

**JOB SEARCH PATTERNS OF COLLEGE GRADUATES:  
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses job search patterns of college graduates and the implications of social capital by race and class. The purpose of this study is to explore (1) how the job search transpires for recent college graduates, (2) how potential social networks in a higher educational context, like KU, may make a difference for students with lower social status, and (3) how race and class structure social networks and influence job search patterns. The data for this study is based on KU graduates from 2000 to 2011, who came to KU from high schools across Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Existing literature on occupational attainment addresses the effects of educational credentials on success in the labor market. Insights from the sociology of organizations and work suggest that while education is important to occupational attainment, networks can be just as important, if not more important than credentials. Variation in credentials is considered particularly significant in accounting for differences in occupational mobility and stratification. However, the effect of educational background on the job search and occupational attainment is likely to be contingent on social network ties, or social capital.

By integrating qualitative interviews with quantitative data, this study sheds new light on the role of social capital in the job search, revealing that race and class largely determine how college graduates utilize their credentials and connections in the job search.

Key findings from this research indicate that the utility of educational credentials depends largely on social capital, suggesting that (1) social capital facilitates the job search; (2) the use of social capital varies because some graduates utilize networks to find jobs, while others do not; (3) students from higher social status backgrounds depend on and utilize social capital to a greater extent than those from lower social status backgrounds; and (4) students with higher



social status enjoy the benefits of social capital to the extent that in many cases their college degree and job need not be consistent.

## **Chapter One**

### **1.1 Introduction**

#### **1.1.1 Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to find out why college graduates have different outcomes in the labor market and how social capital affects this process. This work demonstrates: (1) how this transpires for recent college graduates, (2) how potential social networks in a higher educational context, like KU, may make a difference for students with lower social status, and (3) how race and class structure social networks and influence job search patterns.

Despite the rhetoric that connects education to occupational outcomes, race and class continue to affect labor market outcomes. As college graduates compete for jobs, disparities among black and white graduates are often linked to race, class, and social capital differences. For many graduates the purpose of investing in a college education is to find a job, but for those who possess credentials, the competition for jobs extends beyond educational qualifications.

One aspect of the job search is based on educational credentials, where graduates compete with other graduates in an effort to exchange their human capital for economic capital, or income and earnings. Current research on Credentialism addresses many of the shortcomings that affect this process. Employers may interfere by unfairly or inaccurately assessing the credentials, skills, and qualifications of applicants. Individual characteristics pose another problem for job searchers, because employers often have their own unique perceptions and preferences regarding the kind of applicant they want to fill a position. Additionally, the job market may be prone to saturation, as the number of college graduates continues to increase.

But the competition between college graduates, and the behaviors of employers, do not completely explain or account for all job search outcomes. Missing from this perspective and current research on Credentialism is social capital theory. Social capital contributes significantly to variation in job search and occupational outcomes because social networks allow individuals the opportunity to demonstrate their credentials to employers. Credentials and social networks are therefore complementary components in the job search process. Without social capital college graduates may be limited in terms of their opportunities to utilize their credentials, because social capital allows people to connect with other people who are in positions of power. Beginning in high school and continuing in college, students make decisions about whom, and within what contexts, they will cultivate relationships with other people. Eventually, these decisions influence the access graduates have to job information. Without access to job information and social networks, college-educated individuals may lose out on opportunities to demonstrate their credentials to employers, if some job information remains accessible only through networks. Therefore, social capital plays an instrumental role in the job search process because individuals with lower capacity social capital may not have the same access to jobs and job information as those with higher capacity social capital, if capacity is largely contingent on networks fundamentally structured by race and class. For those with lower capacity social capital, the effective acquisition and utilization of social networks is more challenging due to race and class barriers.

The purpose of this study is to offer new insights into how college graduates from lower social status backgrounds might develop higher capacity social capital that will benefit them in the post-college job search. This study adds to current research by examining how college graduates utilize social capital to find jobs.

### **1.1.2 Significance of Study**

This study of job search patterns of college graduates is important for three primary reasons: (1) it constitutes a starting place from which to determine how social capital is used differently by blacks and whites, and by those from various social backgrounds; (2) it assists in understanding the disparities that exist between credentials and social capital, and how individual job searchers might develop networks that are important for success in the labor market; and (3) it acknowledges inequities with credentials and social capital, by questioning the power some dominant groups have over labor market outcomes. This study improves knowledge of how advantages in social capital accumulate over time to produce inequality and variation in post-college job search experiences and outcomes. Policy makers may be interested in using this research to cultivate new approaches to reducing differences in higher education outcomes through the development and expansion of social networks in college.

Given that credentials and social capital are integral parts of the job search process, this research is important because it offers a clear description of how race and class affect the way college graduates look for jobs. In terms of research on how social networks are used in the job market, Granovetter (1973, 1974), the leading organizational sociologist in social network theory, proved that who you know is just as important as what you know. From his seminal work, "Getting a Job," Granovetter (1995) contributed substantially to our understanding of the role of social relationships in job finding.

Other research on the role of credentials in the job market addresses discrimination. Bertrand and Mullainathan's (2004) study of discrimination in the labor market provides an instructive place from which to build. Their study consisted of fictitious black and white applicants with equal credentials who were assigned stereotypical black and white names.

Employers responded more favorably to whites who submitted resumes with lesser credentials than blacks who submitted resumes for the same positions with better credentials. From this study, and other research, significant conclusions were effectively drawn about the challenges individuals face in terms of utilizing their credentials and social capital in the job search (Strayhorn, 2008).

Studies such as these indicate a need for further research that delves into the larger issues surrounding job search and outcomes among college graduates specifically. Up to this point, research has failed to offer a detailed description of how race and class affect credentials and social networks simultaneously in the labor market. Describing this process is a crucial first step in determining the prevalence of social capital inequities in the larger occupational structure.

### **1.1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Contemporary issues regarding credentials affect college graduates in what is commonly referred to as the “credential crisis.” College graduates are no longer guaranteed work after college, and especially in today’s job market, large numbers of college graduates are unemployed. “Various new types of credentials are being proposed and requirements for jobs are being raised, not as a result of new educational knowledge, but because of the increased number of people seeking higher-level jobs in the system” (Ballentine, 2001, p. 280). Due to the competition that exists in a labor market saturated by credentials, job applicants may require a second resource to gain an advantage in the job market, and social capital may be the resource applicants need.

Credentialism and social capital theories are complimentary in addressing individual occupational outcomes. Credentialism focuses on college education as the fundamental means

by which individuals find work; social capital theory explains a second resource utilized in the job market, namely social contacts. Therefore, these two theoretical approaches are necessary in order to understand more about who gets ahead in the labor market (Bills, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1988; Coleman, 1980; Folger, 1972; Granovetter, 1973). Critical to the objective of this study is Granovetter's research on social networks in the job market. Building on his influential research, this study examines how college graduates utilize social networks and credentials in the job search.

Researchers concur that credentials and social capital develop under a multitude of institutional domains. Schools serve various segments of the population from the very poor to the very rich in an effort to prepare students for their designated roles in society (Cookson & Persell, 1985; MacLeod, 1995). Families also contribute considerably to occupational outcomes and social capital development (Bourdieu, 1976; Coleman, 1980; Lareau, 2003); however, additional sources of social capital accrue in locations outside the home and school. In the community and neighborhood, among peer groups, through religious organizations, in college, and at the workplace, individuals constantly make new connections and build important relationships.

As the competition for jobs intensifies, social networks are becoming increasingly more valuable in the labor market. Job applicants rely on friends, family, and acquaintances to find out about job leads, to receive recommendations and referrals, and to make connections with employers. For these reasons, social capital should assume a prominent place in labor market research by lending important insight into the race and class disparities that exist among college graduates who may access and use their social networks in unique ways during the job-finding process.

Up to this point, little is known about how college graduates specifically use their credentials and social networks together in the job market. This study aims to bridge that gap by examining the ways in which credentials and social networks interact for college graduates engaged in the job search. More specifically, this study addresses the effect of race and class on social network use among job applicants with college credentials.

#### **1.1.4 Outline of the Study**

This study reviews Credentialist literature and contributes to the discourse on social capital by way of a qualitative inquiry on how college graduates from various social backgrounds have searched for jobs. In the first chapter the study is introduced along with its purpose and significance, the main research questions, and the statement of the problem. Following the outline of the study, current literature and research on credentials and social capital is reviewed.

First, credentials are defined according to acquisition and use, followed by a discussion regarding the problems associated with inequities that the Credentialist approach accounts for. Problems addressed include: credential value and credential inflation, saturation of the job market with credentials, credentials and signaling, “sheepskin effects” caused by credentials, credentials and social discrimination, employer bias, and employer discrimination.

Next, social capital and social networks are defined, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with social capital are presented. Pre-college sources of social capital from the family and school are reviewed; then social capital at the college level is discussed.

Following this section, Credentialism and social capital are situated in the context of the labor market. Stratification of social capital and networks is discussed in terms of how race and class affect this process. This study is situated within the framework of Credentialism and social

capital theory in order to illustrate how college graduates specifically use their education and social networks in the job search.

In the third chapter the methods and data are detailed. Data was gathered primarily from two sources: (1) interviews of college alumni who were either employed or actively engaged in a job search, and (2) supplementary data assembled from the college registrar and alumni offices from one university.

The registrar and alumni offices provided published lists of graduates as potential interview respondents. Using a single stage sampling procedure, names in the population were accessed, and alumni were sampled directly. Permission to contact alumni was gained from the registrar and alumni offices at the university.

Survey research allowed for the identification of attributes from a larger population to be applied to a smaller group of individuals (Babbie, 1990). In this study, generalizations were made about the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of college graduates (Babbie, 1990). The sample consisted of alumni from various races and social backgrounds who earned a college degree from one university in the Midwest. The survey is the preferred type of data collection for the study because of its inherent advantages. In this study the characteristics of social capital and how it is utilized by college graduates from various social backgrounds was considered. The survey was cross-sectional, with the data collected at one point in time. The forms of data collection included (1) interviews and (2) demographic variables on individual students collected from the university's registrar and alumni offices (Creswell, 2009). The rationale for using these methods was based on cost efficiency, data availability, and convenience.

For data collection and analysis, this study relied on a qualitative method, driven by a deductive approach (as opposed to an interpretive approach). This study was oriented in this



manner so that specific questions could be raised regarding the effects of race and class on the job search. A systematic coding procedure for social capital and social networks was used to organize responses gathered from alumni during the interviews. The composition of each alumnus's network determined the extent to which social capital was used in the job search. Networks included family members, friends from school, neighborhood connections, colleagues, community members, religious affiliations, volunteer groups, fraternal contacts, and a variety of other connections that provided important information, referrals, and job leads.

The organization of specific demographic variables collected from the university required the use of quantitative methods. Variables included: alumni's age, race, gender, college major, GPA, degree earned, and graduation year. Interview responses from this study were analyzed in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of higher and lower capacity social networks. Non-demographic variables, such as the attitudes and behaviors of job searchers, required qualitative methods for analysis.

The initial selection process of graduates involved a random sampling in which each individual in the population had an equal probability of being selected (Creswell, 2009). The study involved stratification of the population to include specific characteristics of individuals who would be represented in the sample in order to reflect the true proportion of alumni who were, for instance, black or white (Fowler, 2002). Stratification ensured representation of the student body in the same proportions as in the population according to race, class, gender, and high school.

The fourth chapter consists of the findings. Interview data and supplementary data were reviewed and coded for information about social background, educational credentials, social capital, social network development, the job search, and occupational outcomes. In this study

social capital and social networks are used interchangeably. “Credentials” refer to four-year college degrees, and for all practical purposes, education was held constant in this study. Comparisons were not made between graduates with different degrees because in most cases, alumni with degrees in engineering are not competing with alumni who earned degrees in journalism or nursing. The “job search” refers to the ways in which individuals find work whether by formal or informal processes, by active search, direct application, walk-in, or informal contacts and other referrals.

The final chapter includes the discussion and conclusion. Findings from 48 college graduates who participated in interviews about the job search are presented. Non-direct questions were asked about how they utilize their credentials and social capital in this process. The purpose of the interviews was to determine if race and class play a role in the way college graduates searched for jobs. By integrating qualitative interviews with quantitative data, this study sheds new light on the role of social capital in the job search, revealing that race and class play a significant role in determining how college graduates utilize their credentials and social networks to find jobs.

## **Chapter Two**

The research questions posed for this study touch upon two primary areas of scholarship: literature on credentials and literature on social capital. The most important research from each of these theories is outlined. The first section of the literature review focuses on credentials and the major problems that exist with the acquisition and use of credentials in the labor market. Following this discussion, the inequities that credentials cause in terms of race and class are outlined. In the second section of the literature review, the primary body of research on social capital is presented. Drawing on status attainment and allocation models, this study adds to current research by addressing the effects of race and class on college graduates' job search and social mobility.

Findings from interviews with 48 college graduates who have utilized credentials and social capital in their job searches are presented. Evidence from this study indicates that race and class affect the use of social capital among college graduates and their ability to demonstrate their credentials to employers.

### **2.1 Credentialism**

#### **2.1.1 Definitions of Credentials**

According to Schultz's (1961) economic definition, credentials are evidence of a person's willingness and productive capacity to make educational investments and enlarge opportunities. Early versions of credentialism can be traced to Bourdieu (1986) who used human and cultural capital theories to explain how the acquisition of educational credentials allows dominant groups

to maintain their social status. Bourdieu (1986) defined credentials as the education and skills acquired and used to access jobs in the labor market. Building on these ideas, Collins (1975, 1979) described credentials as a tool used in the job market, where every credential holds value. Pressure from employers to upgrade formal educational requirements for entry into and promotion through the labor market became formally known as credentialism (Davis, 1981), and over the years credentials have become more than an educational expenditure—they are considered the most important investment a person can make (Becker, 1992).

Literature on credentialism tells us that credentials confer status and are a symbol of educational qualifications conferred by colleges and universities in the form of degrees (Bills, 2003; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Boylan, 1993; Brint, 1998; Brown, 1987, 2001; Collins, 1975, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Schultz, 1961). For the purposes of this study, credentials are defined as four-year college degrees.

In the United States, college credentials are important because they have considerable value in the labor market. The consistent rise in higher education enrollment, which has changed employer expectations and the expansion of labor market recruitment, has significantly affected the acquisition of credentials (Brown, 1978, 2001). Over the last five decades, the college credential has gained more and more significance, and today credentials are widely required to get ahead in the occupational system (Golden & Katz, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistics reported that the percentage of 25–29 year olds with a bachelor's degree was 29.1% in 2000 and 30.6% in 2009. Whites were at 34.0% in 2000 and blacks were at 17.8%. In 2009, 37.2% of whites had earned a bachelor's degree compared to 18.9% of blacks. These findings suggest a continual increase in the number of job applicants entering the labor market with a college degree.

In the job market, credentials serve three major functions: credentials link educational institutions to the labor market; they provide an efficient tool for filling jobs by connecting workers with employers; and they serve as hiring criteria, establishing parameters and guidelines for entry into the job market.

Credentials are an efficient tool used by employers as a benchmark to assess job applicants. By evaluating the type of credentials an individual holds and the institution that awarded it, employers are able to make decisions that effectively match the skills and qualifications of the worker to the work (Belman & Heywood, 1991; Berg, 1970; Bridges & Villemez, 1986; Brown, 2003; Kerbo, 1991; Layard & Psacharopoulos, 1974; Spence, 1974).

## **2.2 Problems Associated with Inequities that the Credentialist Approach Accounts For**

Despite their reported efficiency, educational credentials remain problematic. Employers interpret credentials differently, and even when equally-qualified individuals apply for jobs, occupational outcomes indicate that whites continue to maintain the greatest advantages in the labor market. For this reason and others, credentials may actually contribute to labor market inequality if those with social capital are given unique opportunities to demonstrate their credentials to employers.

### **2.2.1 Credential Value and Credential Inflation**

The Credentialist approach accounts for many of the shortcomings and problems associated with educational credentials. Many inequities that exist in the labor market are based on the value applicants and employers place on educational credentials. Employers contribute to

one aspect of labor market outcomes, but powerful social constructs within educational institutions are fundamentally responsible for the issues that surround labor market inequality, because credentials are acquired in a variety of educational institutions that contribute to each person's entry into the larger occupational structure.

The link between education and earnings is verified by the United States Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor Statistics who reported in 2009 that the median weekly earnings for people over the age of 16 were as follows: whites earned \$757 and blacks \$601. In 1997 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported on the value of an education that causes earnings to increase and unemployment to decrease with additional years of education. The report emphasized the fact that the completion of a program is worth more than attending college but not completing a degree. Employers believe educated workers learn tasks more easily and are better organized, although discrepancies in earnings are also connected to the type of degree one earns and their profession and occupation.

At the time of the 2009 report, median annual earnings for full-time workers by educational attainment were as follows: some college, no degree \$30,400; associate's degree \$31,700; bachelor's degree \$40,100; master's degree \$50,000; doctoral degree \$62,400; and professional degree \$71,700. The report indicates that the value of a credential increases in a market where education is rewarded with earnings.

In the United States, education has gained importance over the years as more and more people emphasized the need for individuals to acquire credentials and develop their human capital. Beadie (1999) traced the historical change education underwent when the market shifted its emphasis from "student markets" to "credential markets." The most significant shift occurred in 1864 when The Regents of the University of the State of New York decided to create state

examinations to raise academic standards. Certificates and diplomas earned in higher education served as the new exit credentials, although some students were inadvertently discouraged by the exams and decided not to pursue higher education. Based on the exams, the Regents issued credentials for academic success, which reduced access and created competition for a credentials market. By developing common standards, a system of advanced credentials evolved that included courses, examinations, and the completion of a college degree. Common standards were designed in effect to establish criteria and guidelines necessary for the completion of a college degree; however, “common standards” could not be met by those who received an inferior education. By restructuring educational requirements in this way, credentials effectively eliminated many individuals from the competition. Today, evidence of the shift from student markets to credential markets is even more apparent. Elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities maintain a system of credentials based on passing entrance and exit exams, creating a competition that allows only “qualified” individuals to contend for status in the labor market.

Over the years, studies of education’s relationship to occupational attainment has challenged the functionalist view that schools merely sort children by their innate talents and motivations for differentiated roles available in the broader social structure (for this functionalist view, see Davis & Moore, 1945). Building on Davis and Moore (1945), Collins (1971, 1979) connected the increase in educational requirements to the constantly changing technological world that requires greater skills and ability. Conflict theory explains the increase in educational requirements as no more than the monopolization of the labor market by status groups who maintain control with credentials. For Collins, the acquisition of an educational credential provides membership in a particular status group that shares similar knowledge, wealth, power,

and prestige. Education in this sense functions as a social advantage in the labor market because it perpetuates the specific norms and behaviors of the dominant group. Collins believed the education acquired in schools is not useful in the labor market because education is more about transferring social norms and behaviors, rather than teaching specific skills. Credentials, Collins noted, are about access and power because occupational requirements and skills are not standardized, and in many cases, jobs are more about the employers who control the positions, not who is hired to fill them. Employers often determine what types of skills they desire for a certain position, and in some cases, the skills are not necessarily reserved to technical skills alone (Murphy & Jenks, 1983). Thus, social origins are the primary determinant of educational credentials and occupational success.

Building on Collins' (1971, 1979) theories of education's relationship to occupational attainment, Murphy (1988) found that disadvantaged students are systematically distributed an inferior education while advantaged students are distributed a superior education. Murphy's research confirmed Collins' theories about how schools train dominant groups for positions of power while marginalized groups are trained to serve. The value of a credential depends on the educational institution that awarded it. Employers assess applicants with "equal credentials" (high school diplomas and college degrees) differently depending on the value associated with the institution and its reputation.

Before college, students attend a variety of educational institutions that are stratified, including elite, suburban, urban, parochial, and private elementary and secondary schools where educational experiences differ greatly based on how students are tracked, whether into gifted programs, special education, college preparatory programs, advanced placement classes, vocational training, or work study programs. In addition to curricular stratification, parents with



resources are able to enhance their child's educational credentials by enrolling them in sports and extracurricular activities that are socially important and often times unavailable to those with limited resources (Collins, 1975, 1979; Labaree, 1988, Royster, 2003). For these reasons, educational institutions are unable to foster a fair and equitable process because socioeconomic status determines access to the best schools and which type of credential a student acquires.

### **2.2.2 Saturation of the Market with Credentials**

Berg (1971, 1981) challenged the effective use of credentials in the labor market because higher education institutions have contributed to the inflation of credentials. He believed the preoccupation with credentials is misguided because credentials do not necessarily dictate how productive or skilled a worker will be. Berg noted that the emphasis on education leads to an over-credentialed society where members of the dominant group are allowed to disproportionately acquire educational property in the form of degrees and diplomas in an inequitable process. Berg criticized employers who use credentials in the hiring process of being engaged in irrational behavior—because credentials are not actually a true measure of ability.

Brown (2003) summarized problems with credentials in an over-credentialed society: he believed credentials are exclusionary because degree thresholds are more important in a credentialed labor market than actual years of schooling or technical knowledge. The expansion of education has caused credentials to become inflated. Credentials are not a true measure of an individual's ability and qualifications because college degrees are a formality when formal qualifications are linked to positional powers. Credentialists believe that college degrees confer status, enlarge opportunities, and allow individuals to monopolize various professions and compete for the best jobs (Bills, 2003; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Boylan, 1993; Brint, 1998;

Brown, 1987, 2001; Collins, 1975, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Schultz, 1961); however, credentials do not guarantee access because different credentials have different value depending on the awarding institute. Despite the fact that every American citizen has a right to an education, education is not equal, and the education an individual receives is typically structured by race and class.

A variety of institutions that maintain different levels of accreditation, certification, and licensing, award credentials by giving each one its own value based on the reputation of the institution (Bills, 2004), but actual learning accomplished by the credential is never easily measured. Depending on the employer, credentials mean different things to different people.

### **2.2.3 Credentials and Signaling**

For employers, interpreting credentials as a signal of future productivity is risky in that the signal is limited in what it truly says about an applicant's capacity to be an effective employee, and in many instances, signals do not effectively distinguish one applicant from another. Employers understand that credential acquisition and educational experiences vary widely, but when credentials are equal, it is still difficult to determine which candidate is the best for the position, even though the inherent stratification of the educational system is well-known (Ishida et al., 1997). However, signaling theorists such as Arrow (1973), Spence (1973), Blaug (1985), and Buerkle and Guseva (2002) maintain that credentials are the determining factor in one's occupational success because education leads to jobs. Signaling theory is based on the rational view that education and schooling signal a certain level of productivity (Spence, 1973, 1976), but signaling also causes employers to evaluate credentials based on the status of the degree-conferring institution.

