.72
Same Race/Ethnicity	.86	.84	.88	.86
Strong Tie	.88	.89	.73	.81 ^a
Neighbor	.36	.48	.24	.35 ^g
Female Tie	.53	.39	.39	.40 ^f

Note: (a) denotes that whites differ from blacks and Latinos at $p < .05$ level; (b) denotes that Latinos differ significantly from whites; (c) denotes that Latinos differ significantly from blacks and whites at $p < .05$ level; (d) indicates that Latinos differ significantly from blacks; (f) denotes that blacks differ significantly from whites and Latinos; (g) indicates that blacks, Latinos, and whites each differ from each other. All noteworthy differences are significant at $p < .05$ level.

Figure 3. Mean Number of Jobs Held in Past 5 Years, by Race

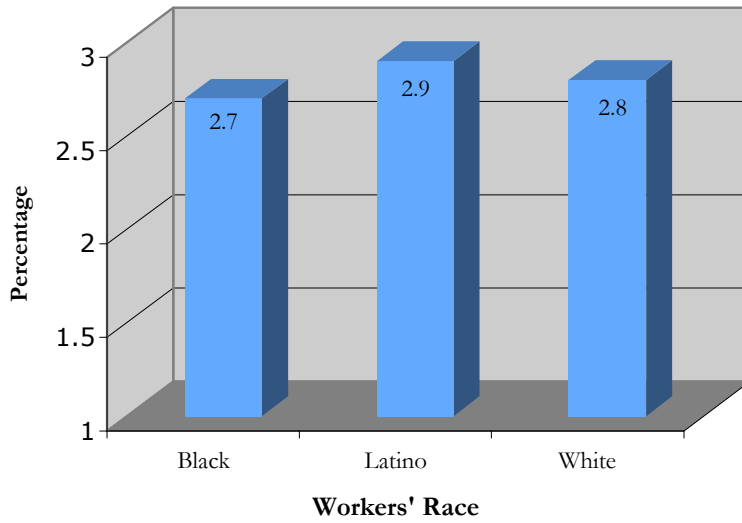


Figure 4. Percentage Held in Reform School, a Detention Center, Jail, or Prison, by Race