Spence (1976) examined credentials and the uncertain investment employers make in hiring employees without knowing their productive capacity. Spence noted that applicants have the power to alter and manipulate the “signals” they put out to prospective employers. Those with individual resources and social advantages can acquire the most valuable credentials from the most prestigious universities, improving their chances of acquiring the best positions. In this sense, credentials are an investment that those who can afford to, pay for. Individuals use their credentials to signal to employers their skills and qualifications, and certain credentials are deserving of certain positions, that in turn demand certain rewards and pay. Employers are thus forced to respond, under competitive pressure, by paying individuals for their “expected” productivity or worth, which is conditional on the signals exchanged.

Inconsistencies among employers and their assessment of credentials confuse the relationship between education and the social and economic rewards it guarantees. Layard and Psacharopoulos’ (1974) screening hypothesis challenged many earlier notions of education’s value in the job market. The effect of race and class on schooling and credential research has noted that socially, credentials have value as a signaling device because schooling acts as a screen for ability by which workers are rewarded accordingly. Employers award higher wages to workers who have a college education, and the quality of the college attended is also important in the screening of an applicant’s credentials. In terms of actual earnings, however, differences between those who attended college and those who completed college were not significant, indicating that credentials further complicate reward systems because some employers are more concerned that applicants attended college, not that they necessarily completed a specific degree (Layard & Psacharopoulos, 1974; Taubman & Wales, 1973).

Literature on credential value confirms that both college origin and individual initiative matter for those entering professional occupations, but for graduates from more affluent families, success in the labor market happens despite the colleges they attend, not because of them (Tinto, 1981).

In order to maintain power and status, dominant groups use educational credentials to signal their elite origins and style. Those who have access to an elite education use their schooling to mark their membership in a status group that shares common values, interests, and social positions (Tzeng, 1992). Many employers who hire on the basis of elite credentials assume their employees will bring social status to their job as well (Kingston et al., 2003). Credentials are socially consequential among elites because in various segments of the labor market those with credentials are rewarded with greater job opportunities, appointments to boards, and positions in various organizations. Haveman and Smeeding (2006) confirmed the prevailing presence of members of the highest socioeconomic groups in top-tier colleges and universities, who not only earn credentials from the most prestigious schools, but who also come from the top echelons of social class, which allows them to dominate the most economically rewarding positions in the labor market.

#### **2.2.4 Sheepskin Effects**

In the labor market, credentials are challenging because not only are they left open for interpretation, but they also act as signals or screens and often cause what is commonly referred to as “sheepskin effects.” Hungerford and Solon (1987) defined “sheepskin effects” as the returns specific to educational credentials rather than to actual years of schooling. They found that the amount of time spent in school is not nearly as important as earning a college degree

because educational diplomas are validation to employers that an educated worker will be more productive. The researchers found evidence of significant sheepskin effects because graduates are considered efficient learners who have enhanced their personal capabilities by completing a college degree. The “sheepskin” (or college degree) is often rewarded by employers who place substantial value on a system of credentialing that is not necessarily based on knowledge, but rather on an individual’s ability to cross a specific degree threshold (Hungerford & Solon, 1987). For some employers, the actual certificate or “sheepskin” proves more than just college attendance: it implies ability and persistence. But the completion of a college degree is not determined solely by the individual’s ability or motivation; it is also contingent on the financial resources available to a student. Without financial resources, which are largely structured by race and class, many individuals are unable to complete their college education and cross necessary degree thresholds.

Belman and Heywood’s (1991) study of sheepskin effects confirmed the influence of education on occupational success and pay. The sheepskin effect explains how an education positively affects earnings not because schooling is a guarantee that an employee will be more productive, but because a credential implies greater productivity to employers. The sheepskin continues to maintain value in the labor market because individuals are rewarded not only with a credential, but also with personal gratification, social self-esteem, and higher wages. Belman and Heywood (1991) found that those with college credentials earn a nine to ten percent return for their education when compared to those with only a high school diploma.

### **2.2.5 Credentials and Social Discrimination**

Collins (1971, 1979) drew on theories of social stratification developed by Weber (1968), who argued that educational credentials are the primary predictors of occupational success. Collins noted that status groups govern particular professions by defining the specific degrees and curricular elements necessary for newcomers wanting to enter the labor market. By configuring educational requirements in this manner, status groups not only maintain their own advantage, but also control the basic patterns of socialization in their professions, as well as mark the boundaries of their occupational domains (Abbott, 1988; Beadie, 1999; Bills, 1988). In some cases, educational credentials can, in and of themselves, hold greater value than what is really learned at school—since employers and job seekers view credentials as more important than the actual skills, talents, and competencies necessary to perform various jobs and advance one’s career (Labaree, 1988, 1997; Murphy, 1988).

Kingston and Lewis (1990) criticized credentials for propagating social discrimination through a labeling process that causes talented individuals with lesser credentials to lose out in the credential labeling process, while mediocre people with better credentials benefit unfairly. As markers of cultural capital, dominant groups use education to teach the personal styles, outlooks, beliefs, and aesthetic tastes necessary to achieve the most valued positions in society—indicating that credentials may not prepare marginalized groups in the same way (Garnett, Guppy, & Veenstra, 2008; Kingston & Lewis, 1990). By examining labor markets and the “opportunity structure,” or information available, known, and open to people, Hanson and Pratt’s (1991) research confirmed the effects of race and class on the worker-employer matching process, where the types of employers and jobs available were often based on the specific characteristics of workers and employers.

Other critics of credentialism have challenged the equity and value of an exclusionary tool that dominant groups use to control the race and class composition of their institutions and professions (Collins, 1975, 1979; Stevens, 2007). High schools, colleges, professional organizations, educational administrators, and businesses collaborate to create a system of credentials that limits the access specific groups have to professional schools, private institutions, and prestigious universities (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Many types of professional schools distribute credentials in a manner that prohibits anyone without a specific credential from entering into that field. There are professional schools for Architecture, Business, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Forestry, Journalism, Law, Library Science, Medicine, Music, Nursing, Optometry, Pharmacy, Public Health, Social Work, Theology, and Veterinary Medicine (Ballentine, 2001), but access to these schools is often limited to individuals with specific credentials, social capital, and financial resources.

### **2.2.6 Employer Bias**

The significant role employers play in their interpretation of credentials contributes to the many problems credentials cause in the labor market, because each employer evaluates and assesses each credential, and the person who possesses it, differently. Employers are often biased and discriminatory in their screening, selecting new employees by using job interviews in combination with preferential treatment and screening tools such as test scores, work experience, references, and credentials (Borjas & Goldberg, 1978; Cohen & Pfeffer, 1986; Cornell & Welch, 1996; McIntyre, Moberg, & Posner, 1980; Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991; Saloner, 1985). Other employers hire for the organization, basing their decisions on a wide range of attributes

including motivation, skills, knowledge, ability, and personality in order to better match the organization with the employees (Bowen, Ledford, Jr., & Nathan, 1991).

Research from Kerckhoff and Bell (1998) found that credentials make a significant difference in the labor market because of their positive effect on employers who prefer to hire educated employees; however, credentials are interpreted differently by employers depending on the applicant and the position he or she is applying for. Due to this and the many other discrepancies that exist, credentials are a complex measure of an applicant's actual ability and are often not interpreted the same by hiring employers in the labor market.

Applicants access formal and informal information sources, while businesses and organizations utilize a variety of tools to assess prospective employees and search for the "right stuff" using both informal and formal recruiting practices (Carson & Winfield, 1998). Jobs that require credentials place applicants in labor queues based on their education and objective and subjective characteristics. Cable and Gilovich's (1998) study described the objective and subjective characteristics employers use in their hiring decisions. Objective characteristics include GPA, leadership roles, and extracurricular involvement, while subjective characteristics include the personal characteristics of the job seeker. Based on these characteristics employers divide applicants. Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, and Boswell's (2003) work acknowledged the power of objective qualifications over subjective: "A candidate with superior objective qualifications may 'blow the interview' but still receive an offer because the employer views his or her superior objective qualifications as providing sufficient evidence that the candidate will be a high quality employee" (p. 220). Kingston and Lewis (1990) noted the power of subjective characteristics in hiring college graduates who are presumed to have greater career chances than



those without credentials because college graduates are primarily distinguished by their ability, intelligence, and personality.

The use of subjective characteristics to inform hiring decisions is further complicated by labor queues and neighborhoods. Job matching requires that employers rank workers and workers rank jobs in what is commonly referred to as a labor queue (Elliott & Sims, 2001; Reskin, 1991). Using credentials, the queuing model describes how applicants compete for positions and how selectivity affects the process. Credentialed individuals use their status to compete for economic rewards, but even with the increased number of college graduates, Boylan (1993) noted that queuing depends not on how many applicants possess credentials but on how the employer ranks each credentialed individual. The structure of the labor queue affects the opportunities available to black and white job seekers who compete differently for employment in open and restricted settings. Lieberman (1980) summarized the effects of racial stratification and the opportunities for those at the bottom of the queue, which depends on the size of the group at the top. When the number of qualified white applicants is low, opportunities for minorities increase.

More recent research on credentials has shown that widely shared social assumptions about education and job assignments have altered employers' views of credentials and affected their ability to be both ethical and fair in their hiring decisions (Bills, 2004; Stoney & Gilbert, 2006). Rather than use credentials to secure the most potentially productive workers, employers remain non-rational and unreflective in their hiring decisions. Employers will use labor queues and credentials increasingly over time, and hiring decisions will be based on a person's educational qualifications—but whether employers are justified in using this practice remains questionable (Bills, 2004) due to the inequality that persists in education.

### **2.2.7 Credentials and Discrimination**

Educational credentials act as the primary mechanism by which employers and businesses sort individuals into the labor market, but applicant and employer assessments of the same credential may not always be consistent. Jaegar and Page (1996) studied returns to education and compared actual credentials to years of schooling and discovered that degrees matter more to employers than years of schooling, even when the years spent in college are equivalent to those necessary for degree completion. Crossing one or more educational thresholds has become increasingly important to employers (Bridges, 1996; Kerbo, 1991); however, not all degrees are rewarded the same in the occupational structure because different degrees have different values.

Employees acquire credentials under the assumption that they will be able to exchange their credentials for a job. Rees' (1966) description of the job search process examined formal and informal processes. Informally, employers admit being more interested in the quality of applicants rather than their quantity of schooling. He found that employers examine applicants for employment in a variety of ways: written applications, interviews, paper and pencil tests, work sample tests, medical examinations, credit checks, school and employment references, and police record checks. Examining employees based on credit checks and police records may contribute to labor market discrimination if members from disadvantaged groups or minorities have police records or poor credit due to their social class. Written assessments are also problematic for applicants who receive an inferior education. Interviews are likewise a contentious issue because employers may be biased in their assessment of an applicant's subjective characteristics.

Hersch (1991) examined the job search and the ways that individuals match their credentials according to information sources provided by state and private employment agencies, newspaper advertisements, union hiring halls, and school and college placement services. Hersch found that applicants typically apply for jobs with educational requirements that match their qualifications. In this way they use their credentials to signal to employers their skills and abilities. Individuals who possess degrees and certificates monopolize the more rewarding jobs and economic opportunities available in the labor market, while those with minimal qualifications and credentials are relegated to lower positions and nominal rewards (Brint, 1998).

With an ever-growing population of educated workers and college enrollment constantly on the rise, Bills (2003) warned that credentials will only serve to further stratify the market by perpetuating the system requiring information-rich credentials conferred by socially trusted schools and certifying bodies. According to Bills, credentials may become more tightly linked with labor market outcomes if human capital is favored. Job applicants lacking credentials from socially trusted schools will miss out on rewarding jobs and economic opportunities as the demand for credentials continues to rise. The stratification of educational institutions will continue to produce a range of workers with credentials and training appropriate for each and every level available in the occupational structure, allowing employers to increase their demand for more educated workers. This relationship between educational institutions and the labor market has caused a steady rise in Credentialism. Bills and Wacker (2003) noted the value and importance of having a credentialed staff. Credentialism has even led some employers to offer financial assistance to new and existing employees who would benefit from additional education and training.

Riley's (1982) study challenged the role of educational credentials in jobs. Riley accepted that credentials are a valuable tool used by employers who need a mechanism to sort applicants according to those who have a college education from those who do not, but Riley also believed that credentials are more than just a "screen" that signal education—credentials are connected to one's ability to perform in his or her job. Riley found that college graduates who study in a specific field, such as education or science, are able to use their training and therefore are better matched to jobs that fit their skills. Graduates with other degrees who study in fields such as English or Sociology are not as likely to work in jobs that match their specific skill set, although the possession of a college credential allows them to secure work. In either case, regardless of an individual's college major, Riley found that employers prefer hiring individuals with credentials because they save time and money on additional training, especially when they hire graduates from schools that adequately prepare their students. Well-prepared graduates with specific training increase their productive ability, general knowledge, and analytic thinking skills once hired. Still, most new hires with a college credential have to participate in some on-the-job training, and many graduates admit that their college education did not compare with the training they received at work. Riley's study challenged traditional notions of education's role in the labor market. If a college education only imparts a certain set of skills, then why the emphasis on credentials? Are college credentials merely a rite of passage for those with the economic resources to attend college, or are credentials designed to keep members of the dominant group in the most rewarding jobs?

When dominant groups control educational institutions and labor markets, race and class structure the way individuals are able to utilize their credentials in the job search. The socialization and allocation models summarized by Kingston and Lewis (1990) explain how

schools transform the capacities of individuals, which allow them to compete in the labor market. Individuals attend school to learn skills and technology as well as to develop particular values and personality traits.

Based on Murphy's (1988) assessment of educational equity, schools cannot transform every individual's capacity to compete in the labor market because schooling is part of an inequitable system that controls how much access each person has to school, resources, and learning. The socialization model therefore only benefits those who attend schools where the focus is on individual change, the learning of skills, and the development of values and personality traits determined by the dominant group. Therefore, the allocation model provides a more appropriate explanation for understanding how education identifies, selects, processes, classifies, and assigns individuals to fill various roles in the occupational structure. The socialization model assumes that education allows people to compete based on their credentials, but the education individuals receive is not equal. Dominant groups monopolize the labor market based on their acquisition and utilization of educational credentials. Individuals who have access to schools, resources, and learning are effectively socialized and later allocated to the most economically rewarding and prestigious positions in the labor market, while those with limited access to schools, resources, and learning are socialized for lower positions in the occupational structure.

Changes in the economy and labor market explain why some individuals are unable to find work. According to McLafferty and Preston (1992) the shift to a technology-based economy has dramatically reduced job opportunities for minorities, who often live in segregated residential areas, away from better paying jobs that are now located in the suburbs.

This shift explains some labor market inequality, but for those who have credentials, their investment in human capital should guarantee a better return in the labor market. In spite of the fact that an individual has a credential, employers still use space (neighborhood or residence) as a hiring signal. For those members from disadvantaged social backgrounds and minority groups, space is often a barrier to employment. Space as a hiring signal has been studied extensively by labor market researchers who note the effect of space on job seekers and their occupational outcomes. Employers' perceptions of applicants are often based on the race and class compositions of their neighborhoods and preconceived notions about the ability of residents from certain areas can influence hiring decisions. Tilly, Moss, Kirschenman, and Kennelly (2001) studied employers who use space as a signal in four metropolitan labor markets: Detroit, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Boston. They tested employers' perceptions of applicants and noted that within metropolitan areas, businesses have disproportionately shifted away from urban areas to suburban areas, keeping those who live in urban areas further from job opportunities. The authors found that space affects recruitment practices and business locations because employers use it as a signal, associating job seekers with their residency. Employers' perceptions of applicants from black neighborhoods are negative, while their perceptions of applicants from white areas are more positive with reference to skills, attitude, and ability. By structuring the hiring process in this manner, blacks and those from urban areas may be limited in their ability to effectively utilize their credentials in the job market. Additionally, Moss and Tilly (1996) found that even when businesses are located in urban areas that are dominated by minorities, employers prefer hiring workers from the suburbs, or workers who are similar in social class and status. "Suburban clienteles, themselves disproportionately white and Anglo, may prefer to deal with

workers who are white and Anglo, leading employers to tailor their workforces accordingly” (Tilly et al., 2001).

Other contributions to research on space as a screening criteria found that employers also use school attendance and home address, as well as the distance a job seeker might have to travel to work, to influence hiring decisions. Distance puts black workers in urban areas at a greater disadvantage because they miss out on important information on job leads, they are farther from job opportunities, and if they commute to the suburbs for work, they assume additional costs during travel (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991). If employers continue to use space as a signal, hire suburban workers to work in urban businesses, and tailor their workforces to match their white clientele, then credentials will lose their significance and value among those who are assessed based on race and class.

Reskin (2001) highlighted the effects of labor market discrimination in a number of contexts. Reskin attributed employer bias to “normal cognitive processes,” in much the same way that Tilly et al. (2001) linked employers’ bias to preconceived notions about applicants’ neighborhood or residence. As employers continue to use race and class to control labor market outcomes, isolated incidences of racial discrimination cannot be ignored—because scattered incidents inevitably accumulate, allowing dominant groups to acquire advantages, while marginalized groups remain disadvantaged (Reskin, 2001). Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel (2000) noted the lack of access to and utilization of social networks by minorities even before applicants and employers meet. The interactions that occur before formal applications are made are what often leads to hiring and jobs.

One cause of discrimination is the mind’s natural tendency to categorize things in order to think. Categorization leads to discrimination in the labor market because individuals

automatically prefer and feel more comfortable with and obligated to others like themselves, (in-group) whom they favor when distributing rewards. In the context of the labor market, in-group favoritism affects hiring decisions because many businesses and organizations are owned and operated by dominant groups. For this reason, minorities lose out on opportunities they may be otherwise qualified for. “Because sex and race are strongly correlated with control over workplace opportunities, with white men monopolizing these roles, in-group preference favors whites, men, and especially white men. Thus, in-group favoritism produces status-group discrimination” (Reskin, 2001).

According to Reskin (2001), one major problem with categorization is that some people neither intend to nor realize they are categorically discriminating because there is an automatic inclination to favor others who are like themselves. People rely on stereotypes when they lack complete information about people, and white employers may possess limited information about black applicants and simply stereotype them as lazy (Reskin, 2001). Additionally, categorization affects employers’ interpretations of credentials by stereotyping each credential according to the university’s reputation. If applicants are from the same institution, employers may further categorize applicants by race and class. Stereotyping and categorization are the basis of thought processes that are both conscious and unconscious, but that have profound effects on the labor market and the occupational outcomes of members from disadvantaged groups (Petersen, 2006; Reskin, 2001).

Non-rational behaviors in the labor market are not limited to space and categorization. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) explored other aspects of labor market discrimination by asking the question, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?” These researchers asked employers when faced with observably similar black and white applicants,



who they favor more. Employers, who admitted favoring white applicants over black, explained that their decisions are based on racism and the perception that blacks are less productive workers. The field experiment consisted of fictitious job applicants who were randomly assigned either very black names, such as Lakisha Washington and Jamal Jones, or very white names, like Emily Walsh and Greg Baker. The researchers were also interested in credential effects, so they varied the education of resumes for the black and white applicants and sent over 5,000 resumes to over 1,300 job ads. Employers responded: white applicants needed to send out ten resumes for one callback, and blacks, fifteen. White names were called back many more times than the black applicants who had eight additional years of experience.

The results of the study imply that employers consider race in hiring decisions, and many blacks who possess stereotypical names may be missing out on opportunities if employers refuse to consider the qualifications of blacks. From a Credentialist's perspective, this is problematic because equally qualified applicants should have similar outcomes in the labor market. If Bertrand and Mullainathan's (2004) study is an accurate assessment of employer perceptions, then blacks may be discouraged from applying for positions with equally credentialed whites. Judging applicants by their names, and not by their credentials, may contribute to labor market inequality. This study indicated the power of dominant group norms and values that determine a great deal of social and economic mobility. Members of minority groups who choose to conform by assigning their children "white or American" names may benefit in the labor market later by undercutting one of labor market's most irrational practices—discrimination based on names.

## 2.3 Social Capital

### 2.3.1 Definitions of Social Capital

The issues addressed in the context of Credentialism fail to adequately capture how social connections make a difference in the labor market. Theories of social capital can be traced as far back as Marx (1933), who believed capital is a resource possessed by the bourgeoisie who ultimately control the means of production. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) supported Marx's view of social capital as a form of class domination; they believed social capital allows certain groups to reproduce themselves based on their dominance.

Other definitions of social capital come from Loury (1977) who defined social capital in terms of the resources that family relationships and community social organizations provide individuals. Loury noted social capital's influence on cognitive and social development when families use their resources to gain access to better schools, live in better neighborhoods, and join community organizations that foster the academic and social behaviors that are rewarded and valued most in society. Coleman (1987, 1988) and Burt, Cook, and Linn (2001) emphasized the role of social capital in education and defined it as a strategic social structural resource that actors use to pursue interests and achieve their goals.

Other definitions of social capital come from McClure (2006), defined in terms of multidimensional social contacts or networks consisting of institutionalized relationships and group memberships whose value increases relative to the resources and exclusiveness of the group. McClure's definition built on earlier theories from Bourdieu (1983) that supported the idea of social capital as a form of class domination. In this way, the value of an individual's

social capital or network is based on resources, which are greatest among dominant groups or members of the middle and upper class.

### **2.3.2 Social Capital and Social Networks**

Organizational sociologists such as Granovetter (1974) and Burt (1997) defined social capital in terms of networks or people—the contacts, connections, family, friends, and acquaintances who aid in and are relied on for resources in the job search. Burt and Granovetter believed social capital serves a specific function in the labor market—affecting occupational outcomes as information about job leads circulates in and between networks that provide important recommendations, referrals, and connections to employers. Granovetter argued that economists and other social scientists' view of the job search as a formal process is inaccurate because job seekers do not simply gather information about jobs and apply. Instead, Granovetter stated that individuals are constantly engaged in social interactions where job information is passed back and forth between people on a daily basis. Depending on the information an individual decides to use, the nature of the job they apply for and obtain varies considerably according to the situation or network from which they obtained the information. Granovetter's findings detailed the importance of informal job information that is transmitted through social networks. He documented the impact of networks on career paths, showing that the type of social contact, whether family, friend, or acquaintance, influences the information individuals receive.

### **2.3.3 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Capital**

Over the years, the primary body of literature on social capital has focused on the advantages and disadvantages social capital offers based on an individual's background (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Glaeser, Laibson, & Sacerdote, 2002; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993). In terms of labor market outcomes, an individual's ability to use his or her resources effectively is often linked to race and class.

Interactions in the labor market are based on social network resources captured and used by individuals (Lin, 2001). Lin (2001) built on group applications of social capital that were originally developed by Bourdieu (1983), Coleman (1988, 1991), and Putnam (1993), adding that levels of social capital are developed by groups as a collective, in order to maintain their assets by enhancing the opportunities available to group members. He explained that the value of social capital is measured by individual and group profits and that an individual's application of social capital focuses on (1) how individuals invest in social relations and (2) how individuals use the embedded resources in their networks to generate a return. Investing in social relationships requires that individuals have certain awareness about various organizations and associations that are comprised of other members who meet specific criteria that contribute to the group's value. For instance, core networks that consist of members who are well-educated, professionals, business owners, politically connected, or otherwise influential, tend to bring significant value to other members by way of their social status (Hurlbert, Haines, & Beggs, 2000).

Lin's (2001) notions of social capital also assume that individuals who are able to capture available resources are also capable of discerning between more and less valuable networks. Additionally, those who are concerned with developing their social capital must have the time to

circulate in a variety of settings where social connections are made and relationships are nurtured.

Other researchers have noted the construct of social capital is largely structured by race and class and developed in a variety of domains and under various circumstances. According to these researchers, social capital is developed in the community, among peer groups, at the workplace, in religious organizations, and during college (Bourdieu, 1976; Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1987, 1988; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Fernandez, Castilla, & Moore, 2000; Lareau, 2003; Lin, 2001; MacLeod, 1995; McDill & Coleman, 1965; Royster, 2003). For the purposes of this study, social capital refers to the resources and networks an individual acquires deliberately and inadvertently for use in the job market.

## **2.4 Sources of Social Capital**

### **2.4.1 Families and Social Capital**

Sources of social capital are found in the larger social structure, and individuals develop social capital in the context of the home, school, community, and workplace, and in various organizations such as religious, fraternal, and volunteer groups, where network members share common values and interests (Burt, Cook, & Linn, 2001; Campbell & Lee, 1992).

Families provide the most influential components of social capital, and studies assert that success in the labor market remains tightly connected to family background. According to Lin (2000), people with lower socioeconomic status are found to have networks that are constrained due to their heavy reliance on strong ties, or friends and family. The homogeneous structure of these networks contribute little in the way of social capital development, or network resources,

when members are primarily from socially marginalized groups. Those with higher socioeconomic status are found to have more fruitful networks—or contacts and resources that enable them to access important information that fosters greater success in the labor market.

Families help their children develop social capital by providing them with a high quality education. Those who send their children to private schools on average are better educated, have more stable homes, value education more, and give greater attention to learning (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Coleman et al. (1982) commented further on social capital's role in education. They associated social capital with parents' education, family income, and employment, as well as with the expectations, involvement, and active participation of parents in their child's education. When parents are invested in their child's education, and when parents have the resources to enhance their child's educational opportunities, social capital becomes a valuable tool that allows individuals to use their education to gain status and prestige in the larger social structure.

The participation of students in extracurricular activities during high school was studied by Broh (2002) who positively linked the participation in activities with academic success, while participation in other activities had negative effects. Broh (2002) noted the benefits of such activities on social capital development where ties among students, parents, and schools have a positive effect on academic success. Building on social capital theory (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Portes, 1998), Broh recognized the role of the family as the primary channel for forming social capital; however, he also considered the possibility that extracurricular activities offer opportunities for the formation and intensification of social ties among students, parents, and the school, where social capital forms outside the family.

### **2.4.2 Schools and Social Capital**

Schools provide the central context for developing social capital. Individuals from affluent, suburban neighborhoods either attend boarding schools, private schools, suburban schools, or other elite educational institutions that provide the setting for developing valuable social networks. Students widen these networks by participating in extracurricular activities, joining volunteer associations, and belonging to religious organizations. The financial resources, power, influence, and status available to members from the dominant group allow them to maintain their status and gain advantages over other members of society by way of their social capital. Those who are advantageously positioned in the larger social structure have personal connections to experts, professionals, and others who are college educated. Membership in social clubs, fraternities, and sororities grant them additional access to important people. Their networks are characteristically large and expansive, consisting of contacts that are personal friends and family members, as well as acquaintances (Cookson & Persell, 1985, 1987; Lareau, 2002, 2003; Stevens, 2007) from influential backgrounds.

Educational institutions foster the development of social capital among disadvantaged groups as well. Individuals from poor, urban neighborhoods attend inner city schools that provide the setting for developing social networks that are not necessarily valuable in the job market. Due to limited financial resources, lack of power, influence, and social status, students from disadvantaged groups are often unable to participate in extracurricular activities, join volunteer associations, or belong to religious organizations that provide valuable social contacts. Those who are from disadvantaged groups often lack connections to experts, professionals, and others who are college educated. Unable to gain membership in social clubs, fraternities, and sororities, these groups miss out on additional access to important people. Networks are

characteristically small and restrained, limited to personal friends and family members, as well as acquaintances who lack connections and access to information. For these reasons, social capital among disadvantaged groups is not easily transferable in the job market, and opportunities are rare due to the limited access these networks have to other persons of power, status, and prestige (Lareau, 2002, 2003; MacLeod, 1995).

Elite schools have received much attention over the years, in terms of the role they play in the reproduction of social class advantage and disadvantage. Important relationships between elite high schools, families, and colleges facilitate the admission process, and colleges, in turn, are often instrumental in the job-finding process after graduation, (Altonji & Dunn, 1996; Cookson & Persell, 1985, 1987). Cookson and Persell's (1985) "Preparing for Power" studied elite prep schools in the United States and the social learning that prepares students to assume the most prominent positions in society. For this purpose, students are exposed to significant personalities, art, sculpture exhibits, travel, volunteer projects, internships, and courses in Shakespeare, politics, leadership, and foreign languages, in order to prepare them to compete with competency and brilliance in the job market.

Stevens (2007), who examined the function of colleges in maintaining the class structure, conducted additional studies on the role of elite schools in social capital development. In "Creating a Class," Stevens clarifies the ways that powerful groups use educational attainment to maintain their status. Under presumptions that a college education is equally available to everyone, dominant groups are actually able to control who enters the most prestigious colleges and universities. Drawing on Weber's *transformation* thesis, Stevens provided a second explanation for why educational attainment is so important in the American class system. According to Weber and the *transformation* thesis, modernization replaces inequities among



families because positions in the social hierarchy are supposed to be based on individual achievement.

By maintaining the notion that in spite of an individual's background, every individual has access to an education, dominant groups are able to uphold the idea that social status is based entirely on individual achievement. According to Stevens (2007), "Education is broadly perceived by people from all social classes as an effective mechanism of social mobility, because it is capable of moving people up, and down, the class hierarchy" (p. 12). However, access to education is not equal, and colleges play a key role in supporting the middle and upper classes that use education to maintain their status. Elite schools cater to families that possess the necessary resources that enable their children to attend the best colleges and universities. Stevens' research found that elite colleges recruit applicants with "measurable academic and athletic ability, demonstrated artistic accomplishment, and formally recognized philanthropic service," characteristics that are more common among dominant groups who have the social and economic resources necessary to fulfill these requirements (p.15). Recruitment based on these criteria limits the selection to middle and upper class students who come from families that are able to provide the educational opportunities necessary to compete in this arena.

College is a place where skills and attitudes required for future positions are transferred, and where social development and social networking lead to opportunities in the labor market (Feldman, as cited in Meyer, 1972). Schools that serve the middle and upper class are often sources of high quality education that grant valuable credentials and create important social network relations. These schools typically provide a rigorous curriculum, along with high quality teachers, facilities, and extracurricular opportunities. By helping socialize students into high status cultures, elite schools reinforce elite group norms and orient students for upper level

leadership and administrative positions in the larger social structure (Anyon, 1981; Portes 1998; Zweigehaft, 1992).

Individuals from more affluent backgrounds tend to thrive on the social capital they develop through their families and unique educational experiences. Tinto (1981) found:

Children of the well-to-do seemed to do well in the occupational marketplace despite the colleges they attend, not because of them. On the other hand, for those individuals of low status origins who are able to enter and graduate from the more prestigious colleges, it does appear that colleges do measurably aid their early professional careers. (p. 511)

Gaining access to more prestigious colleges by members from lower status origins requires a certain amount of social capital, not typical among the poor and working class. For those who do succeed, Tinto (1981) noted that social capital is an essential component. Individuals from less affluent backgrounds must utilize their education to succeed, while those from more affluent backgrounds thrive mostly on their social capital.

Sacerdote (2001), who studied college seniors from Dartmouth, provided other examples of how individuals thrive on the social capital developed in college. They found that students use their college social networks when looking for jobs. Students solicit help from networks that include professors, alumni, career services, fraternities, and sororities—networks that all lead to higher paying jobs.

Buerkle and Guseva (2002) recently criticized education's role in stratification, saying that it has been exaggerated by earlier status attainment and human capital theorists (e.g., Becker, 1975; Mincer, 1974; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Jencks et al., 1972; Featherman & Hauser, 1978), who believed education allowed people to find better paying jobs.

Buerkle and Guseva's (2002) study, "What Do You Know, Who Do You Know?" illustrated the role social capital plays in schooling and how societal rewards are still unequally distributed. They found that education contributes to stratification not only because of the variation in knowledge and skills taught, but also because of the variation in networks and connections made within and between groups. They added that school-based networks are especially important for occupational success because they indirectly help individuals gain access to new professional networks through previously established school-based networks.

Buerkle and Guseva (2002) saw social capital developed in schools as a private good, or asset, that people possess in various amounts. They noted that individuals are not entirely in control of their ability to use social capital, because social capital depends on one's capacity to maintain membership in groups that support their careers. According to Buerkle and Guseva, social capital increases as groups expand, and decreases when they move. At the college level, individuals have the opportunity to enlarge their social networks by joining social, religious, fraternal, and volunteer organizations that transmit capital based on common values and interests shared by group members. The larger the social organization, the greater the opportunity is to meet members who may play an important role in enhancing an individual's occupational opportunities.

Mouw and Entwisle (2006) noted that the desire to maintain friendships and networks with members of the same group is not always possible given the size of a group, the number of members in a group, and whether or not opportunities are available that promote socializing among a certain group. In some instances contact may even be discouraged among and between group members. Studies of interracial friendship in schools among younger students have indicated that there may be a link between residential segregation and the relationships that are

formed in schools (Mouw & Entwisle, 2006). Friendship is affected by many factors including residential location, social class, race, age, gender, attitude, and the influence of other friendships and network members. For this reason, race-based friendships and network practices that begin in elementary, middle, and high school may carry over into college and later into the labor market where opportunities for socializing will likely reflect the basic demographics of the context, where the preference for same-group contact, social segregation, and cross-group interaction occurs randomly and regularly (Mouw & Entwisle, 2006).

Colleges would therefore seem to be an ideal context from which the random chance of cross-group interactions would be most likely to occur, but given that social networking is a key component of college integration that often plays an important role in the student's college experience, some group members may prefer to maintain those relationships that they are most familiar with.

Mollica, Gray, and Trevino (2003) found that socializing on college campuses remains race-based. Their study of racial homophily—or same-race friendship ties—in large organizational contexts, including college degree programs, revealed that racial homophily is persistent among students and their social networks. Racial-minorities typically had a smaller selection of same-race ties with whom to socialize; however, their networks were largely homogenous. African-Americans tended to seek out homophilous friendships and networks, and the longitudinal study conducted by Mollica, Gray, and Trevino revealed little change in the structure of racial groups' networks over an extended period of time.

### **2.4.3 Social Organizations and Social Capital**

One way individuals develop social capital in college is through membership in Greek organizations. Fraternities and sororities are gender based, and most Greek organizations are defined by their middle and upper class status, as well as by the racial composition of their members, who adhere to a common set of norms and values. Research by Beggs and Hurlbert (1997) found the access and acquisition of social resources by men and women occurs in Greek organizations, and although ties created in fraternal and service organizations tend to be weak, the higher socioeconomic status of the members provide individuals with better access to social resources. McPherson and Smith-Lovin (2001) studied college fraternities as voluntary associations that connect members to their campus where social networks are created and maintained. McPherson and Smith-Lovin found that both black and white members benefit positively from the development of social networks that occur in fraternal organizations.

Admittance into these “elite” organizations is complex. On many campuses white, Greek-letter organizations, or WGLOs, do not accept non-white members, and in fact, encourage homogeneity and discourage interactions with non-white students (Hughey, 2010). These age-old traditions, despite legislation to prohibit such exclusion, continue to define many decisions WGLOs make to admit, or exclude, non-white members on campuses across the United States. In cases where non-white members are admitted, university officials are often praiseworthy, while Greek members can be less than welcoming; non-white members are treated arbitrarily at times and in some cases are criticized and ostracized by white members. Such circumstances may complicate non-white members’ ability to develop, maintain, and expand social networks within their Greek organization. In cases where non-whites are successful in their network development and expansion, and in situations where they effectively “switch code” between

friends of the same race and those of other races, opportunities may occur in the form of social contacts who have access to important job information.

Many fraternity and sorority members join Greek organizations for the very purpose of social networking. Participating in community service and philanthropic activities is one way to network while in college. Because occupational outcomes are one of the greatest indicators of higher educational success, many students capitalize on the opportunity to join Greek organizations, as well as other well-connected organizations that embody a certain “status” in American society. Hughey’s (2010) research on the paradox of such participation in Greek organizations by non-white members specifically looks at how integrated membership is the goal of non-white members. His study focused on how non-whites use their resources and how their resources inhibit or support membership. He also explored the daily actions of non-whites who successfully gained acceptance into their WGLO, describing three areas where participation was key: community service, networking, and sisterhood/brotherhood. Individuals who successfully integrated into the WGLO participated in, and even managed, community service activities and philanthropic events. According to non-white members, they were often encouraged by white members to manage much of the organization’s community service projects because they believed their unique racial identity gave them “insight” into issues surrounding poverty and various other social problems (Hughey, 2010).

The second vital area required for successful integration is networking. Non-white members provided a variety of reasons regarding the value of networking in Greek organizations, including collecting business cards from alumni, finding jobs, and meeting spouses who are also “well-connected.”

The third requirement for gaining acceptance in a WGLO centers on “kinship” where bonds are formed and solidified through rituals, ceremonies, and activities (Hughey, 2010). These bonds require taking on many roles when members are engaged together in social settings, but for some non-whites, this bond proves to be challenging because it requires maintaining friendships and connections with their white “brothers and sisters” while also maintaining relationships with the “brothers and sisters” of their own race (Hughey, 2010). Without access to individuals within Greek organizations, how do college students who do not join fraternities and sororities rely on these same practices to increase their social capital? How do non-Greek college students become involved in community service that lends itself to social networking? In which social settings do they network and gather important information about jobs? With whom do they create bonds, similar to those described as sisterhood and brotherhood, during their college years?

If pre-college attributes, such as socioeconomic background, play an important part in occupational outcomes, then college students may gravitate to others like themselves from similar backgrounds. If this occurs, then those from advantaged backgrounds will likely maintain status-congruent networks, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds will do the same. In terms of Hughey’s (2010) findings, those from disadvantaged social backgrounds may not seek out opportunities to engage in community service and philanthropic activities if they are typically the recipients of such efforts. If this is typical, then those from disadvantaged backgrounds will miss out on opportunities to network and develop their social capital. On the other hand, those from advantaged social backgrounds may be familiar with and comfortable participating in community service and philanthropic activities either because it is expected, or because they may have attended a high school where, for example, service projects were a

graduation requirement. After college, students may even become interested in pursuing jobs with community offices, volunteer agencies, and non-profits that they worked with while they were in college. Additionally, meeting people who socialize in these circles may open the door to other job opportunities. College students who navigate both within their college campus and with people from the surrounding community will likely increase their opportunities, as well as the amount of information and people they have access to. Taking the initiative to do this work may be more difficult if it is new to a person, or if a person is not around others who regularly, or at least occasionally, take part in community service.

#### **2.4.4 Social Capital and the Community**

According to Knoke (1986), voluntary associations provide another context where social capital development is prominent. Voluntary associations are formally organized groups whose members are not financially compensated for their participation. Additional studies by McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1986) on social networks established in voluntary organizations found that these venues provide members with important contacts, and men, in particular, gain the most beneficial contacts. Membership in voluntary organizations is most common among the middle and upper classes who have the time and resources available to join associations and develop their social capital and social networks (McPherson et al., 2001); but voluntary organizations may exacerbate and amplify disparities between social networks, if time and resources limit who is able to join. In this way, the expansion and development of social networks in the larger community remains the right of the privileged.

Wellman and Wortley (1990) conducted other studies that examined social capital development in the context of the larger community, arguing that community members provide



social support that allows individuals to use and obtain resources such as market exchanges, institutional distributions, and coercive appropriations. They noted that community ties provide much of the social capital that people use to deal with daily life, seize opportunities, and reduce uncertainties. In this way, social capital provides a measure of dependence that allows communities to share resources in a way that maintains the social status and community assets of the group. In many ways, social capital provides non-monetary benefits that indirectly affect labor market outcomes because knowing someone often leads to employers, job information, and gainful employment (Axel & Hangartner, 2006). But when communities are broken and social support is missing, a lack of social capital may explain why the underlying problems persist that plague marginalized groups who suffer from social isolation and who have more difficulty finding jobs.

## **2.5 Social Networks and Job Search**

### **2.5.1 Using Social Networks in the Labor Market**

Credentials, individual talent, and motivation are important factors in occupational mobility, but social networks have been shown to be just as important—at times even more important. Social networks are used to influence hiring decisions, and employers and employees alike turn to their connections in order to exchange job information and match workers. For this reason, social capital has become a powerful tool in the labor market, and the development of relationships across social networks is vitally important to individuals who seek jobs from employers who are influenced by credentials and connections alike.

Theories based on human capital development suggest that applicants are rewarded in the labor market based on their educational qualifications, or credentials, but early research from Rosenbaum et al. (1990) described a different scenario in the job market; they found that relationships between schools and employers complicate the equitable function of the labor market because not all job seekers are able to use their credentials when certain relationships provide certain groups with an advantage.

Upon leaving school, graduates set out to use their human and social capital. By way of their college credentials and the friendships and ties developed throughout their lives, entrance into the job market occurs, and some are in a more advantageous position than others given their social capital. Feld (1981, 1984) studied the structure and use of social ties: personal associates and networks to emphasize how personal relationships serve a range of functions for individuals. Depending on their purpose, individuals divide their associates into groups and use them differently. The development of relationships, how they are created, how long they last, and if they will end, all depend on whether the relationship is one of commitment or convenience.

Other researchers who confirm the value of relationships in the job market include Granovetter (1973, 1974), the leading organizational sociologist in social network theory. Granovetter proved that who you know is just as important as what you know. From his seminal work, "Getting a Job," Granovetter contributed substantially to our understanding of the role of social relationships in job finding.

Following Granovetter (1973, 1974), the influence of social networks on school and work was examined by Altonji (1995), Cookson and Persell (1985), MacLeod (1995), and Royster (2003), who found that an individual's social network largely determines educational aspirations and occupational outcomes. Other significant research on social network theory and the

significance of an applicant's contacts has appeared from researchers such as Burt (1997), Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore (2000), Lin (2001), and Stainback (2008), who also linked networks to employment. But studies remain limited on social network effects on college graduates. For this reason, many questions remain about how networks are developed and used and how race and class structure job opportunities.

Granovetter's (1973) "The Strength of Weak Ties" was one of the most influential studies of social networks in the job market. Granovetter defined social capital in terms of relationships and job-finding outcomes and processes. He made significant contributions with his extensive work on the power of social contacts—in job finding, social capital acquisition, and use. Granovetter learned that individuals find jobs not only through direct applications, but by also using their social networks. Social networks allow applicants to make informed decisions about potential jobs based on the information their contacts provide. He also discovered that social contacts supply different information to applicants based on whether they are a "strong" or "weak" tie. Granovetter defined "strong ties" as friendships or other intimate relationships where people socialize together. "Weak ties" are less intimate and include acquaintances and business associates. Granovetter's most significant contribution to labor market research was the role these networks, or ties, play in the job-finding process. Weak ties serve job searchers better because acquaintances and associates have access to additional contacts that an applicant might otherwise not know. Before Granovetter, conventional wisdom about job search assumed close friends and family were the most influential forces in the job-finding process, but the publication of "The Strength of Weak Ties" proved that individuals who wish to gain an advantage in the job market need access to as many contacts as possible, because contacts outside an individual's immediate social circle have access to more information and more people. Strong ties limit

individuals by tying them to their own world, while weak ties allow individuals to expand and enlarge their networks by meeting people who know others outside their network.

Additionally, Granovetter (1973, 1974) found that individuals who do not have contacts and referrals at their disposal and who have to enter into jobs by way of employment agencies and advertisements have a more difficult time fitting in at work, especially when they are of a different race.

Marsden and Campbell (1984) expounded on Granovetter's work by discussing how to measure tie strength. They developed a system to measure ties and found that the strength of a tie depends on many factors, including the length and depth of the relationship, and measures of closeness were discovered to be the best indicator of tie strength. Montgomery (1992) elaborated on information flow and the effects of tie strength by offering new perspectives on earlier theories. He argued that the quantity of weak ties is important in that more ties mean more job information; however, he did not believe that it also meant better jobs. This line of research suggests that access to a larger number of people is vital for employment, but Cornwell and Cornwell (2008) pointed beyond the number of ties to the profession and expertise of those ties. They studied the role of an applicant's relationship with experts and the advantages of access to specialized knowledge. They argued that tie benefits are maximized when they can be tapped informally. "One indicator of such informal access to experts is tie multiplexity, or the extent to which an expert contact is accessible to an individual through personal relationships (e.g., sibling, neighbor, friend) rather than limited to formal consultation" (p. 865). Cornwell and Cornwell utilized data from the 1985 and 2004 General Social Survey and found that race and class continue to determine the unequal distribution of social resources and available experts in a network. They concluded that expert ties empowered individuals to access and utilize these

connections for the purposes of influencing politics, providing legal protection, managing health, and enhancing socioeconomic attainment.

Researchers such as Burt (1980, 1997) and Lin (2000) continued the debate on social networks by theorizing and asking questions about the role of contacts, the value of strong and weak ties, the construct of various networks, the status of group members, and how each of these relates to labor market outcomes. Burt's work analyzed the connections between people and how people connect to others, who they trust and feel obligated to support, and on whom they depend for success and mobility in the job market. He believed social capital returns depend in some part on a person's standing in the social structure, but more so, on his or her contacts. More advantaged social networks include members who are managers and professionals, gainfully employed, in careers, and well-educated, with college and professional degrees. These members represent a variety of professions and are often from the middle and upper class. When network members are well established and respected in their field, their referrals are requested and trusted. In this way, Burt's ideas about social ties and social closure (or the exclusion of one group by another) prove that one network can in turn provide access to many others. Burt's concept of social networks is also tied to the concept of "bridging," or brokerage, where weak ties allow people to function at the intersection of many social worlds as a result of their access to many ties and networks. Those engaged in "bridging" have connections between and across networks, which allow them to develop new relationships and ideas. Burt used the concept of "bonding" or closure, (bonding is the tightening and coordination of individuals in a network) to explain how people create strong ties or trust within businesses and organizations.