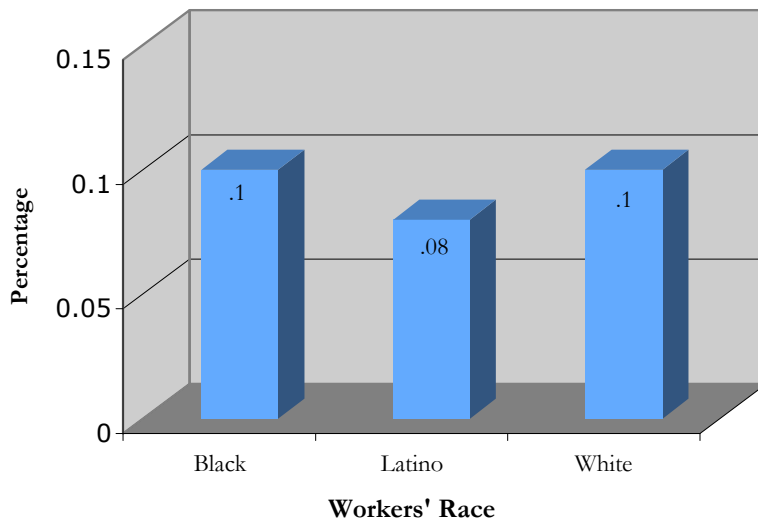


Table 2. Odds Ratios of Personal Contact Use

N=2,353	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)
Characteristics of the Individual					
Latinos	3.75***	2.60***	2.50***	2.52***	1.69+
Whites	1.24+	1.48**	1.23	1.25	.86
Female		.72***	.72***	.67***	.66***
Age		1.02	1.03	1.04+	1.04
Age2		1.00	1.00	1.00+	1.00+
Educational Attainment (Ref: High School Graduate)					
Dropout		.91	.90	.93	.92
Some College or More		1.14	1.12	1.10	1.08
English Fluency		.35***	.40***	.40***	.40***
Citizen		1.39+	1.38+	1.50*	1.34+
Previous Experience		.75**	.75**	.75**	.77**
Characteristics of the Job					
Managerial/Professional		.89	.89	.90	.92
Service Industry		1.51***	1.51***	1.52***	1.51***
Union Member		1.15	1.18	1.25	1.37*
Government Job		.49***	.49***	.47***	.46***
City (Ref: Boston)					
Atlanta		1.91***	1.92***	1.93***	1.94***
Los Angeles		1.85***	1.91***	1.95***	1.93***
Same Race Supervisor			1.20+	1.18	1.15
Same Race Coworkers			1.26*	1.28*	1.26*
Reputation					
Spotty Work History				1.22+	1.17
Number of Jobs in Past 5 Years				1.03	.97
Ex-offender				.54***	.96
Reputation*Race Interactions					
Spotty Work History*Latinos					1.22
Spotty Work History*White					1.37
Number of Jobs*Latinos					1.16+
Number of Jobs*Whites					1.23**
Ex-offender*Latinos					.46
Ex-offender*Whites					.10***
<hr/>					
Constant	1.18	1.21	.78	.54	.79
Chi-square	165.28	294.47	306.04	327.87	371.58
Degrees of Freedom	2	16	18	21	27

Note: +p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3. Odds Ratios of Receipt of Proactive Assistance

N=1,271	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)
Characteristics of the Individual						
Latino	2.13***	1.44	1.47	1.32	1.37	1.26
White	1.62*	1.58*	1.63*	1.46	1.46	1.54
Female		.52***	.52**	.54***	.65**	.66**
Age		.96	.95	.98	.98	.99
Age squared		1.00+	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Educational Attainment (Ref: H.S.)						
Dropout		2.11***	2.16***	2.04**	1.97**	2.01**
Some College or More		.55***	.55***	.55***	.53***	.51***
Fluent		.79	.75	.69	.67	.62+
Citizen		.68	.66+	.67	.67	.65
Previous Experience		1.22	1.22	1.26+	1.23	1.30*
Characteristics of the Job						
Managerial/Professional		2.47***	2.53***	2.40***	2.51***	2.50***
Service Industry		1.99***	1.99***	2.26***	2.24***	2.21***
Union		1.42+	1.44+	1.40	1.43+	1.50+
Government Job		.44***	.43***	.46**	.50**	.49**
City (Reference: Boston)						
Atlanta		.91	.89	.93	.88	.89
Los Angeles		.65**	.63*	.65*	.61**	.63*
Same-Race Supervisor			1.18	1.15	1.15	1.21
Same-Race Coworkers			.74*	.84	.87	.84
Characteristics of the Job Contact						
Insider Referral				1.99***	2.02***	2.01***
Same Race/Ethnicity				.64*	.66*	.66*
Strong Tie				.49***	.48***	.46***
Neighbor				1.33*	1.47**	1.50**
Female Tie				.85	.80	.77+
Reputation						
Spotty Work History					.65**	.71+
Number of Jobs in Past 5 Years					1.06*	1.07
Ex-offender					1.60*	1.39
Reputation*Race Interactions						
Spotty Work History*Latinos						.63
Spotty Work History*White						1.17
Number of Jobs*Latinos						.99
Number of Jobs*Whites						.96
Ex-offender*Latinos						3.58*
Ex-offender*Whites						.84
Constant	.98	3.11	4.12	3.52	2.95	2.87
Chi-square	16.65	185.51	189.97	236.70	254.47	267.81
Degrees of Freedom	2	16	18	23	26	32

Note: + p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Figure 5. Method of Job-Matching Assistance Personal Contact Users Received, by Race