Burt (1997) believed human capital is necessary for success, but useless if the right social capital opportunities are missing. He wrote, "While human capital refers to individual ability,

social capital refers to opportunity” (p. 339). Lin (2000) likewise referred to social capital as a network of opportunity: “Obviously not all individuals or social groups uniformly acquire social capital or receive expected returns from their social capital” (p. 786).

Contacts are important because informal personal communication allows individuals to share information about employers who people have worked for. Job searchers may rely on personal contacts to find out about the nature of a particular job. Hanson and Pratt (1991) discussed the ways in which contacts are used:

Informal personal communication often conditions the individual’s response to job information acquired through more formal sources; for example, someone might learn from a friend or neighbor that a certain employer is desirable, see a newspaper advertisement for a job in that firm, and then apply. Although the job was obtained through “direct application,” the application might never have materialized without the information obtained informally. (p. 231)

### **2.5.2 Stratification and Social Capital in the Job Market: The Effects of Race and Class on Networks**

Employers rely on both formal and informal practices when making hiring decisions. Formal hiring practices are based on credentials, while informal hiring practices are based on personal characteristics and personal ties. Applicants are assessed by their credentials, as well as their personal characteristics: appearance, verbal skills, mannerisms, personality, race, class, and gender. Additionally, an individual’s network is important in the hiring process.

With regard to the inequities that exist among employers and their hiring practices, informal assessments lead to a great deal of disadvantage in the labor market because decisions

are often based on the applicant's personal characteristics and connections. When decision-making shifts from formal assessments to informal assessments, who you know becomes more important than what you know, and applicants with large networks and influential social contacts that are not vulnerable to assessments based on race and class might utilize their ties to gain advantages over other applicants in the labor market.

The situation that an individual is born into can hinder the acquisition of social capital. Working class and poor families are less productive in assisting their children in school and in the job market. These families are often affected by their oppositional views, tendency towards resistant behavior, and feelings of rejection, which affects social capital and labor market outcomes (Wilson, 1996). Social class can also affect the size and composition of social networks; Fischer, Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert (1986) argued that:

The use and effectiveness of interpersonal networks vary by social class: the poor, who are in greatest need of resources provided by social ties, tend to have smaller and less diverse networks (as cited in Tigges, Browne, & Green, 1998, p. 55).

Social capital development and educational outcomes of youth from low-income neighborhoods may be subject to poverty that is transmitted across generations (MacLeod, 1995). MacLeod (1995) argued that inequity defines the United States job market and educational investments do not guarantee returns for the poor. Even with social capital, such as close friendships with peers and neighbors, students from low-income families are often unable to take advantage of their resources, despite their race. MacLeod found that the lower classes are either crippled by hopelessness and low aspirations or unusually optimistic about their ability to overcome the substantial social, class, and racial barriers that restrict them. Even in instances where credentials are present, social capital deficiencies provide little in the way of job leads.

The development of social capital does not guarantee individuals the opportunity to utilize their networks in the job market when networks are small and less diverse or when network members originate among the lower class.

In addition to an individual's social status or class, race has a significant effect on social network development and use. Thomas and Holmes (1992) studied the impact of race on social support, or social capital that comes from friends, families, neighbors, and religion, writing:

Previous research suggests that "being black" and, at the same time, from another socially disadvantaged group has compounding negative economic effects. The concept of "double jeopardy" is used to characterize this dual discrimination certain group's experience. For example, being black and elderly, female, single, or living in an inner-city does seem to increase economic disadvantage.

Economic disadvantages are multifaceted in that they interfere with an individual's ability to benefit from social support and social capital that are tied to success. Thomas and Holmes' (1992) test of the double jeopardy hypothesis indicated that blacks are more vulnerable than whites when social capital and social support are lacking. Blacks who did not have the support of friends, family, neighbors, and religion evaluate their life experiences in terms of how racism and economic deprivation negatively affect them. Thomas and Holmes noted the objective circumstances and subjective experiences of blacks who require social support from two major institutions, the black family and black church, in order to be successful and consider themselves as such. Without these support systems, blacks continue to evaluate their lives negatively. Whites, by contrast, assess individual success according to material achievements; they tend to have adequate, if not abundant, social support and social capital and are often exempt from racism and economic deprivation. Strong social support and social capital allows whites to



evaluate their life experiences more positively and therefore achieve greater success in the labor market.

The concept of “double jeopardy” is also applicable to labor market theory where social capital and credentials constitute a “double jeopardy.” Depending on an individual’s race, class, education, and social capital, a double jeopardy will either have positive or negative effects on occupational outcomes. Utilizing Thomas and Holmes’ (1992) theories, being white and, at the same time, from a socially advantaged group would have compounding positive economic effects. The concept of “double jeopardy” could then be used to characterize the dual favoritism certain groups’ experience. For example, being white and young, male, married, or living in a suburb, would then seem to increase economic advantage. Furthermore, individuals entering the labor market with the double jeopardy described above would then be in a position to also use their credentials and social capital to gain access to information and secure the best jobs.

Royster’s (2003) research expanded on earlier work (Fernandez, 1994; MacLeod, 1995; Thomas & Holmes, 1992) that focused on the composition and influence of social networks among blacks and whites from poor and working class neighborhoods. Her work highlighted the effects of urban education on black and white students who attended the same school and completed the same vocational training. Royster discovered that despite having similar credentials and training, blacks are still unable to achieve the same amount of success as their white counterparts. Discrepancies in occupational outcomes between blacks and whites are not based on academics, character, motivation, or preparedness. She found that the failure of blacks in blue collar industries is the result of social networks, not education. Unions and networks are dominated by whites who use their contacts and connections to gain advantages in the labor market (Royster, 2003).

Relationships are important because employers and prospective employees connect through formal and informal processes as they navigate through the labor market. The constant exchange of information among employees, friends, relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances influences hiring decisions that result in job matches. College graduates participating in the job search process access individual and group resources in the form of credentials and social capital that eventually structure outcomes in the labor market.

The ability to rely on social networks in the job-finding process depends in large part on the networks available to an individual. Wellman (1983) wrote,

The pattern of ties in a network provides significant opportunities and constraints because it affects the relative access of people and institutions to such resources as information, wealth and power. Furthermore, because of their structural location, members of a social system differ greatly in their access to these resources. (as cited in Kingston & Lewis, p. 28)

Social and economic inequalities play a key role in how rewards are distributed. “Most social and economic inequality across racial groups in American society is rooted in disparities in their position in the labor market” (Falcon & Melendez, 2001). The job search is significant because individual search patterns affect occupational outcomes, and social networks that are structured by race and class determine access to information and opportunities. Family and friends often provide information about jobs that make the job search process short and easy. Research has found that people possess a wide range of information about job options available, but in reality, they use networks of friends, peers, parents and teachers, to obtain most of the job information that leads to work (Holzer, 1987).

Social networks allow workers and employers to connect in various social settings and under various circumstances, which both affect the way an individual job searches. Falcon and Melendez (2001) studied racial and ethnic differences in job search and found that social bonds based on ethnicity, race, and class, either lead to or prevent individuals from job opportunities. Social position, social ties, and access to available resources determine the individual's approach to the job search, creating a competition that is seemingly unfair because employers are unable to screen and negotiate all applicants, and in many ways race and class determine who has access to employers and other job-finding networks (Autor, 2001; Bills, 2003).

Other contributions to the study of occupational and status attainment are based on personal and social resources that determine mobility (Haller and Portes, 1973). Yamaguchi (1983) divided mobility according to one's generalized and specific resources. He believed social stratification is based on channels of mobility, social distances in mobility and barriers to mobility. Occupational attainment is therefore linked to mobility factors, and more specifically to credentials and social capital. Without certain credentials, jobs that lead to social mobility are less accessible, and without social capital these same jobs are nearly impossible to claim.

Lin (1999) described the resources necessary for occupational attainment as those that can be used and disposed of without cause or concern for compensation. Social resources are those accessible through one's direct and indirect ties. Lin's (1999) study found that college attendance is often a strain on personal resources that may be limited in some families. Without an abundance of resources, those who make a financial investment in education depend on jobs with decent salaries to compensate for this sacrifice later in life. For the middle and upper classes, a college education may require little if any need for compensation. The outlay of

personal resources is likely made by the parents and families who can easily, if not generally, survive even when incurring the additional costs inherent in funding a college education.

Drawing on Rees (1966) and Rees and Schultz (1970), Barron, Bishop, and Dunkelberg (1985) studied the process of applicant interview and selection from the employer's position, where employment is the outcome of an employer's selection from a pool of qualified applicants. Employers obtain signals about applicants' skills and abilities and then make hiring decisions. Job search intensity therefore largely determines who is hired (Pissarides, 1984). The more applicant pools one joins, the more employers signaled, and the greater chance an applicant has of being hired. In order to join as many applicant pools as possible, applicants must be cognizant of job leads, and in many cases, information about open positions is commonly circulated among large, diverse, social networks. According to Moynihan et al. (2003), the simplest models of career and job search assume people choose from a large set of options using all available information, but that self-efficacy, or personal views of oneself, also affects job search. Control over one's network and resources is important; however, high self-efficacy is what enables job searchers to evaluate jobs constructively before the interview and to turn good interviews into job offers by way of their self-worth, social support, and social connections.

Later work by Lin (2001) discussed how embedded resources in social networks enhance labor market outcomes. Networks facilitate information flow by providing certain amounts of valuable information to individuals who need to know about the requirements, demands, and opportunities available in the market. Networks and network members simultaneously share similar information about the individual job seeker with the market and employers. Lin went on to describe how networks are used to exert influence. Depending on the social network and the status of the members, influence can be very powerful in the decision-making process of

employers who rely on the social credentials of a network to validate individual members.

McDonald, Lin, and Ao (2009) and Fernandez and Weinberg, (1997) demonstrated the way social capital operates through personal contacts that willingly provide access to job information and exert their influence on the hiring process by using their own social credentials.

Neighborhoods provide another context in which social capital's effect on the labor market can be analyzed. Living in suburban neighborhoods, job seekers are exposed to crucial job information by way of their location in thriving business areas. Individuals encounter others who aid in the development and expansion of social capital and networks. Suburban workers often have an additional advantage in the labor market because many higher paying jobs are located in wealthier suburbs (Elliott, 1999; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Mouw, 2002; Tilly et al., 2001). Advantaged networks transfer social and cultural capital across generations, making it easier for those who are members of the dominant group and who reside in wealthier neighborhoods to use their race and class effectively in the labor market (MacLeod, 1995; Royster, 2003).

Contributions from Semyonov, Hoyt, and Scott (1984) and Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo (2006) included evidence that community origin is a strong indicator of occupational success, given that social background such as race and class influences occupational differentiation in the labor market. Their study investigated the link between communities and opportunities: the greater percentage of blacks in a community, the fewer opportunities available to applicants from those neighborhoods. The study also revealed that employers more frequently designate blacks to unskilled and semi-skilled manual occupations while they hire whites for white-collar and upper-status positions. Racial differences in the occupational hierarchy are

most extreme at the bottom and top, with blacks often being denied access to the higher-status positions.

In urban areas, job seekers are isolated from crucial job information, and blacks tend to search in areas where the growth of employment is low. Racial residential segregation significantly impacts job search patterns for blacks (Stoll & Raphael, 2000). Blacks typically have access to only a limited number of job opportunities because the center of their search is in the urban core (Stoll & Raphael, 2000).

Tigges and Tootle (1993) found that where occupational segregation is high, black men work in low wage jobs, and where segregation is lower, they have higher levels of unemployment and are more disadvantaged. Distance often puts urban workers at a greater disadvantage because many higher paying jobs are located in wealthier suburbs. Poverty in urban areas affects the social resources available to those from disadvantaged groups who live in neighborhoods where valuable social contacts and networks are limited (Tigges, Browne, & Green, 1998).

Isolation and unfamiliarity with work practices is another reason why blacks are less successful in the job market (Wilson, 1996). Wilson (1996) discussed some of the reasons that explain why blacks enjoy fewer benefits from social networks. According to Wilson, the rise in the number of welfare dependent black households with no employed members, the high unemployment rates of older black males, and their low representation in skilled blue-collar positions all affect the ability of blacks to develop and use social networks effectively. In these types of settings, social network members have inconsistent work histories or are unemployed. Blacks are subject to small networks that are comprised of members who may only have vocational degrees, on-the-job training, or no higher education at all. Social networks, consisting

of members who have only worked in manual labor, blue-collar work, entry-level positions, or temp work, offer little in terms of influence or power in the labor market. Wilson connected the lack of positive experiences in the professional world among the urban black community to their inability to be successful in the labor market. According to Wilson, the black community is often inexperienced with normal work patterns, or consistent and regular work, daily schedules, or forty hour work weeks, and monetary rewards, or pay compensation that is commensurate with education and experience.

Expanding on Wilson's (1996) work, Elliot (1999) used social isolation and labor market insulation to explain racial differences in network and neighborhood effects on occupational outcomes. Elliott found that a heavy reliance on social networks is the result of neighborhood effects. Individuals who are socially isolated from jobs that require formal applications have to depend on social networks to learn about jobs. The development of networks in isolated neighborhoods is often counterproductive because network members are predominately made up of friends, relatives, and neighbors who have limited access to high-status jobs. Living in areas with high poverty isolates job seekers from crucial job information. Social isolation leads to labor market insulation because job seekers increasingly rely on neighbors and contacts who only know about low-paying jobs in mostly non-white settings.

When social networks are limited and applicants have to rely on their credentials, blacks are more vulnerable to informal assessments made by employers. Research conducted by Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) revealed that appearance, communication skills, and personality are of vital importance to employers, and employers' perceptions lead to many disadvantages in the labor market, specifically for black applicants because employers are concerned about black employees ability to effectively communicate with white customers.

Research by Wilson (1996) on employer expectations focused on applicants with highly desired “hard” and “soft” skills. “Hard” skills are defined as literacy, numerical ability, basic mechanical ability, and other testable attributes. “Soft” skills include personalities suitable to the work environment, good grooming, and group-oriented work behaviors. Wilson noted that hard skills are typically acquired through formal education, which is lacking in most inner-city schools. Likewise, soft skills, which are developed in the environment, present another challenge for inner-city job applicants because the inner-city environment is typically harsh.

Other considerations that lead to employer discrimination are based on the increasing importance of social skills in many occupations and the extent to which these skills affect occupational outcomes. Kim and Tamborini’s (2002) findings pointed to differences in a “two-tiered occupational schema” where one tier is based on technique-oriented tasks and the second on social skills. They discovered racial inequality in the labor market is due to the subjective evaluations of an applicant’s social skills. In this type of context, they believed racial prejudice is more prominent and likely to occur when credentials are secondary and social skills primary. In cases such as these, where blacks and whites hold similar credentials, blacks are at a disadvantage. Stewart and Perlow (2001) discovered employers have greater confidence in their decisions to hire whites for high-status jobs because the employers lack confidence in the ability of many minorities to adequately perform in high-level positions. Steve and Perlow (2001) found evidence of these attitudes in occupational representations; for example, blacks are overrepresented in lower-level positions such as janitorial jobs, while whites are overrepresented in higher-level positions such as architectural jobs. Occupational representations are therefore the result of employers who may hire applicants based on race, not credentials.



Other studies of black/white differences in the job market have found that upward movement is more common for whites, who traditionally use their credentials and social capital to compete for higher positions and better rewards. Compared to blacks, whites receive greater prestige and returns for their educational investments, in both the public and private sectors, because blacks frequently are only able to find work in low-paying jobs that offer little prestige and require few hard skills (Grodsky & Pager, 2001; Sandefur, 1981). Similar discriminatory behavior occurs among employers who use credentials, school quality, and race in their hiring and promotion decisions (Altonji & Pierret, 2001; Psacharopoulos, 1974). This information is often tied with other information about an individual's experience and references, and the latter may be used by employers who discriminate against applicants and employees unfairly.

When employers evaluate applicants by credentials, ideally, an impartial decision is made about those with similar educational backgrounds. When employers have a secondary measure with which to assess applicants, namely, referrals made through networks, hiring decisions are based on social capital. The use of social networks affects the job-finding process when additional information is provided about one applicant that may influence the employer to hire based on *who* the applicants know, not *what* they know (Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991; Saloner, 1985; Simon & Warner, 1992).

Rees (1966) found that employers relied on informal information sources about prospective employees. Hiring agencies are used in some cases, but employers actually prefer using informal information networks because employee referrals, which are viewed as the most important information channel, usually provide a good screening tool based on personal job satisfaction. Rees discovered employees often refer people like themselves, and when making referrals, employees are careful about protecting their reputation, suggesting only those who they

believe will be successful on the job. Referrals from current employees and network members serve as a trustworthy signal to employers. Those who make the referrals understand the need to preserve and maintain their reputation, and therefore only people they know and trust are suggested. Belliveau's research on social network effects confirmed the idea that "who people *think* you know may be at least as significant in influencing occupational outcomes as who you *actually* know" (p. 147) because reputation and status are powerful in terms of who refers who. Kasinitz and Rosenberg (1996) wrote, "Ordinarily a job seeker with an inside contact mentions that name as a way to 'score points' with the employer and typically the applicant can count on the employee contact to be a trustworthy 'gatekeeper' on his or her behalf" (as cited in Kmec, 2007, p. 486). In this way, network members reinforce each other's status by maintaining group resources and advantages in the labor market. Thus, the importance of networks and the different levels of usefulness they offer indicate that job seekers who lack connections to employees who are in a position to refer, waste time and money searching and do not necessarily find good jobs (Barber, 1998).

Smith (2005) offered other explanations of occupational attainment based on reputation and status, explaining that reputation is determined by the attributes of the individuals involved in the job information exchange, and status is based on the prestige an individual's position carries. According to Smith's research, an individual's reputation signals to job contacts how the potential job seeker might function in the workplace. Based on the job seeker's behavior, current status, and perceived character, the job contact evaluates the seeker's ability to be successful. Job contacts who are concerned about their reputations long term will most likely not provide information to anyone who might negatively impact their work situation.

Kmec (2007) studied the role of race and class and how they affect social networks and job referrals. She found that employers treat referrals made by whites and minorities differently. She also discovered that employee's expectations of their referrals are also not the same. For example, white employees provide white referrals with the expectation that they will be hired and that they will stay in the position. For this reason, Kmec (2007) found that whites are more likely to refer other white applicants because they are typically successful on the job. Additionally, employees who are hired by way of their contacts are given automatic entry into the social circles of the workplace. Furthermore, these same employees are provided helpful information about the company that may be missing from formal training sessions, making the new work environment easy to manage and pleasant.

Kasinitz and Rosenberg's (1996) research found that blacks often miss out on opportunities to benefit from referrals because they are not members of the informal networks employers use to share job information and find applicants. Mouw (2002) added to earlier research on black/white inequities in referral use, writing:

In racially segregated cities, high levels of social segregation among black and white workers means that information about jobs is transmitted along racially segregated social networks. Consequently, when firms use employee referrals to fill job vacancies, they tend to attract workers who are the same race as their current workers, thereby maintaining existing levels of employment segregation.

(p. 507)

Occupational outcomes and the acquisition of authority positions in the labor market also differ by race and class. Wilson's (1997) research revealed differences in black/white job search practices. He found that blacks depend heavily on their credentials and experience, yet they are

still unable to market their human capital skills effectively. For whites, occupational outcomes are connected to credentials and experience, as well as social networks. Whites use their education and experience to effectively acquire positions of authority that are largely determined by social networks, or connections, that are virtually unavailable to blacks.

Saloner (1985) examined social networks that are comprised of middle and upper class white males and studied the concept of “old boy” networks whose members deliberately favored white male applicants. Saloner’s work illustrated the influence of personal opinions from “old boys” on hiring decisions that maintain inequities in the labor market. Later work by Mouw (2003) supported the power of networks that are based on relationships built by those from similar social backgrounds.

Other studies of race and opportunity structures from Ibarra (1995) found that minorities who do acquire jobs in corporate settings are challenged by the diversity of their social networks. Ibarra investigated the informal networks of white and minority managers and discovered that minority managers tend to have fewer intimate network relationships and the majority of their networks are racially heterogeneous. In terms of analyzing race and network effects on occupational opportunities, Ibarra found that minorities who are successful have networks that consist of same-race and cross-race contacts, as well as networks dominated by ties to whites.

Ibarra (1995) suggested that an individual’s stance toward his or her racial group and toward the dominant group determines network development strategies, and in some instances, minorities lack professional support networks and make no effort to develop these types of networks. Racially diverse networks may stimulate success by helping minorities gain access to others who have been successful and by initiating access to diverse information sources, but the

development of diverse networks may also be the result of the individual and their confidence level, ability, and willingness to accumulate social capital (Ibarra, 1995).

The power of social networks in the job market suggests that black applicants might do better with formal methods, such as direct applications that utilize their credentials. Because whites dominate the most influential networks, blacks are often unable to use social networks in the same way whites can. Holzer (1987, 1998) found that informal job search methods involve fewer objective criteria that applicants can be judged on. Especially with walk-ins, race often becomes an applicant's most prominent feature, and for blacks, this feature is not helpful when it comes to positively influencing hiring decisions. Holzer discovered that blacks who use informal methods do not produce as many job offers because employers have skewed impressions of these applicants and their personal contacts.

The underlying effects of human and social capital were studied by James (2000) in her research on race-related differences in promotions and hiring in a Fortune 500 financial services firm. James found that while social capital does not affect rates of promotion, social capital mediates the relationship between race and support. According to her surveys, black managers report having less social capital than whites, thus affecting the social support received within the firm. James noted the possibility that blacks have fewer social resources to draw on than whites, because blacks working in traditional organizations do not work with other blacks because the representation of that population is lower. Therefore, blacks' ability to develop social capital at the same rate as whites is impossible because they have fewer same-race ties. Additionally, blacks have fewer strong tie relationships due to the limited availability of other blacks in the workplace. For this reason, blacks also face difficulties establishing strong cross-race relationships (James, 2000).

Returns to social capital are most significant for those who are advantageously positioned in the larger social structure. Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore (2000) found that the common organizational practice of hiring new workers via employee referrals supports social capital theory and the importance of networks. They labeled employers who use these informal methods as “social capitalists” because these employers draw on the connections and networks of workers to improve hiring practices and defer costs.

Blacks living in the inner city have limited access to job information and jobs because they are segregated in residential areas where the growth of employment has been retarded and the connection to major centers of employment is missing (Kasarda, 1989). For this reason, blacks lose out on employment opportunities based on their residency.

McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook’s (2001) outline of the homophily principle supported the idea that network ties are structured by race and class. They discovered that homogeneous groups of minorities, or the disadvantaged, limit people’s social worlds and their access to information and opportunities in the labor market, but when homogeneous groups consist of those from the dominant group, or majority, access to job opportunities opens, because these social groups use their education, status, and social capital to maintain power in the labor market.

The job-finding process has evolved over the years as expectations, requirements, and hiring procedures change but the use of credentials and social networks remains constant. Credentials continue to be used predominately in formal processes, while networks are an integral component of the informal process.

This study explores the way individuals use their college education and personal connections to find work. Current research lacks the high quality evidence needed to show that a

significant or direct relationship exists between race- and class-based social networks and occupational attainment. With the exception of Granovetter, who contributed significantly to labor market research by proving people use social networks to find jobs, studies have failed to explain how race and class affect an individual's ability to use their credentials and social networks in the job search. Because occupational outcomes are based on a combination of characteristics that empower and limit graduates, more research is needed on the role of education and networks in the job market. The primary objective of this study is to utilize social capital theory and provide important insights that may shape new thinking about the structure of the labor market and the ways in which credentials and networks function for those from various social backgrounds. The areas to be studied are (1) social capital or networks—the value of an applicant's network; and (3) race and class inequities in job search. The first part of the study researches the educational credentials of job applicants. The second part of the study addresses social network use among college graduates. Ultimately, this study examines job search patterns among college graduates from different social backgrounds to determine how they utilize their credentials and social capital to find and get jobs.

The accumulation of social capital determines a person's education and occupational outcomes and plays an important role alongside credentials in the job-finding process. Disparities caused by race and class affect human and social capital development, and in the current job market, educational credentials may no longer be sufficient if one lacks connections to important social networks. Because social group membership inevitably structures life opportunities, asking questions about education, social capital, race, and class provides new perspectives on classical thinking about labor market outcomes. The study of individual job-

finding processes may indicate that race and class play a significant role in determining how college graduates access and use their credentials and social networks differently.



## Chapter Three

### 3.1 Methods

#### 3.1.1 Data Sources

The key question in this study is how social networks are used in the job search. The purpose of this study is to explore: (1) how this transpires for recent college graduates, (2) how potential social networks in a higher educational context, like KU, may make a difference for students from lower social status backgrounds, and (3) how race and class structure social networks and influence job search patterns.

Data was collected from multiple sources including the University of Kansas Alumni Office, the University of Kansas Registrar's Office, the Institute of Education Sciences, (IES) and the Common Core of Data (CCD) websites. Additional data was collected through audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with 48 KU alumni. The majority of interviews were conducted in person, although several transpired by phone. In order to initiate contact, alumni were emailed and invited to participate. The nature and tone of the email left little reason to suspect any selection bias (see Appendix A). Those who were willing to participate in the study responded by either phone or email to schedule an interview. Alumni who were unable to participate usually indicated so, and those who did not respond were removed from the sample and not contacted a second time.

Interviews provided an in-depth exploration of each graduate's job search, initiation and engagement, individual experiences, interactions with employers, and decision-making processes. The purpose was not to examine the type of work each individual found, or their occupational attainment, but rather to gain insight into the search process and the various

resources graduates used to find jobs. Interviews delivered important information about the dynamics of social networking in college and the relationship between college majors and jobs. Participants were asked specific questions about the duration of their job search, the particular resources utilized to find out about jobs, the extent to which they relied on their credentials and social capital, and whether or not they felt the university had any impact on their job search and occupational outcomes.

The sample from which the data was drawn came from a list of 15,330 alumni, who graduated from high schools in Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. Because the study dealt with college graduates from one university, the majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face within the same locale as the university. Additional interviews were conducted by phone with alumni living in Colorado, California, Texas, New York, and Illinois. The participants in this study came from various social backgrounds with origins in seven states. The initial sample of 15,330 college graduates were coded for SES based on the type of high school they came from: urban, rural, suburban, parochial, and other private. The coding relied on categories used in the Common Core of Data (CCD) developed by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). This initial coding scheme was later triangulated during interviews by means of direct questions on SES and family background. To simplify the sampling frame, two broad categories were developed for alumni: (1) higher social status, from suburban or private high schools, and (2) lower social status, from urban high school graduate. Rural and parochial high school graduates were excluded due to limited variation of students from these schools by race/ethnicity and class. Table 1 shows the list of high schools with students from the University of Kansas who were selected for the final sample.

**Table 1: US High Schools with Students at KU by Type for Final Interview Sample**

<b>State</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
Colorado	2	27	30	59
Illinois	8	21	22	51
Kansas	2	17	17	36
Missouri	16	20	22	36
Nebraska	0	8	14	22
Oklahoma	0	16	17	33
Texas	6	30	22	58
<b>Total Schools</b>	34	139	144	

Students who attended private or suburban high schools tended to come from higher social status backgrounds, and students from urban high schools came mostly from lower social status backgrounds. For the purposes of this study and the examination of race and class in the job search process, these distinctions were necessary. Each high school listed in the sample had a different number of alumni at the University of Kansas. The range of alumni from any high school varied, with some high schools listing only one alumni who attended the university, while others had as many as 2,968 from one single high school.

The initial plan was to interview approximately 60 alumni from the University of Kansas. For each alumni selected, six additional alumni were designated as backups, in case the first alumni declined. These alumni needed to be as similar as possible to the original alumnus in terms of race, class, and gender. Data requested from the alumni office was challenging in terms of size, but based on anticipated response rates it was necessary to ask for a large extract from the master data pool. Eventually, most of the data was not used, but it was important to have it available in order to figure out which alumni would be selected for backups. Another reason the data request was larger than usual was due to geographic

representation and the request for alumni from seven states—Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the data on the alumni was merged with additional data from the registrars' office on their high school GPA, college GPA, race/ethnicity, gender, college major, and graduation year. *Based on entry into the job market, alumni from 2005 and on were selected for potential interviews.* Table 2 outlines race and class distinctions by categorizing these alumni into one of six categories: Group A: White Urban, Group B: White Suburban, Group C: White Private, Group D: Black Urban, Group E: Black Suburban, and Group F: Black Private. These alumni were from urban, suburban, and private high schools. Due to their limited number, black students from private and suburban high schools were oversampled.

**Table 2: Alumni from 2000 on / Black or White / Urban, Suburban, or Private**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>1=Urban</b>	<b>2=Suburban</b>	<b>4=Private</b>	<b>Total</b>
1=White	1,114 26.51 Group A	2,946 70.11 Group B	142 3.38 Group C	4,202 100.00
5=Black	107 66.05 Group D	52 32.10 Group E	3 1.85 Group F	162 100.00
<b>Total</b>	1,221 27.98	2,998 68.70	145 3.32	4,364 100.00

From this data a working subsample was created that included eight plus alumni in each category for backup interviews. Table 3 generated names of alumni by race: black or white; gender: male or female; and high school: private, suburban, or urban. These categories were designed for the purposes of creating a sample that would represent alumni from various racial and social class backgrounds. By constructing the sample in this way, the effects of race and

class are put into context, allowing for the examination of social capital in the job search process. Further detail in on the sampling procedure is provided in the Appendix.

**Table 3: Alumni from 2000 On  
Black or White / Urban, Suburban, or Private / Male or Female**

<b>Gender/Race</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Private</b>
<b>White=1 Male=1</b>	8+ alumni	8+ alumni	8+ alumni
<b>White=1 Female=0</b>	8+ alumni	8+ alumni	8+ alumni
<b>Black=5 Male=1</b>	8+ alumni	8+ alumni	8+ alumni
<b>Black=5 Female=0</b>	8+ alumni	8+ alumni	8+ alumni

### 3.1.2 Interview Protocol

This study addresses job search patterns of college graduates and the implications of social capital by race and class. The data for this study is based on KU graduates from 2000 to 2011, who came to the university from high schools across Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The data for this study was collected through audio recorded semi-structured interviews with 48 alumni from the University of Kansas who met the following four criteria: (1) Race/Ethnicity: black or white; (2) graduated 2000 and on; (3) attended high school in Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, or Texas; and (4) attended a private, suburban, or urban high school in one of seven states.

Qualitative interviews for this study were guided by Rubin and Rubin's (2005) opening-the-locks pattern. Because the interviews were structured in such a way that they organically took shape depending on what the interviewees responded, one set of questions addressed certain

responses, while a second set was needed to address other responses. Participants were well-prepared to answer questions since they were mostly subjective and pertained to a broader story, one that developed over time, involving their education and social networks. Interview questions “opened the lock” on extensive amounts of information regarding broader topics.

The University of Kansas is a large Midwestern university located in Lawrence, Kansas. The university provides the ideal setting for studying the job search patterns of college graduates. Alumni in this study were interviewed for the purposes of exploring how the job search process transpires for recent college graduates, how social networks affect this process, and how race and class structure and influence networks.

The data from this study supports current research and literature on the role of social capital in the job search. Responses from participants indicate that social capital implies a variety of contacts, both strong and weak, that are often instrumental to the job search. For the purposes of this study, social capital refers to social contacts or connections, and includes a variety of people: friends, family, acquaintances of family members, high school friends, neighbors, friends of friends, professors, and people they knew from campus organizations, clubs, or other involvements. Additionally, each alumnus was asked about their use of campus career services and whether or not they attended any job fairs. Naturally, while the job search was the core topic, a variety of other questions were asked about family background, job choice, future goals, and experiences on campus. (For the full list of questions see Appendix A.) To varying degrees, every alumnus relied on his or her credentials in the job search. In this study, credentials refer to college degrees, and alumni interviewed for this study earned degrees in a variety of fields including: education, engineering, nursing, journalism, business, communications, and urban planning. For some, the credential was the determining factor in the

job search; for others, social capital played a bigger role. The interview protocol from this study could be duplicated for further exploration or comparative data on college graduates from other universities, currently engaged in the job search.

Requests for participation were sent by email to alumni from the University of Kansas. Alumni were asked to be interviewed about the job search. Those who agreed to participate replied back and scheduled an interview date and time. All interviews were recorded with an audio recording device and transcribed into summaries. Each alumnus interviewed graduated in 2000 and on. In an effort to prevent selection bias and the rate of response, only the fundamental objective of the interview was revealed in the invitation email. The particular topical areas covered in the interviews were not revealed until later.

Building on social capital research and theory (Bills, 1988, 2003; Collins, 1974, 1979; Granovetter, 1995; Royster, 2003), the interview protocol (see Appendix A) was designed with the intention of exploring the role of social capital in the job search. Questions were written in an open-ended format to allow alumni to share their stories and perceptions of the job search process. Interview questions were asked in broad, non-directed terms such as, "Tell me about the interview process," and "Do you believe you were hired/not hired based on your credentials, social networks, or social background/characteristics?" The overarching questions of the interview progressed organically, by way of a common set of questions. "Do you have a job? If, yes, what type of job? Do you use your college major and who told you about the job?" In each case participants were asked to go backwards from the beginning when they started searching for jobs. The questioning focused almost exclusively on the job search and social networks. The story of each graduate's job search was followed, and one comment about the job search opened

the door to another. Revelations about the job seeker, the job informant, and the hiring employer ultimately unfolded.

Questions were designed to gain insight into the specific role of social capital in each alumnus's job search process. The interviews were not tightly structured, thus providing a forum for participants to share openly about their experiences and job search. The tree-and-branch method developed by Rubin and Rubin (2005) provided a framework for structuring the research questions into categories so that each category was covered by a main question. The trunk in this study was job search patterns, and the branches involved questions about social capital from family, high school, and college networks. The main questions (or trunk) included explicit points that followed a chronology about the specific job search. What happened first, second, third, etc. in terms of how they searched for jobs and in which ways social capital was used. Interviews were divided into six major categories.

- Section I: Pre-College Graduation/Job Search
- Section II: Post-College Graduation-Job #1
- Section III: Post-College Graduation-Job #2
- Section IV: College Experience
- Section V: Pre-College/High School Experience
- Section VI: Follow-up Questions

The goal of the questioning was to capture the entire job search story in order to obtain information about how each alumnus utilized their credentials and social networks to facilitate the process.

The data from this study allows us to gain new understanding about the effects of race and class on the job search process. From this data, new understanding can be translated into policies that may improve job search outcomes for those from lower social status backgrounds.

Participants were encouraged to be candid in their statements about the job search process and their experiences in the labor market. Each interview was audio-recorded with the



participant's permission. Immediately after each interview a summary of the alumni's job search was written. Key quotes were transcribed along with specific answers to questions. All summaries were corrected and supplemented as needed, then checked for accuracy. Alumni were informed that the actual names of participants would not be included in the study.

### **3.1.3 Interviews**

In total, 4,202 white and 162 black respondents were originally identified for interviews, with an additional 217 blacks added to the sample later due to a low response rate and in an effort to acquire a more balanced representation of this portion of the population. Given KU's location and "catchment zone," it is a predominantly white institution, but the eventual participant pool included a sufficient number of blacks. Black students from suburban and private schools were intentionally oversampled while white students from urban schools were purposefully under sampled. Of the 48 respondents, 31 were white: 8 from urban, 16 from suburban, and 7 from private high schools. The remaining 17 were black: 15 from urban and 2 from suburban high schools. The sample included 24 females.

As noted earlier, the data collection process involved an approximately 30 to 60 minute long semi-structured interview for each participant. While the interview protocol included a common set of guiding questions that were addressed without exception—the job search, credentials, and social network ties—the interview process was inherently organic, whereby the sequence and structure of each conversation was determined, in part, by the unique experiences and attributes of each respondent. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore, in-depth, each graduate's job search: what job information they had access to while in college, how they found out about jobs, the structure of the job interview, and decisions about which job to accept as they graduated from college, as well as the extent to and ways in which they relied on their

college credentials and social networks. Questions were asked in broad, non-directive terms such as “How did you start searching for jobs?” or “Tell me about your first job out of college and how you found out about that job.” Details were gathered about high school and college experiences in terms of academics, peer groups, social interactions, and extracurricular involvement.

The first interviews were selected from the final file created in STATA. The key files selected for the first few interviews were from Cell D and Cell B. The selection was random, 10% from Cell D: Black Urban, and 1% from Cell B: White Suburban. Initially two alumni were selected from each category. Alumni currently living in the Kansas City area who graduated in the last four to five years were contacted by email for an interview.

All other interview participants were contacted by email and interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to one hour. A total of 1,036 interviews were requested, and 48 were completed. Table 4 below indicates the exact number of interviews requested from each category and the number of interviews conducted.

**Table 4: Interview Response Rate from Sample of Alumni by Category**

<b>Social Background</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Interviews Requested</b>	<b>Interviews Conducted</b>
<b>Group A: White Urban</b>	1,114	157	8
<b>Group B: White Suburban</b>	2,946	498	17
<b>Group C: White Private</b>	142	112	7
<b>Group D: Black Urban</b>	107 (210)*	107 (210)*	14
<b>Group E: Black Suburban</b>	52	52	2
<b>Group F: Black Private</b>	3 (7)*	3 (7)*	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	4,471	1,036	48

A variety of topics were covered in conjunction with the information provided in the alumni records. Graduates were asked to elaborate on their family, high school, and college networks as well as their job search process. In the majority of the interviews, much of this information was collected in explicit relation to discussion of the job search process itself.

To give an abbreviated example,<sup>1</sup> the graduate interviewed below was a white male. He attended a private high school in Kansas, and while at KU he played football. His parents are both college educated and he relied on social capital to find his job. The job he took as a financial advisor was largely inconsistent with his psychology degree:

*Q: Tell me about your first job out of college. What was it? How did you get it? How did you first hear about it?*

A: I got a job as a financial advisor. Still doing it. It involves investments and retirement plans...A lady in the athletic department told her brother about me, and that I was looking for a job.

*Q: Did you meet her brother in person or know him before?*

A: He was a former football player like me.

*Q: How and when did you meet him?*

A: I met him on campus and later at his office in Kansas City. He got my email address from his sister and arranged a meeting for me to meet potential employers in Kansas City.

*Q: How did you first meet this lady exactly?*

A: She worked in the athletic department, so I always stopped in her office when I was there to chat. She was very nice and she took care of all of the athletes.

*Q: What else did you do to look for jobs for after college? And, in addition to deliberate efforts, do you recall other situations—such as conversations with friends, hanging out at parties, meeting other acquaintances—where you ended up gathering information about jobs or potential employers?*

A: Not much.....at the meeting John held, I met every important business man in Kansas City. Suddenly, I had all kinds of opportunities.

*Q: OK. Let's go back to this first job, if that's alright. You said you are a financial advisor. But at KU you majored in psychology, right? So how did you end up with this job? Did you also look for something more consistent with your specific major?*

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<sup>1</sup> Though some facts are edited for anonymity, this excerpt is based on the material from an actual interview.

\*The second numbers listed next to Groups D and F with an \* represents a second sample pulled from the original sample because the initial response rate was low, and more interviews were needed.

A: Not really. I knew I could learn how to do anything because I am an athlete. I don't think the degree really matters that much, all you really have to do is be able to earn people's trust. You have to be friendly and outgoing. I was never really trying to look for something in Psychology, I just wanted to work.

*Q: What do you exactly do in your job? What is the specific task you perform? In what ways does your academic background from college apply?*

A: I help people plan for the future and their retirements by investing their money for them. My degree does not really apply, just in terms of dealing with people, but that is it. Not much...everything I do, I learned on the job.

*Q: What was the employer looking for? Did they not mind that you were a psychology major?*

A: They weren't hiring at the time, but they knew me from football and I had a good reputation so they wanted to help me out. The degree was irrelevant, I mean, they wanted someone with a degree, of course, but, it didn't have to be a Finance degree. Like I said, they wanted someone with personality.

*Q: OK. Going back to your college years, why did you major in psychology? What was it that was attractive to you?*

A: I majored in psychology because it was easy. I had to maintain a certain GPA to play football.

Questions about family and general social class background were also included. In an effort to triangulate the sampling assumptions made by virtue of each alumni's high school, information about alumni that was originally based on high school type—private, suburban, or urban—was verified in the interviews by way of inquiries into each alumnus' family background, including their parents' and siblings' education levels, professions, and work. This information allowed for substantiation of the earlier categorization of each alumnus into a "class" category based on high school data. The objective for triangulation was to ensure that the sampling was not affected by invalid assumptions made earlier regarding SES.

Methods for this study rely on a deductive approach. Many of the issues addressed in the interviews are consistent with existing literature on social capital and social networks. In order to explore patterns not consistent with current insights on social networks, additional questions were asked about family, high school, and college connections. Although a number of predictions were tested, the interviews and inquiries were also open to new insights about how

race and class structure the social networks of college graduates engaged in the job search. Questions were designed to acquire the most precise information possible in order to avoid any overt ambiguities about social capital and social networks. The design of this study was therefore fundamentally deductive. Drawing on current research an analytical approach was employed based on the technique of qualitative interviewing.

The interview data and supplementary data were reviewed and coded for information about social background, educational credentials, social capital, social network development, the job search, and occupational outcomes. In order to analyze the information collected from interviews about the use of social contacts in the job search, Lin's (2001) theories of group applications of social capital were applied. Social networks were organized into three categories: high school networks, family networks, and college networks. Group applications were examined in order to compare the use of social capital by race and class. Alumni were divided into two different groups according to race, and then these two groups were separated again according to class or social status. Lower social status and higher social status was determined by high school, and in this particular sample, alumni from private and suburban high schools, regardless of race, tended to be from higher social status groups, while alumni from urban high schools, irrespective of their race, were typically from lower social status groups.

It should be noted that the social status of alumni was initially determined by high school attended, as indicated above, and then verified in the interview with questions about family background, parents' education level, and profession. In the entire sample of 48 interviews, only one alumnus who attended an urban high school came from a higher social status background. Her father was a physician at a hospital in the city and she attended an urban high school near their home and the hospital.

Table 5 outlines the final categories of groups (Lin, 2001) organized for this study.

**Table 5: Applications of Social Capital by Group**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Social Status Background</b>		<b>Social Capital Capacity</b>	<b>Social Networks</b>
Group 1: Black	Higher Social Status	Private high school	Higher Capacity Social Capital	High School Networks Family Networks College Networks
		Suburban high school	Higher Capacity Social Capital	High School Networks Family Networks College Networks
Group 2: White	Higher Social Status	Private high school	Higher Capacity Social Capital	High School Networks Family Networks College Networks
		Suburban high school	Higher Capacity Social Capital	High School Networks Family Networks College Networks
Group 3: Black	Lower Social Status	Urban high school	Lower Capacity Social Capital	High School Networks Family Networks College Networks
Group 4: White	Lower Social Status	Urban high school	Lower Capacity Social Capital	High School Networks Family Networks College Networks

Lin's (2001) research on group applications of social capital explained how as a collective, groups may seek to maintain assets by enhancing the opportunities they make available to group members. Lin (2001) explained that the value of social capital is measured by individual and group profits and that an individual's application of social capital focuses on (1) how individuals invest in social relations and (2) how individuals use the embedded resources in their networks to generate a return. To give an example, the female alumni mentioned above relied on embedded resources in her family network to find a job after college. This alumnus's father (the physician) arranged an interview for her with the director of the lab at the hospital where he worked. Although her biology degree, or credential, made her qualified for the

position, she may not have been able to arrange an interview with the director of the lab, without her father's connection.

In this study, network value was based on higher- and lower-capacity social capital. In order to understand how graduates invested in social relationships, Lin's (2001) theories were utilized to determine how specific individuals and groups gain access to other individuals, organizations, and associations comprised of members with higher social status and stronger capacity social capital. To give an example, stronger capacity social capital networks consist of individuals who are well-educated, business owners, professionals, politicians, and otherwise influential people. Networks consisting of members with higher social status typically are in a position to provide information to alumni about jobs. Building on Lin's (2001) notions of social capital, interview participants were asked specific questions regarding their ability to capture and utilize available resources, and the extent to which they committed time to circulating in a variety of settings, to making new connections, and to developing new relationships.

Table 6 outlines the coding scheme developed for social networks utilized by college graduates in this study.