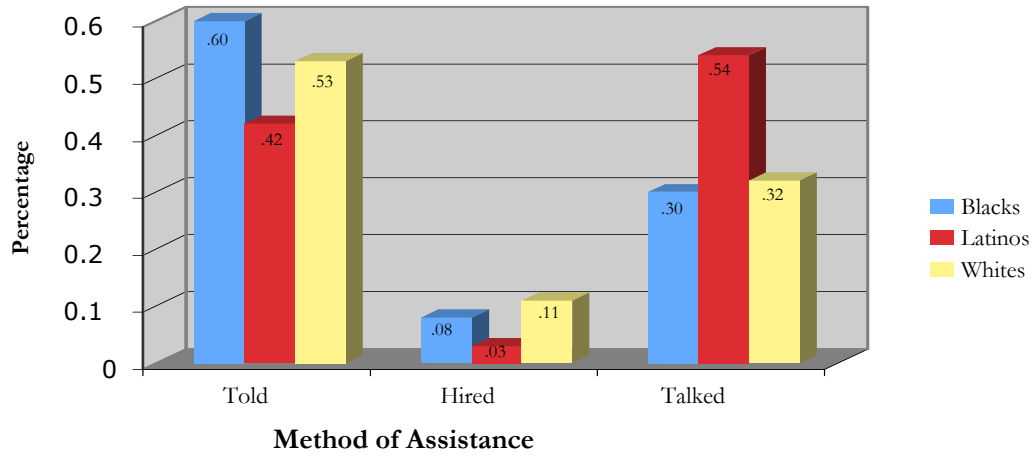


Table 4. Multinomial Regression Predicting the Odds of Job-Matching Assistance Received

N=1,274	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)	Exp (β)
	Hired versus Told			Talked versus Told		
Characteristics of the Individual						
Latino	.50+	.27*	1.17	2.68***	1.43	1.17
White	2.01*	.23*	.31	1.50+	.55	.67
Female		.41**	.62		.53***	.61**
Age		1.07	1.09		.99	1.00
Age squared		1.00	1.00		1.00	1.00
Educational Attainment (Ref: H.S.)						
Dropout		.59	.50		2.27***	2.34***
Some College or More		.39***	.30***		.58**	.55***
Fluent		.52	.52		.63	.56*
Citizen		.53	.40+		.70	.70
Previous Experience		1.93*	2.53**		1.21	1.22
Characteristics of the Job						
Managerial/Professional		4.99***	5.20***		1.90***	1.96***
Service Industry		3.18***	2.72***		2.11***	2.12***
Union		.52	.59		1.57*	1.67*
Government Job		.13**	.15**		.57*	.60*
City (Reference: Boston)						
Atlanta		1.62	1.37		.85	.83
Los Angeles		.99	.80		.68*	.68*
Same-Race Supervisor		5.53***	5.68***		.96	1.02
Same-Race Coworkers		.94	.96		.80	.81
Characteristics of the Job Contact						
Insider Referral		8.20***	8.57***		1.58**	1.59**
Same Race/Ethnicity		.12***	.13***		.47**	.50**
Samrace*White		3.62+	3.13+		3.47**	3.14**
Strong Tie		.30***	.33***		.55**	.50***
Neighbor		.74	.85		1.49**	1.67***
Female Tie		.66	.50*		.93	.88
Reputation						
Spotty Work History			2.63			.57
Spotty*Latino			.16+			.91
Spotty*White			.32			1.81
Number of Jobs in Past 5 Years			1.20			1.11
Number*Latino			.66			.97
Number*White			1.02			.89
Ex-offender			2.22			.59
Ex-offender*Latino			3.33			5.79*
Ex-offender*White			.47			1.35
Chi-square	92.21	490.22	549.31	92.21	490.22	549.31
Degrees of Freedom	4	48	66	4	48	66

Note: + p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