**Table 6: Coding Scheme for Social Capital and Networks**

<b>A = Family Network</b>	<b>B = High School Network</b>	<b>C = College Network</b>
Grandparents	High school teacher	College professor
Father	Friend from high school	Friend from college
Mother	Friend of friend	Roommate in college
Sibling	Coach from high school	Students from class
Aunt	Student government friend	Student government friend
Uncle	Athletic teammate	Athletic teammate
Friend of family	Neighbor	Neighbor
Client of parent (s)	Friend from extra-curricular activity	Sorority sister
Colleague of family members	Friend from club or other organization	Fraternity brother
Professional-medical, dental, etc.	Colleague in high school work setting	Colleague in college work setting

Religious associate	Religious associate	Religious associate
Step-parents	Significant other	Significant other

Three categories of networks were created based on interview responses and current research on social capital and social networks (Granovetter, Linn, MacLeod, Royster). College graduates in this study ultimately relied on contacts from three networks: family, high school, and college. Collapsed into each category is a variety of individuals that graduates knew from various relationships and social situations. Excerpts from interviews were coded when a respondent referred to contacts used in the job search process. For example, graduates were asked, “How did you find out about this job?” and “Did you know anyone who worked for the company?” Based on the responses, social networks were categorized as a family, high school, or college network. Below are several examples of excerpts from interviews and their respective coding categories.

A = Family Network:

*For white kids, born in a bubble, there is an expectation that you either go to a professional school, medical school or law school, or you end up in the business community. Country clubs, alumni, parents cultivate these relationships for a reason, whether it is unfair, or pathetic, I think it is ok, you can draw on these resources. But [name removed] was not even able to get his family members jobs. It's not just the old, 'well he knows someone,' there is a certain amount of qualification that is required. It's fairly common, relying on parents.*

*Or maybe it's a generational thing, I could be speculating wildly, but I don't even know how many people turn in paper resumes anymore. I have two friends who graduated in the top 5% of their class at Duke Law, and they had trouble finding a job, so they came back here and took jobs with firms where our families and friends practiced.*

B = High School Network:

*I was involved in everything in high school. I had a good group of friends who were all pretty motivated, maybe not the best grade-wise but they all wanted to be professionals. My friends majored in business and finance, or architecture. I graduated in 2009 with a job already lined up. I work for Performance Contracting, the largest sub-contracting company headquartered in Kansas City. The company has 55 branches, and each project is divided up. I work on dry-wall and metal framing of interior and exterior walls.*



*I got the job because I knew someone in corporate. My family moved to Kansas when I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and I played basketball all through high school with my best friend, [name removed]. His dad works for corporate. Our families were really close and his dad helped me get the job. He is the one who told me about the posting.*

C = College Network:

*[Name removed] was instrumental in my success. She is a professor who not only has come and seen every play I've done in Kansas City, and not incidentally, like maybe other professors have, but intentionally, and not only that, but she recommended to the artistic director on more than one occasion that I audition for certain shows, shows that otherwise I might not have been considered for, I ended up getting. She came to watch me in the Outsiders, and recommended to the Director that I audition. I ended up getting the lead part and he wasn't even going to have me audition for it.*

The next nine tables highlight the coding scheme developed for alumni based on college degree, job, and degree consistency. Alumni were asked specific questions to determine whether they have a job that was consistent or inconsistent with their field of study. In some cases, although the job and degree were seemingly consistent, if the alumni indicated that they do not use their degree specifically, then responses were coded as such, and inferences made by the researcher were cancelled. Tables 7–15 include data gathered from three major questions that were used to determine categories of consistency and inconsistency by race, class (or high school), and gender. Tables for black females from private and suburban high schools were not created because no alumni from these categories responded for interviews. For the same reasons, no black males from private high schools were interviewed.

**Table 7: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency  
for White, Private, Males**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>WPM 6 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
H.H.	Psychology	Financial Advisor	Inconsistent
J.B.	Economics	Insurance Claims	Consistent
J.G.	Communications	Manager of Sales Representatives	Consistent
J.B.	Spanish and Journalism	Communications and Public Relations	Consistent
P.W.	Business and Economics	Assistant Relationship Manager	Consistent
T.Z.	Journalism	Office Manager	Inconsistent

**Table 8: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency  
for White, Suburban, Males**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>WSM 9 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
A.B.	Mechanical Engineering	Engineer	Consistent
R.L.	Political Science	Claims Appraiser	Inconsistent
B.R.	Electrical Engineering	Multi-Discipline Engineer	Consistent
C.C.	Economics	Mortgages and Loans	Consistent
E.P.	Physical Education and Health	High School Teacher	Consistent
E.S.	Political Science	Real Estate Agent	Inconsistent
J.S.	International Finance	Health Care Information Technology Programmer	Consistent
M.M.	Mathematics	Electronics Technologist	Consistent

T.Z.	Architecture	Project Manager	Consistent
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**Table 9: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for White, Urban, Males**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>WUM 5 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
E.E.	History	Restaurant Manager	Inconsistent
M.C.	Marketing	Supervisor of Dispatch	Inconsistent
M.B.	Strategic Communications	Video Producer	Consistent
C.L.	Education	K-5 Reading Specialist	Consistent
D.Q.	Mathematics and Statistics	Property Manager	Inconsistent

**Table 10: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for White, Private, Females**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>WPF 1 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
A.G.	Business and Marketing	University Recruiter	Consistent

**Table 11: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for White, Suburban, Females**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>WUF 8 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
A.E.	Psychology and Religious Studies	Library Aide	Inconsistent
M.W.	Journalism	Theatre Marketing	Consistent
R.W.	Medical Technology	Medical Technologist	Consistent
L.R.	English	Special Events Coordinator	Inconsistent
T.P.	History	Math Teacher	Inconsistent
M.R.	French	Office Manager	Inconsistent
D.N.	Journalism and Strategic Communications	Media Associate	Consistent
C.T.	Accounting and Business Administration	Dispatch Coordinator	Inconsistent

**Table 12: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for White, Urban, Females**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>WUF 3 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
S.M.	Human Development and Family Life	Non-profit grant writer	Consistent
H.N.	Latin American Studies	Math Teacher	Inconsistent
J.B.	Religious Studies	Director of Community Engagement	Inconsistent

**Table 13: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for Black, Suburban, Males**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>BSM 2 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
J.F.	Italian and Music	Language Instructor	Consistent
T.M.	Theatre	Resident Theatre Actor	Consistent

**Table 14: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for Black, Urban, Males**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>BUM 2 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
Q.S.	Political Science	Recruiter	Inconsistent
T.R.	Women's Studies	Art Gallery	Inconsistent

**Table 15: Coding Scheme for Degree Consistency and Degree Inconsistency for Black, Urban, Females**

<b>Alumni</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Consistent/Inconsistent</b>
<b>BUF 12 total</b>	<b>What degree did you earn?</b>	<b>What was your first job out of college?</b>	<b>Do you believe you were hired based on this degree, does it relate to your work and responsibilities?</b>
M.S.	Organismal Biology	Lab Technician	Consistent
K.M.	Nursing	Private Practice Nurse	Consistent
M.E.	Communications	Regional Director for Career Placement	Consistent
S.E.	Psychology	Counselor	Consistent
S.C.	Biology	Lab Technician	Consistent
J.T.	Urban Planning	City Planner and Researcher	Consistent
C.M.	Communications	Administrative Assistant	Consistent
W.F.	Advertising	Teacher	Inconsistent
Z.M.	Mathematics	Systems Analyst	Consistent
J.H.	Economics and Computer Science	Test Developing Engineer	Consistent
L.G.	Art History	Administrative Assistant	Inconsistent
M.S.	Nursing	Progressive Care Hospital Nurse	Consistent

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed into written format for analysis.

Reoccurring references to social networks that were common among many of the interviewees were noted and coded. The consistency between college degree and first job was also coded. The reoccurring data in this study was gathered, coded, and then analyzed. Categories were allowed to form during the analysis of transcript data.

Steps were taken to ensure validity throughout the study, and objectivity was maintained during the data collection process. A semi-structured interview format was used where each alumnus was asked the same primary interview questions. Follow-up questions were unique

from person to person, but were delivered with the same open-ended format allowing alumni to share personal responses.

Throughout the interviews no attempts were made to prove or disprove any theory; rather, the focus of this study was to openly explore the job search process in an effort to enrich current research and understanding about the role of social capital.

## **Chapter Four**

### **4.1 Findings**

#### **4.1.1 The Role of Social Capital in the Job Search Process**

As literature suggests, the transition from college to work is an important indicator of educational outcomes. Yet individuals with credentials often vary in terms of job search patterns and occupational outcomes. In the labor market, credentials are a marker of status, a symbol of educational qualifications, conferred by colleges and universities in the form of degrees that graduates and employers use in their interactions—exchanging education for work (Collins, 1975, 1979; Bills, 2003). Credentialist theory attributes much of the variation in job search patterns to employer perspectives and applicant behaviors, but current research fails to sufficiently address the role of social capital in this process.

This study indicates that the role of social capital is fundamentally tied to the job search process because social capital functions as a moderator, determining the extent to which an individual can actually demonstrate his or her credentials in the very first place. Without social capital, job seekers may miss out on opportunities to engage and connect with employers, limiting themselves to formal applications and jobs that match their credential.

Collins (1971, 1979) noted that status groups govern particular professions by defining the specific educational degrees necessary for newcomers wanting to enter those professions. By configuring educational requirements in this manner, status groups not only maintain their own advantage, they also control the basic patterns of socialization that occur in their professions (Abbott, 1988; Beadie, 1999; Bills, 1988). In a similar way, dominant groups depend on educational institutions to impart the personal styles and values necessary to achieve the most



valued positions in society. These styles, shared between status groups, enable some graduates to utilize their credentials in unique ways, by working for employers with whom they share social status. For those who do not adopt the values and styles of the dominant group, status may limit opportunities if applicants are unable to connect with employers. This disconnect may result in qualified individuals accepting inferior jobs and social positions (Kingston & Lewis, 1990). By sharing values and styles, applicants with higher social status are able to effectively interact with employers.

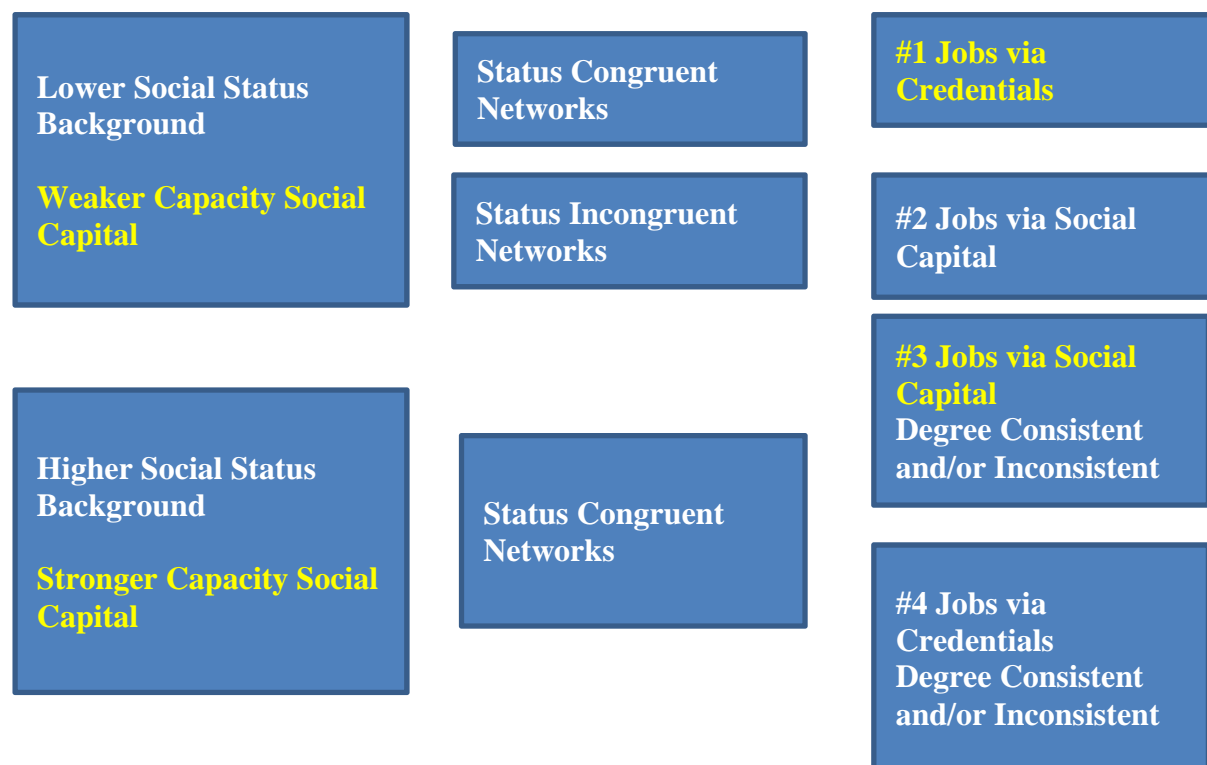
The Credentialist perspective, based on earlier research (Beadie, 1999; Berg, 1971; Bills, 2003; Collins, 1977; Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Murphy, 1999; Royster, 2003; Spence, 1973; Stevens, 2007) has indicated that credentials play an important role in how workers are matched to employers, and how credentials, or human capital, are evaluated and exchanged in the labor market for jobs and economic capital. Those from higher social status backgrounds typically acquire the most valuable credentials, but credentials alone do not sufficiently explain the variation that persists in job search patterns and occupational outcomes.

If credentials are important to employers, and graduates have “equal credentials,” then the moderating factor between employers and applicants is likely social capital. In this case, *who* you know matters just as much as *what* you know, in terms of job information and opportunity, because social capital remains the strongest link between applicants and employers.

For those from higher social status backgrounds, access to higher capacity social capital is more common. For those from lower social status backgrounds, this access is less common. Ultimately, it is access to *stronger capacity social capital*, regardless of race and class that allows individuals the opportunity to demonstrate their credentials and job search effectively.

Summarized in Figure 1 is the interaction of credentials and social capital. Figure 1 outlines the central insights based on findings from this study. The following discussion systematically expands on various features of Figure 1. Among these features are (1) how weaker and stronger capacity social capital affects the types of networks used, and (2) how these networks influence job search patterns and outcomes. The two dominant scenarios discovered from interviews conducted for this study are highlighted below in yellow. Scenarios two and four represent unexpected findings.

**Figure 1: The Interaction of Credentials and Social Capital**



#### 4.1.2 The Interaction of Credentials and Social Capital

Four major scenarios found among job searchers who recently graduated from college are outlined below. Pre-college social capital is linked to status and background; students with higher social status typically possess stronger capacity social capital, while students with lower

social status usually have weaker capacity social capital. Status distinctions and social capital determine job search outcomes; students either maintain status congruent networks or develop new networks that are status incongruent. Based on these networks, one of four scenarios unfolds.

### **Scenario 1: Lower Social Status Background and Weaker Capacity Social Capital = Jobs via Credentials**

The first scenario is consistent with dominant theories that support findings from this study. These findings indicate that college students from lower status backgrounds—who socialize with others like themselves or in networks that are congruent with their status—will most likely miss out on opportunities to meet new people from different social backgrounds. After graduation, credentials become the primary means by which jobs are found, because lower capacity social capital offers little in terms of job opportunities. Graduates who consistently rely on contacts from status-congruent networks will, by virtue of their lower capacity social capital, limit their opportunities and the amount of job information they receive.

### **Scenario 2: Lower Social Status Background and Stronger Capacity Social Capital = Jobs via Social Capital**

In the second scenario, college students with lower status who choose to socialize with status incongruent networks will improve their opportunities to demonstrate their credentials to employers in unique ways. By developing their networks and socializing with others who have stronger capacity social capital, these graduates often find jobs that are both consistent and inconsistent with their degree and field of study. By virtue of their networks, they have more access to opportunities and job information.

**Scenario 3: Higher Social Status Background and Stronger Capacity Social Capital = Jobs via Social Capital (Degree Consistent and/or Inconsistent)**

The third scenario follows the pattern of college graduates from higher social status backgrounds. Students who enter college with stronger capacity social capital tend to socialize with others like themselves or in networks that are congruent with their status. As a result, their credentials are, for the most part, secondary because higher capacity social capital improves job search outcomes. Social capital affords these graduates the greatest advantages because higher capacity social capital permits graduates to find jobs that are both consistent and inconsistent with their credentials. Having networks that include professionals who are well-educated and well-connected allows graduates the opportunity to demonstrate their credentials in a variety of ways and in a range of contexts.

**Scenario 4: Higher Social Status Background and Stronger Capacity Social Capital = Jobs via Credentials (Degree Consistent and/or Inconsistent)**

Scenario four also follows the pattern of college graduates from higher social status backgrounds. These graduates rely on their credentials as the primary means by which they find jobs; however, their social status and stronger capacity social capital allows them to use their credentials and search for jobs that are both consistent and inconsistent with their degree.

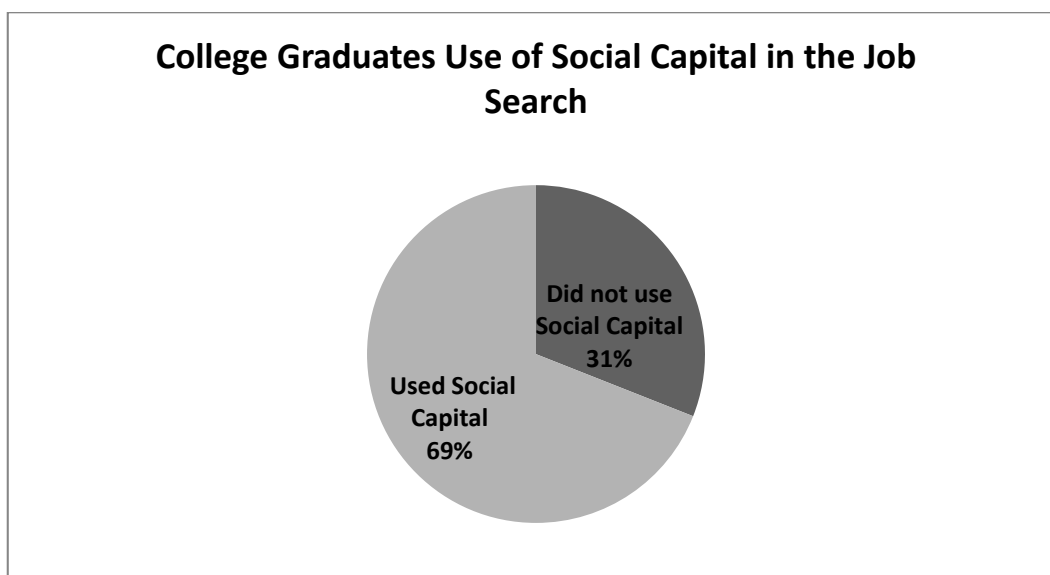
**4.1.3 Social Capital and the Job Search**

The next set of findings related to the model in Figure 2 are from a total of 48 interviews that focused on the role of educational credentials and social capital (networks) in the job search process for college graduates and how these roles vary by race and class. This study supports earlier research by Granovetter (1973, 1995) who found that while education was important for

job finding, networks were also important. As seen in Figure 2, 69% of graduates (both black and white) relied on a social network, in combination with their educational credential, to find a job. The rest of graduates did not. According to these alumni, 31%, the job search was conducted independently; applications were formal, and most relied on their credentials to guide the search. Several examples from graduates who relied only on their credentials are included below:

1. Black, female, alumna from an urban high school in Kansas City, Missouri, relied on the K-Force Staffing Agency to find a job. K-Force Staffing is a scientific staffing agency, and the graduate earned a degree in Organismal Biology. She found the agency on-line and submitted her C.V. She also interviewed with K-Force so they could better match her.
2. Black, female, alumna from an urban high school in Kansas City, Kansas. Involved in church activities, did well in high school, straight A's, but did not feel well-prepared for KU after first completing an Associate's Degree from Kansas City Kansas Community College. She earned a degree in Nursing and worked for a family practice doctor for many years. Her job search was formal. She found her first job in the newspaper. She interviewed with the doctor and office manager and was hired after all of her credentials and licenses were verified. She began working just a few weeks after graduating. She was happy to get a job close to her home, right out of college.

**Figure 2: Use of Social Capital in the Job Search**



Graduates who utilized contacts indicated that their social networks made finding a job easier; above and beyond the educational credential, knowing someone who could pass a resume on, provide a reference, or set up an interview, required less work on the applicant's part. By investing in social relationships, graduates relied on the well-connected to find opportunities and meet people in powerful positions (Lin, 2001).

To give one example, the participant interviewed below was a white male who attended a suburban high school in Kansas. This alumnus relied on social capital, specifically, family networks, to find his first job out of college. After graduation he was hired as a computer programmer for a healthcare company in Kansas City. This job was, for the most part, consistent with his degree in Business and Finance.

*Q: Tell me about your first job out of college. What was it? How did you get it?*

A: I got a job as a computer programmer at a company that deals with healthcare and information technology.

*Q: How did you first hear about this job?*

A: Well, my dad worked at the company formerly and his friend was the CEO. He called some people he knew to arrange an interview, and I got the job.

*Q: OK. Suppose that didn't happen and you had to get something on your own? Was there anyone you could have gotten help from? Friends from college? People you knew from other places?*

A: Sure. I know lots of people who could have helped me out.

*Q: How? I'd like you to imagine you are back in college getting ready to graduate. How would you go about searching for a job? Also, were there situations where information about jobs could have found their way to you? Perhaps while talking to a classmate, hanging out with a friend, or enjoying your time at a party? What do you think?*

A: I grew up in a nice neighborhood, and when I started looking for a job after graduation most of my friends and my parents' friends were more than willing to help. I really could have asked just about anyone.

Interviews from this study include a detailed narrative of the job search, the nature of the job (if the respondent actually had a job), the role of educational credentials in the process, and the use of social network ties. Despite how wide the social-institutional domain covered in any search,

the objective of the analysis was to determine the connections among all the pieces in a story leading up to the search process. Regardless of how far back the story stretched, all efforts related to a given job, as well as other potential job opportunities, are important for understanding the role of social capital in this process. It should be noted that in a small proportion of these cases, the participant's social capital played a limited role. In such instances, it was necessary to determine whether this was because the participant had indeed a limited degree of social capital, or because he or she did not need or choose to utilize existing network ties in the job search process.

The next example illustrates how some individuals may have stronger capacity social capital, but still not choose to utilize it. In the following example, the individual was currently employed and not engaged in the job search; however, a member from his social network presented him with an opportunity that led to a "valuable" contact. The alumnus was a white male who attended an urban high school in Kansas. He knew the initial contact from college, and although he was not searching for work at the time, the contact knew the alumnus majored in Mathematics and decided to introduce him to a potential employer. The meeting was unplanned and casual; however, the connection eventually led the alumnus to take a new job that was more consistent with his field of study.

*I met up with some friends at a bar, and one of the guys in the group who I knew from class introduced me to [name removed] who worked in marketing and analytics at [name removed]. We exchanged emails and numbers. Two weeks later I interviewed with [name removed] and was hired to work for the Director of Analytics at his company.*

The next quote is from a white female who also attended an urban high school in Kansas. She moved away after college, but upon her return she immediately sought out local contacts in the area whom she knew would be valuable in terms of job information. Her decision to contact a

former professor from college was intentional because she knew the professor would know about available opportunities.

*After moving back from Arizona, I contacted one of my former professors in the Religious Department. [Name removed] told me about an upcoming position with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. They were looking for a Director of Community Engagement, and she felt confident I was the right person for the job. I was a top student and I won a few awards when I was at KU, so I applied and they hired me. [Name removed] was the perfect reference for the position.*

As illustrated in the examples above, neither alumnus knew about the open and upcoming positions. Both alumni admitted that without their contacts they would have not known about the jobs or been hired. The possession of stronger capacity social capital, and status-incongruent networks, proved to be valuable resources for these alumni. Whether in social or academic settings, graduates who utilize social capital seem to find out about jobs even when they are not specifically searching.

By associating with others who are advantageously positioned in the larger social structure, alumni are able to benefit from new opportunities while making personal connections to experts, professionals, and others who are in positions of power. This type of social capital is considered stronger capacity social capital because these networks are characteristically large and expansive and consist of contacts from influential backgrounds who are acquaintances, personal friends, and family members, who are in a position to provide other members with information and opportunities (Cookson & Persell, 1985, 1987; Lareau, 2002, 2003; Stevens, 2007).



#### 4.1.4 Ways in Which Social Capital Makes the Job Search Process Easier

Drawing on interview data, Table 16 illustrates the ways in which social capital made the job search easier for college graduates who used their social capital in combination with their educational credentials.

**Table 16: Ways in Which Social Capital Makes the Job Search Process Easier**

	<b>Relied only on Credentials</b>	<b>Relied on Credentials and Social Capital</b>
<b>Average number of "formal" job applications</b>	7.90	3.50
<b>Average number of job offers</b>	2.90	1.40
<b>Utilized campus career services</b>	54%	28%
<b>Attended job fairs</b>	45%	25%
<b>Found a job in less than two months</b>	36%	46%

After each interview, every alumnus was placed into one of the two categories based on the story of their job search—graduates who either relied on credentials or relied on credentials and social capital. During the interviews alumni were specifically asked about the number of formal applications they made, as well as the number of job offers received. Although not every alumnus could recall exactly how many they applied to, they were at least able to give an estimate and this information was recorded. Based on interview responses, the average number of job offers was calculated by adding the total number of formal applications made, and then dividing that number by the number of participants who provided information. The same procedure was followed to determine the average number of job offers received by alumni engaged in the job search.

As indicated in Table 16, compared to graduates who relied solely on educational credentials (about eight applications were made on average), those with social capital did not

necessarily feel the need to invest the time and energy required for making more formal job applications. By virtue of their social contacts, they could engage in more informal searches that typically required fewer applications and less effort (about four formal applications made on average).

For those who rely mostly on credentials, more applications are required. As indicated by participants interviewed for this study, 54% of those who relied exclusively on their credential utilized career services to make contacts with employers and to collect job information. By contrast, only 28% of those who had social capital resources used career services to acquire additional information to aid them in their job search. Forty-five percent of graduates who relied solely on credentials were more inclined to attend job fairs in addition to using career services. In the interviews alumni discussed the importance of attending these events as a way to make contacts and meet employers—a common theme among those with weaker capacity social capital who need more opportunities to connect with employers and others in positions of power.

Individuals who relied on credentials applied for about eight jobs on average, while those who relied on social capital applied for about four jobs on average. Of the alumni who relied on their credentials to find jobs, 36% were employed just two months after graduation, but for those who relied on social capital, employment occurred for 46% of these graduates, indicating that social capital not only allows more individuals to find work, but for those who rely on contacts, jobs are found more quickly.

Additionally, individuals who rely on social capital, rely less on job fairs. Only 25% of those who utilized social contacts attended job fairs. Ultimately, for those who depend mostly on their credentials, more applications are required, but among graduates who use their

credentials, in combination with their social capital, fewer applications are required. The submission of fewer applications inevitably means fewer offers, but according to participants interviewed for this study, social contacts simply made it easier to find and get a job. The use of career services and attendance at job fairs was lower among this population because in many ways, those with stronger capacity social capital are “already connected to people who are in positions to hire.”

Time and money affect the search efforts of individuals looking for jobs, and the intensity of search also depends on whether the job seeker is currently employed or unemployed (Barron & Mellow, 1979; Bloeman, 2005). For those who have fewer resources, the “first” job out of college is typically the first full-time job a graduate takes that either requires or matches their educational credentials. For those with more resources, social capital jobs are found faster and searching requires less effort. Several examples of how social capital facilitates this process are found below. The first alumnus was a white male who attended an urban high school in Kansas. Simply by making a routine dental appointment, this alumnus found an internship in high school that led to a job in college, which eventually bridged the gap between college and work, making the transition smooth and easy. Ultimately, this graduate was able to use his social contacts and his high school and college experiences to find the job he really wanted:

*I actually got an internship at KU when I was still in high school. My orthodontist [name removed] told me about a friend of his who worked at Rock Chalk Video and he said, “You’re a smart kid, [name removed] I’ll put in a good word for you.” I think ultimately, I owe my job at 6 News to him because he was the one who put me in touch with [name removed] the guy who eventually became my mentor, and helped me get the job at 6 News.*

In the next example, a white male from a suburban high school in Kansas met a woman who offered him a job without any inquiry on his part. At the time, the alumnus was not looking for work because he was gainfully employed.

*I was working at [name removed], not really looking for a new job, but I ended up meeting the Assistant Principal from [name removed] a school in Topeka. [Name removed] told me there was a job opening in the fall for a Reading Specialist. She said if I wanted it, it was mine.*

Meeting at parties and introducing friends from college to other friends, not only expands an individual's network, but often leads to jobs. The following alumnus was a black female from a suburban high school in Nebraska. She was introduced to an individual who was able to hire her, and after their meeting she was essentially offered the job.

*I went to a party with some friends and was introduced to the General Manager of an amusement park. We really hit it off, so he asked me if I wanted to come in and apply. They were looking for someone to work in the accounting department. I was happy I met him, it was a great job; I stayed for several years.*

For those who relied only on their credentials, the job search was more labor intensive and time consuming. These graduates often relied heavily on career services and job fairs. And although they received more job offers, they also had to submit more formal applications. The following quote is from a black female who attended an urban high school in Kansas. When asked if she knew anyone who could help her find a job, or who may be in a position to "put in a good word" or "pass her name along," she said no, and explained that she assumed finding a job was her responsibility alone and that her degree would determine the search and outcome.

*I found my first job out of college in the newspaper. It was a very small ad requesting a licensed nurse to work in a private practice. I interviewed with the office manager, head nurse, and finally [name removed]. After all of my credentials and licenses were verified, I was hired. I did not think the pay was fair, but at the time, I was just happy to have a job.*

Another black female from an urban high school in Kansas made similar assumptions about the job search process and depending on herdsxx credentials to find work. She was a first-generation college student raised by her grandmother. When asked about contacts, she explained that she did not use anyone to find her job at a local medical laboratory.

*I moved back home after I graduated and looked for jobs for almost four months. I wanted to stay near home, but I thought if it took any longer, I would have to look outside of Kansas and Missouri. I have a degree in Organismal Biology so I applied to labs, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies. I was finally hired at a lab, I still work there. I deal with specimens and I assist with clinical trials.*

Other alumni, including a white male from an urban high school in Kansas, worked diligently to navigate the job market. According to this alumnus, job fairs and career services were necessary and important in terms of finding out which companies and organizations were hiring.

*I attended job fairs, I created a file with career services, and I utilized every resource I could in the School of Business. I used the job fairs to practice my interviewing skills even though I was not initially given any offers. I finally moved back home and got an entry-level position with a large insurance company working in claims department.*

#### **4.1.5 The Use of Social Capital in the Job Search Process by Race**

When it comes to occupational attainment, research in the sociology of education addresses the effects of educational performance and credentials on success in the labor market. Variation in credentials is considered particularly important in accounting for differences in occupational mobility and stratification among social groups. However, the effects of educational background on occupational attainment and the job search are likely to be contingent on social network ties, or social capital.

Basic insights from the sociology of organizations, occupations, and work suggest that while education is important in occupational attainment and job searching, networks can be just as important, if not more important, than credentials (Granovetter, 1995). Racial and class differences in occupational attainment persist for individuals with similar educational credentials (Bills, 2004). One explanation for these differences is variation in social networks and social connections. Well-educated members of disadvantaged groups may still fall behind in the occupational system because of limited network ties. The same network ties that members of

other, more advantaged groups may take for granted because of similar social status. Social capital—acquired, for instance, through family members (e.g., parents and siblings), high school and college peer groups, and residential neighborhood connections—affects not only the information available in the job search process, but by virtue of one’s social capital, these resources may also influence opportunities one has to demonstrate their educational credentials and skills to hiring managers and potential employers. If educational credentials prepare individuals for the transition from college to work, then networks may structure the interactions that occur between college graduates and employers.

The breakdown of social capital by race is shown in Table 17. Seventy-eight percent of whites relied on social network ties to find jobs. When asked about their networks specifically, many whites explained that they knew exactly who they planned to ask about jobs. Additionally, they acknowledged other network ties that could be utilized if a particular job did not work out. The other 22% of whites utilized their credentials in the job search.

**Table 17: The Use of Social Capital by Race**

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Blacks</b>
<b>Social Capital</b>	78%	50%
<b>No Social Capital</b>	22%	50%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%

In regards to attending college, white alumni often talked about how college was an expectation in their family and the obvious next step. But when asked about the intensity with which they job searched, they seemed less worried than their black peers about finding a job immediately after college. If whites enter college with higher social status, then they may value their social capital above their college credential (or human capital) because they acknowledge

that finding a job is more about who you know, not necessarily what you know, and this knowledge makes the job search feel less intense.

For blacks, it appears that in many cases the opposite is true. Blacks who enter college with lower social status may lack the social capital and network ties needed to make the job search easier. Without stronger capacity social capital, these individuals may need to rely more heavily on their credentials because what you know may be more important than who you know if your social capital has a weaker capacity.

Perhaps what is even more significant than the finding that whites utilize social capital more than blacks in the job search, is the finding that indicates that when blacks *do* utilize social capital, it is social capital they developed in college, not prior to. These networks are largely status-incongruent, consisting of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In many instances, the shared experience of the higher educational context allowed college students to develop new network ties that were status-incongruent. When these types of networks were utilized, 50% of blacks found jobs by way of their social capital.

Questions regarding decisions to attend college were also addressed in this study. White alumni from private and suburban high schools indicated that the decision to attend college and which major to choose was based largely on the fact that their parents and other family members were college educated. Black alumni and white alumni from urban high schools indicated that the decision to attend college was mostly a decision of practicality, one that would eventually allow them to exchange their college degree for work.

Those from higher social status backgrounds tended to have, and use, more social capital than those from lower social status backgrounds because stronger capacity social capital allows alumni to “cash-in” their credentials faster, while weaker capacity social capital limits a person’s

access to others with power, status, and prestige (Lareau, 2002, 2003; MacLeod, 1995). Based on findings from this study, whites from higher social status backgrounds typically enjoy the benefits of social capital to a greater extent than blacks.

Whites interviewed for this study, in addition to cashing in their credentials faster, indicated that they and their families were well-connected and that these connections often made finding jobs easier. To illustrate, the first alumnus quoted below was a white male who attended a private high school in Kansas. His parents were both college educated and working professionals. He not only discussed the value of social capital in the job search, he also made reference to the cultural capital imparted on him by his family and school:

*I went to a college prep high school, everyone was white, middle and upper class, and competitive. My friends were all from successful, wealthy, and professional families. I think being around people like that your whole life makes it easier to talk to people—you know how to dress, what to say, how to act, that kind of stuff. It makes interviewing really easy.*

In the next example, another male alumnus, from a suburban high school, referred to his informal application and interview process. As a result of his social capital, he simply attended the job interview as a “formality.”

*The guy who interviewed me knew me personally, so it wasn't much of an interview. He knew my dad and was also from KU so we talked about college, sports, that kind of stuff. I think the interview was just more of a formality.*

Social capital led other alumni to jobs even when they were not looking. In the following example, a white female from a suburban high school talked about how she found a job through a social contact doing work that was unrelated to her field of study in college.

*I was friendly with the principal where my children attended school. I was not working at the time, nor was I looking to work, but they needed a Math teacher. I actually majored in Latin American Studies at KU, but I figured that was probably qualification enough to teach kids.*



Meeting people and developing personal relationships, or strong ties (Granovetter, 1973), appears to be the best way to gather job information. The next alumnus was a white female who attended a suburban high school in Kansas. Her father was a university professor and she discussed the importance of making connections.

*I am a big believer in networking. Personal relationships will always yield better results than impersonal relationships. It's the personal ties that will always prove beneficial when it's time to find a good job.*

The next excerpt is from a white male who attended a suburban high school in Kansas. He did not believe a person should be limited by their credential, or specific field of study; however, the freedom to search broadly also indicates that a person knows which other fields to search and which people to talk to.

*Just because you major in something doesn't limit you to search for that career within that small range. If you talk to people, you can find out about jobs you might not have even considered.*

Tinto (1981) found that those from higher social status backgrounds thrive on social capital in the occupational marketplace and are successful despite the colleges they attend, not because of them. This research is consistent with findings from this study, because whites with higher social status and stronger capacity social capital relied mostly on their networks to find jobs. According to Tinto, college adds measurably to the early professional careers of individuals from lower social status origins. In this study, 50% of blacks relied solely on their credentials to find work. The other 50% of blacks in this study, from lower status social backgrounds, not only utilized their credentials to find jobs, they also accessed status-incongruent networks developed in college to make connections, meet employers, and find jobs.

#### 4.1.6 The Sources of Social Capital by Race

Findings from this study indicate that the sources of social capital are also significant because even when credentials are equal, race and class differences continue to affect the job search. In Table 18, social capital sources are organized into three categories—high school, family, and college, according to data collected from interviews with 48 alumni.

**Table 18: The Sources of Social Capital by Race**

	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Whites</b>
<b>High School Networks</b>	6%	12%
<b>Family Networks</b>	6%	53%
<b>College Networks</b>	38%	13%
<b>Credentials Only</b>	50%	22%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%

As seen in Table 18, 53% of whites used parents and parents' contacts to find jobs, while another 25% of white alumni relied on other forms of social capital developed in either high school, 12%, or in college, 13%. These networks consisted of friends made in high school or college, teachers, professors, fellow athletes, coaches, roommates, friends of friends, and other acquaintances. Consistent with research by Mouw and Entwisle (2006), the influence of other friendships also affects network development because friendships form in a variety of social settings where other factors, including residential location, social class, race, age, gender, and attitude, play a significant role. For this reason, race-based friendships and network practices that begin in elementary, middle, and high school may carry over into college and later into the labor market.

As indicated in Table 18, the use of social capital by whites is consistent with the finding that status congruent networks are most beneficial for whites when they choose to access and

utilize their “stronger social ties” or “family networks” to find jobs. Blacks and whites from lower social status backgrounds who do not develop new networks that are status-incongruent will have to rely on their credentials more heavily. In this study, 50% of blacks who did not have access to or utilize social capital relied instead on their credentials alone. Similarly, 22% of whites relied on credentials, either because they did not have strong social capital, or they did not choose to use the social capital and networks they possessed to find jobs. Twelve and a half percent of these graduates were from urban high schools, while only 9.5% were from suburban or private high schools. Consistent with other whites from suburban and private high schools, the access to social capital and the use of social network ties depends largely on social status. Whites from disadvantaged backgrounds who typically have low capacity social capital than those from more advantaged backgrounds tend to rely on their credentials more often. But when asked about the potential for using a contact, white participants from every social background admitted that they had contacts they “could have used”; however, some did not believe it was necessary for their search.

For the purposes of organizing social capital into networks, high school networks include both casual and intimate friendships and relationships, as well as academic connections or relationships built during school with teachers and other staff. Athletic connections made between athletes, coaches, and teams were also included with high school networks.

Family networks required their own category because these ties extend beyond the educational context. College networks were categorized in much the same way as high school networks and include casual and intimate friendships or relationships. Academic networks developed in college refer to those relationships built during a program of study with professors and other instructors, and athletic networks are defined by the connections students make with

other athletes, coaches, and teams. College networks include one more category, Greek networks, or groups of students who join either a fraternity or sorority where additional social capital is developed. Given the significant amount of research that exists on Greek organizations and how they function as a tool designed for social promotion and social networking, one unexpected finding from this study is that even when college graduates were members of these organizations, they seldom, if ever, referred to these contacts for job information. Although alumni from this study did not rely on members from Greek organizations, they indicated that if necessary, other members could most certainly be assets in the job market.

Based on data collected from interviews, white alumni spoke frequently about their reliance on family networks, while blacks tended to rely on professors and other students, utilizing new network ties cultivated in college. These types of networks, when developed by black students with lower social status, qualify as status-incongruent networks because network members are from higher social status backgrounds. Similarly, when white students from lower social status backgrounds develop networks with others from higher social status backgrounds, these networks also qualify as status-incongruent because status, for the purposes of this study, is mostly determined by class.

To give another example, status-congruent networks are networks created and developed in various social contexts, including college, by individuals from similar backgrounds. For instance, black and white students from affluent backgrounds who associate with other black and white students from affluent backgrounds are socializing in networks that are considered status-congruent. The same parameters can also be applied to black and white students from lower social status backgrounds who continue to socialize with others from similar backgrounds; these networks are considered status-congruent, regardless of race.

In either case, college students tend to thrive on social capital developed in college, which is often useful when looking for jobs. The findings in this study support earlier research by Sacerdote (2001) who found that college students depend on social network ties developed in the higher educational context to look for jobs. College students solicit help from professors, alumni, career services, fraternities, and sororities—or networks that, according to Sacerdote, all lead to higher paying jobs. According to this study, 38% of blacks relied on a college network to find a job. When asked specifically whom they contacted from college, these students contacted professors, alumni, and other students to find out about jobs and request recommendations and referrals. Alumni indicated that college professors were instrumental in making them privy to job information, as well as helping them secure employment. College professors assisted alumni in many capacities, including helping former students with referrals, job information, connections, and opportunities. Many alumni were pleased with the help and assistance various professors offered in terms of guidance and support.

Although a large majority of black alumni were able to draw on college networks, these networks were largely outside of their immediate social circles. There were a small percentage of blacks who relied on pre-college social capital or family and high school networks to find jobs. Twelve percent of graduates from this population relied on either a high school or family network. Of these, only one alumnus was able to use a family member directly. Her father was a physician at a local hospital, and she requested he set up an interview for her with the director of the lab. The director was a close friend of the family's and the interview resulted in a job, although it should also be noted that the applicant had a background in biology. The majority of the participants from this population, however, made no reference to family members being in any position to provide information about jobs or opportunities. Likewise, graduates seldom

turned to friends or neighbors, and regardless of their social background, the use of family and other types of networks was virtually non-existent among blacks; they depended mostly on their educational credentials. In cases where they did not, the networks used were newly formed college networks that were largely status-incongruent.

Fifty percent of black alumni interviewed for this study relied on their credentials to find work. In most cases, participants indicated that their credentials were the “obvious” route to securing employment. When asked about how they found their first job out of college, they typically attributed it to the process of formal searches: applications, online searches, job fairs, interviews, and the matching of their skills and credential to a particular job. For those who did not take advantage of college as a new and potentially valuable social-institutional domain, the development and utilization of networks was irrelevant. College for these students served one purpose: *securing an educational credential*. In several interviews with black alumni, the college experience was never about meeting people who would add to their social capital. Friends were made and relationships were developed, but not for the purposes of making connections that would lead to jobs. Some alumni even admitted that they could not think of anyone they could have turned to find out about jobs.

The use of social capital among college graduates encompasses a wide variety of networks including family, high school, and college networks. These bonds require taking on many roles when members are engaged together in social settings. For some blacks this bond proves to be challenging because it requires maintaining friendships and connections with white “brothers and sisters” while also maintaining relationships with the “brothers and sisters” of their own race (Hughey, 2010). The inevitable “code-switching” requires individuals maintain

relationships with status-congruent networks, while also building and developing new relationships with status-incongruent networks.

When comparing family and high school networks with college networks, there is a significant shift in the development and utilization of social capital among blacks who use college as a context where they can socialize with others and create status-incongruent networks. Despite the fact that family and high school networks provide little in terms of pre-college social capital and occupational opportunities for blacks, the new social capital developed in college allows graduates the occasion to use their college contacts. In contrast, socialization among whites is typically confined to those with others who possessed status-congruent networks. As mentioned earlier, most whites enter college with larger networks that are more diverse and that offer connections in spite of the individuals social background or class. Blacks, on the other hand, enter college with lower social capital and often times tend to see college as a chance to accumulate more social capital that will expand their networks and occupational opportunities. Black alumni in this study who deviated from status-congruent networks benefited from the cultivation of ties developed in college, closing some of the gap between blacks and whites and lower and higher social status groups once they entered the labor market.

*Q: What was your major in college?*

A: Art History.

*Q: Why did you choose that major?*

A: I loved taking classes and I studied abroad my junior year in Europe. KU finally sent me a letter saying I had to declare a major, so I chose Art History because I had the most hours towards that degree.

*Q: Did you find a job or work that allowed you to use your degree?*

A: No, not really, I actually work in the Classics Department at KU.

*Q: How did that happen?*

A: My friend. We lived together in the dorm and she told me I should get a job on campus, where she was working.

*Q: Was she working for the Classics Department?*

A: Yes, and I took a lot of classes in that department and we both figured I could use some of our professors as referrals.

*Q: Did you?*

A: Yes, in fact, one of my professors was on the interview panel, and he remembered me well. I told him after the first class I took with him how much I enjoyed it. They hired me as the secretary.

Regardless of social background, alumni who cultivated new network ties with others who were “status-incongruent,” afforded themselves an advantage in the labor market. Specifically, the new network ties—disadvantaged students tied to advantaged actors not from their typical stratum—became instrumental in gaining access to job information and opportunities.

For whites, the use of family networks was most prevalent among those from middle and upper-class backgrounds. Especially in the case of those whites who attended private high schools, family members were an integral resource for facilitating occupational opportunities and outcomes. A critically important point to note, however, is that whites, regardless of social class or social background, relied almost exclusively on family networks when utilizing social capital. For whites, families in general seem to possess stronger capacity social capital in terms of knowing and being related to people who are in a position to pass along job opportunities and information.

One final point to note about the sources of social capital by race is the amount of social capital each possesses prior to entering college. From this study, it appears that blacks have limited social capital prior to entering college, when compared to whites. According to the alumni interviewed for this study, only 12% of blacks had any social capital to rely on, from either their high school or family networks, after college. Whites, on the other hand, relied much more heavily on social network ties developed before college; 65% of whites accessed social capital from either their high school or family networks to find jobs after college. These findings further indicate that the development of relationships and networks in college is significantly less important for whites, in terms of the job search, because their pre-college social capital is much



stronger. In many cases the status-congruent networks developed by whites before college are just as important as the status in-congruent networks developed by blacks during college. In either case, networks are still critically important to the job search process, regardless of race.

In regards to the relative value of a person's social capital, many whites indicated that although college was an expectation of themselves and their families, finding a job after college was not a "serious concern." Few, if any, seem worried at all that they would find work or ever be unemployed for an extended amount of time. Given their "status" and the value of their social network ties, going to college and finding a job was a "rite of passage." These graduates seemed to find job opportunities with little effort or time spent searching; many had jobs lined up before graduation, and some had several job offers from which they could choose. In instances where the search extended into the summer, alumni simply asked their parents for assistance, and most families willingly offered support and help that led to a job. Many college graduates entering the work world depend on parents to assist them with the transition (Farner & Brown, 2008). In this study, the use of family networks remained the most important social capital resource used by whites.

When asked about the urgency of finding a job, one alumnus discussed his level of commitment to the job search. This individual was a white male who attended a private high school in Colorado. A client of his father's, who also knew their family personally, inquired about the alumnus and his plans after college. The client suggested to the alumnus's father that he contact the bank where he was the president.

*Q: So you graduated in May. How long did you search before you found your first job?*

*A: I graduated in May and I was working in June.*

*Q: What was your first job?*

*A: I worked as a Loan Assistant at a bank in Colorado.*

*Q: How did you find out about the job? Can you tell me about the application process?*

*A: My dad is an attorney and one of his clients told him about the job. He was the*

President of the bank, so the application process was pretty straight-forward.

*Q: Did you interview?*

A: Yeah, I filled out an application on-line and sent in my resume. I was called in to interview with the Senior Vice-President, but we just talked, hung out, he showed me around the place and explained what I would do.

*Q: So was this your ideal job? Your dream job?*

A: Not exactly, although I did major in Finance. I can't say I was exactly committed to searching for jobs, and I honestly thought it was going to be a lot harder to find one.

For whites, credentials do not appear to be as important as social contacts. Given that the family is the primary channel for forming social capital (Broh, 2002), white alumni from every social background utilize their families to some extent in the job search. Even when network members are not as powerfully positioned, white alumni still manage to utilize their family networks and ties to find jobs. To give an example, one white alumnus took a job at the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities where his father worked, while another white alumnus found out about a job with a truck driving company, where her father was employed. Neither of the above-mentioned alumni came from homes with college educated parents, but their social capital and social status still provided them with important opportunities via their family networks.

#### **4.1.7 Status Congruency in Networks by Race**

Findings presented here provide support for the argument that even when individuals have similar educational credentials the utility of those credentials varies by social capital, and because social capital varies by race and class, status differences account for much of the differentiation in job search patterns and outcomes. Table 19 highlights status congruency in networks by race for those who relied on social capital to find a job.

**Table 19: Status Congruency in Networks by Race**

	Blacks	Whites
<b>Jobs Found Using Status Congruent Networks</b>	<b>12.5 %</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Jobs Found Using Status Incongruent Networks</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>
Jobs Found Using a Credential Only	56.2%	31.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Among whites who used networks, 56% found jobs using status-congruent networks, or networks of people from similar social backgrounds. Only 12.5% of whites found jobs using networks that were incongruent with their social status. The remaining 31.5% of whites relied on their credentials to find a job.

For whites, making connections with others from lower status groups does not seem to be as beneficial as staying with and connecting to others who are of similar status, with stronger capacity social capital. For blacks with lower social status, using networks that are incongruent or relying on people with higher social status is more beneficial in the job search. Thirty-one percent of blacks who relied on social capital to find a job utilized a status-incongruent network. According to the data from this study, blacks are able to utilize social capital more effectively in the job search when they interact with members from status incongruent networks. Whites, on the other hand, are able to utilize social capital more effectively in the job search when they do the opposite, or, when they interact with members from status-congruent networks.

Mollica, Gray, and Trevino's (2003) study supports these findings in terms of racial homophily—or same-race friendship ties. In large organizational contexts, including college

degree programs, racial homophily is persistent among students and their social network ties because racial minorities typically have a smaller selection of same-race ties with which to socialize, causing their networks to be largely homogenous. Such network homophily is consistent with the classical notion that most individuals relate to other members of their primary reference group (Merton, 1968). The longitudinal study conducted by Mollica et al. (2003) revealed that African-Americans have a tendency to seek out homophilous friendships and networks, and over an extended period of time, little change was observed in the structure of these racially-based networks. When asked about high school and college friendships, alumni interviewed for this study indicated that for the most part, their friendships are homophilous. Whether intentional or not, the findings from this study point to the benefits of homophilous friendships for whites who tend to have stronger capacity social capital and more status-congruent networks.

Regardless of any tendency to network with others who are from similar and/or different backgrounds, the higher educational context naturally lends itself to the exchanging of job information between people, irrespective of any particular relationship or one's individual race or class. As a "space," the college environment is a unique place where individuals from every social status interact. However, in order for the college context to function in a way that benefits an individual's development of social capital, the individual must not only be able to access available resources, he or she must also be able to discern between more and less valuable network ties (Lin, 2001).

From the perspective of those from private institutions, a public institution may not possess the same stronger capacity social capital. To give an example, one male student who attended a private high school at Kent in Colorado shared his academic talents. He said he was

always very advanced, especially in math. He received scholarships from KU, but explained that he was often bored in classes.

*When they were reading off the colleges the senior class students would attend there was a gasp in the audience because everyone at Kent saw KU as a lesser achievement since so many of the students went onto Ivy League. But, I was very happy I went to KU. There were tremendous professors at KU, and I made great friends.*

Accumulating social capital not only requires the accurate assessment of a network, but also the time to circulate in a variety of settings where social connections are made and relationships are nurtured. To illustrate, one white alumnus who utilized a status-congruent network found a job teaching at his former suburban high school after his mother ran into his former swimming coach. Although this relationship was not developed in college, the network was still accessible and useful after college, even though it is categorically a high school network. This type of network is the result of “stronger social capital” because the alumnus was able to utilize it after college. Family and high school networks in this instance are intertwined because the mother of the job seeker facilitated the process. She told the swimming coach her son was looking for a job and asked if he should stop in for a visit. The visit resulted in a job.

*I was thrilled to work for such a great district. I loved my high school as a student, and as a teacher, I was able to coach. Moving back home with my parents gave me the opportunity to work and save money for a house.*

In the second example, a status-incongruent connection resulted in a job. A black, male alumnus from an urban high school roomed with a white student who came from a private high school in Chicago. The black alumnus was a first-generation college student and admitted that he knew his new roommate “came from money.” This connection not only resulted in a close friendship, but eventually, a job.

*I was not able to get into the School of Journalism, so I decided to major in Women’s Studies. I wanted to write professionally but when that didn’t happen I finally decided to take my friend up on his offer to work in his gallery in New York.*

### 4.1.8 Degree and Job Consistency

In this study, credentials are defined according to acquisition and use. Table 20 reports on an unexpected yet important finding: occupation and college degrees are often inconsistent for those from advantaged backgrounds with significant social capital. The table includes information on degree and job consistency from 100% of the participants interviewed for this study.

**Table 20: Degree and Job Consistency**

	Credentials Only	Credentials and Social Capital
<b>Degree Consistent</b>	23%	25%
<b>Degree Inconsistent</b>	8%	44%

In other words, many of the jobs that students found through social network ties were inconsistent with their field of study or college major. Although there is not an exact job specified for each major, in general, certain degrees cover certain fields. To clarify, participants were asked during the interview to explain their job duties and responsibilities. Additionally, they were asked whether or not they used their college degree at work, and if they believed they were hired for their particular position based on the degree they earned. For example, an individual with an education degree who works in a school, for a school district, or for an organization that serves students, is considered to be a person working at a job that is “consistent with their degree.”

Evidence from this study that supports earlier research regarding the problems associated with inequities that the Credentialist approach accounts for, including credential value and credential inflation, saturation of the job market with credentials, credentials and signaling, “sheepskin effects” caused by credentials, credentials and social discrimination, employer bias,

and employer discrimination. Many college degrees are broad and cover a variety of fields, so only the very obvious inconsistencies were categorized as such. If an alumnus had, for example, a degree in psychology, but he or she worked at a bank, then this degree would be considered “inconsistent.” For the purposes of this study, unless the alumnus specifically discussed how the degree was used in their current position, these types of jobs and degrees were categorized as inconsistent. An important point to note, however, is that several alumni specifically mentioned that the completion of a college degree is generally considered “qualification enough” for being a suitable candidate for hire.

Employers often hire applicants with a college degree or credential because the credential signals a certain level of skill and competency (Bills, 2003). To recall, two previously mentioned alumni who found work at a utility and truck driving company were working at jobs that were relatively inconsistent with their college major. The former studied Business and Marketing, and worked on the utility trucks overseeing repairs. The latter earned a degree in Accounting and Business Administration and worked as a dispatcher for a truck driving company.

For whites and the middle and upper class, educational credentials are likely secondary to social network ties. The possession of social capital and the access some individuals have to networks inherently changes the meaning of one’s educational background. For affluent individuals, education can at times be nothing more than a credential, such that the merit and skills it implies are not as important. Individuals from higher social status groups have higher capacity social networks; to illustrate:

*One male alumnus from a private high school admitted that he did not study in college. He was a Fiji and he commented on the success of his closest friends. They are all very successful. They all are either lawyers, doctors, or they have Master’s degrees. His three*

*closest friends are in Denver, one is a lawyer, another friend is an attorney in Dallas, a third is a CPA in Kansas City.*

But for those who are less affluent, a credential is more important because it functions not only as an indicator of educational competency, but also as a substantive signal for merit and skill. According to the alumni interviewed 23% of graduates that relied on their credentials worked in jobs that were consistent with their education. Only 8.3% of graduates who relied on their credentials worked in jobs that were inconsistent with their field of study. Also, 43.7% of these alumni not only worked in jobs that did not match their degree, they also found these jobs through social contacts. The remaining 25% of graduates who found jobs using their social capital worked in fields and industries that were consistent with their background. To illustrate:

*Q: What did you study in college?*

A: Education.

*Q: What do you do currently?*

A: I teach high school History and I also coach the swim team.

*Q: What did you major in?*

A: Architecture.

*Q: Where do you work?*

A: I am a Project Manager at Performance Contracting?

*Q: Which degree did you earn from KU?*

A: I have a degree Electrical Engineering.

*Q: Do you currently use your degree at work?*

A: Yes, I am a multi-discipline engineer for L3 Communications.

In addition to these unexpected findings, the interviews revealed another important finding about the academic experience at KU. According to the interviews, the academic experience varies considerably by race and class. White students from suburban and private schools explained that transitioning from high school to college was very manageable, if not easy. Alumni talked about how well-prepared they were for college by their high schools. To



illustrate, the three excerpts below are from alumni who attended private and suburban high schools:

*I went through Calculus I. I had it 8:00, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I took the first exam and got 150%, because I had already taken Calculus in High School. I could have tested out but my thinking was, look, I'm going to have one semester where I'm probably going to party a little bit harder than I normally would. So then why not have a course that I'm gonna get an A in. The professor was really cool. He was like you know you don't even need to be here. But I said yeah, I'm going through pledgship can I come to your class to sleep and so I would literally go to class and sleep."*

*KU was easy, in fact, it was easier than high school. I went to a private high school, college prep, and the teachers were much harder on us there than they ever were at KU. I suppose they had to be though, after all, my high school was considerably more expensive than KU.*

*Classes at KU were so large, it was easy to get by without doing too much and still get a good grade. My high school was so competitive, way more competitive than KU, but that is probably because of the size. Everyone knew where everyone stood in high school in terms of ranking, and parents and teachers exerted lots of pressure, they expected us to do well.*

The academic experience for blacks, especially from urban schools, was considerably different. In many cases, black alumni were the first in their families to attend college, and among their friends, they were also often part of the minority. In addition to struggling academically, these students often had to work part-time jobs to help support themselves. The two excerpts below are from alumni who attended urban high schools in Kansas City. To illustrate:

*I struggled a lot at KU. My first semester was so difficult. My advisor signed me up for all of these science courses and I ended up dropping one and as for the others, well, I didn't do so good.*

*I met one other black girl in the five years I was at KU. There aren't any black females in the Sciences, but a lot of the other girls invited me to their study groups, which I appreciated. I went, but I still struggled. It actually wasn't until I received a letter from IMSD-The Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity, that things finally improved. I think if I didn't get that letter I probably would have dropped out, my GPA was so low! They offered free tutoring and they even helped me get a job on campus.*

### 4.1.9 Proportion of Degree Consistency and Network Use by Race

As reported in Table 21, blacks are more successful in the job search when they develop and rely on social network ties that are incongruent with their social status. In Table 21 the proportion of degree consistency and network use by race indicates that 75% of blacks who relied on social capital to find jobs found jobs through status-incongruent networks. As a result of these incongruent networks, 50% of black college graduates found jobs in fields unrelated to their majors. Because of their social capital they were able to expand their job search and options by utilizing new networks. Not only did they search for jobs that were consistent with their degree, but also they were able to utilize social contacts that allowed them to also search for jobs that were inconsistent with their degree.

**Table 21: Proportion of Degree Consistency and Network Use by Race**

	Blacks (8 out of 16)	Whites (24 out of 32)
<b>Jobs Found Using Status Congruent Networks</b>	25% (2 alumni)	<b>Of the 83% (20 alumni)</b> 35% found jobs consistent with their degree 65% found jobs inconsistent with their degree
<b>Jobs Found Using Status Incongruent Networks</b>	<b>Of the 75% (6 alumni)</b> 50% found degree consistent jobs 50% found degree inconsistent jobs	17% (4 alumni)

When blacks rely on status-congruent networks, the job-finding process is more challenging. According to Table 21, only 25% of blacks found jobs using status-congruent networks.

For whites, social network ties are the most common way to find jobs. Individuals from advantaged backgrounds tend to mingle and socialize with others from similar backgrounds, and

for this reason, 83% of whites interviewed in this study found jobs through social contacts. Individuals who cultivate new networks are often able to access and use social capital in unique ways. When individuals from lower social status backgrounds utilize status incongruent networks, they often expand their opportunities and find work in fields, industries, and organizations that may or may not be related to their field of study.

For whites, degree and job consistency occurs less often. By virtue of their social capital, 65% of whites work in jobs that are inconsistent with their degree. Knowing people who are well positioned and influential allows many whites to use their credentials in more unique ways. In this study, only 35% of whites work in jobs that are consistent with their degree.

If social capital allows some individuals to demonstrate their credentials in unique ways, then inconsistencies may occur more frequently between college degree and job if contacts allow graduates to apply for and accept positions unrelated to their field of study. If the benefit of educational credentials in the job search is in part determined by social network ties, then variation in the benefit of credentials among status groups can also be explained in reference to differences in social capital. Race and class play an important role in this regard. Given the degree of stratification by race and class, many individuals are likely to possess and cultivate status-congruent network ties: advantaged students tie to other advantaged actors in their stratum, and disadvantaged actors tie to other disadvantaged actors (Mollica et al., 2003), thus affecting job search and outcomes.

## Chapter Five

### 5.1 Discussion and Conclusion

#### 5.1.1 Overview

Credentialists link education to occupational attainment in a system that rewards human capital with economic capital. Across the country, universities award degrees and graduate students with formal credentials intended to be exchanged for work in the labor market. The successful transition from college to work is considered by many to be the greatest indicator of higher education outcomes, yet graduates continue to have different experiences in the labor market. As findings from this study indicate, college graduates from lower social status backgrounds face unique challenges in the job search because the utility of educational credentials depends not on college degrees, but on the use of social capital.

In order to sufficiently prepare students for this transition, universities must focus on the development of human capital *and* social capital. By listening to how college graduates search for jobs, university leaders can gain a more accurate understanding of the role of social capital in this process and create policies and programs that will support the development of networks across social status backgrounds. Working together, employers and universities can facilitate a fair and successful exchange of human capital in the job market and positively impact the higher education experience of all college students.

The purpose of this research was to study the job search patterns of college graduates and the role of social capital in this process. Drawing on two major theories, credentialism (college degrees) and social capital (individual and group networks), and from research from Granovetter, (1973, 1974, 1995), this study includes data from 48 interviews conducted with alumni from one

university. Data was collected from each participant about the job search and the role of social network ties in this process.

In the analysis, three major categories of networks were identified: high school networks, family networks, and college networks. These networks consist of family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, professors, coaches, and others. From the analysis it became apparent that the use of social capital varied by race and class. Alumni from lower social status backgrounds relied on their credentials to find jobs, while those from higher social status backgrounds depended on networks with multiple resources to gain access to information and job opportunities.

To answer the research question, how college graduates search for jobs, 48 alumni were interviewed about their family background, academic and social experiences, decisions to attend college, and future career plans. These questions were designed to gather information about the job search and the development of social capital in a variety of contexts.

Despite assumptions that college graduates compete in a fair market, information and opportunities are largely determined by social status (Tilly et al., 2001). Employers can treat the “information source” of a job candidate as an important signal for the merits and talents of the candidate (Reskin, 2001). As a result, college graduates from lower status social backgrounds with access to weaker capacity social capital may not have the same opportunities to demonstrate their credentials.

Based on information gathered through interviews, the development of social capital is not always deliberate. In some cases, new friends provided important information about jobs. In other instances alumni intentionally sought out new network ties to help with the job search. In

either case, social capital was instrumental—allowing job applicants the opportunity to utilize their educational credentials, impress employers, and eventually get jobs.

Findings from this study revealed that college graduates with higher social status often get ahead because higher capacity social capital facilitates the exchange of information that leads to opportunities and jobs in unrelated fields and industries.

### **5.1.2 Discussion of Research Implications for Sociology of Education**

In sociology of education, social capital is typically construed as parental and community involvement that results in improved academic performance (for a review, see Dika & Singh, 2002). As a social resource, it facilitates access to elite secondary and postsecondary institutions that help reproduce status distinctions (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Stevens, 2007). Underlying both perspectives is the view of social capital as a key factor in the acquisition of valuable educational credentials. As an extension to this, social capital can also be viewed as a factor that influences how educational credentials are utilized in the job market. Without the right connections, job candidates may fail to take full advantage of their formal credentials. Therefore, even when the gap in educational credentials of status groups is narrowed, superior status groups with better social connections may continue to have an edge in utilizing their credentials in the job market.

College students acquire social capital from multiple sources and often depend on these ties for their strategic utility. Parents' ties to various actors and acquaintances in their social environment are central in this regard (Bourdieu, 1986). Family members and friends of family members constitute “strong” network ties that are able to provide information and opportunities after graduation (Burt, 1980; Granovetter, 1973). Overlapping with family are the network ties

acquired through friends and acquaintances in one's neighborhood, local school, and broader residential area (Coleman, 1988). Members of such peer groups—and their acquaintances in other contexts (e.g., their friends, relatives, and contacts elsewhere)—are often instrumental in the exchange of information. These connections often constitute “weak” network ties, but they can also be strong ties, as some members of peer groups are considered “close” friends.

Considerable variation is common in terms of “pre-college” social capital, but the college context provides new opportunities to extend one's network and connections. Networks are formed with classmates, professors, and roommates, as well as through sports, recreational and extracurricular activities, Greek organizations, volunteering, and other campus activities. The college context provides students with a range of opportunities to interact and connect with others across social classes (Chang, Denson, & Saenz, 2006; Tinto, 1975, 1993). As students approach graduation, race- and class-based social bonds either lead to or prevent individuals from accessing job opportunities (Falcon & Melendez, 2001). Talking with people about jobs is one way to gather information about potential opportunities. Knowing who to talk to is also helpful, but speaking to people who are already employed, in positions of power, or in a desired or related field, is the best way to acquire information about jobs and opportunities.

These findings are important for sociology of education because the effects of race and class on educational background and occupational attainment are structured by social capital differences. Colleges provide students with human capital, but closing educational achievement gaps between status groups may not be sufficient in terms of improving equality of life chances. In order for the competition to be fair, the development of social capital is also necessary. Theoretically, these findings are important because the effects of educational background on occupational attainment need to be considered in the context of social capital, with a focus on

race and class differences. These findings have two important implications for college graduates:

1. The utility of a college degree in the job search will vary by the social status of actors in one's total network (family, high school, neighborhood, college, and other ties).
2. College graduates from lower status social backgrounds may benefit considerably from cultivation of "status-incongruent" networks in college.

To date, these issues have not been sufficiently addressed in sociology of education or higher education research.

### **5.1.3 Discussion of Research Implications for Higher Education**

College degrees are widely accepted as a precondition to a successful career. In much of the research pertaining to college graduates, "underemployment" is neglected. College graduates invest in education with the hopes of exchanging their credential for financial rewards (Feldman & Turnley, 1995), but many graduates are unable to find jobs that require and utilize their college degree.

Despite the fact that the number of highly-skilled jobs has increased (Feldman & Turnley, 1995), college graduates still face challenges in terms of demonstrating their educational credentials to employers. Post-graduation outcomes are affected by social status and students' attitudes towards jobs and careers. These factors determine the intensity and effort of the job search, the level of confidence employers perceive, and the types of jobs an applicant will apply for (Ryan, 2001). In addition, social status and attitudes affect each graduate's ability to connect with employers in meaningful ways. In another sense, social capital improves job prospects because employers seek applicants with emotional intelligence and academic strength (Castro,



2003). Social capital aids this process for those from advantaged backgrounds. Stress, fear, and uncertainty explain one aspect of variation in occupational outcomes when comparing college to work transitions. Yazedijan (2010) found that these factors interfere for those who lack skills to deal with the changing atmosphere. For these reasons, it is important that colleges take a very deliberate and close look at why students do not mingle and socialize more. Without social capital, graduates will miss out on opportunities to utilize their credentials and apply for highly skilled jobs.

In colleges there is a strong need for career assistance and internship programs (Feldman & Turnley, 1995) to address the needs of students from lower social status backgrounds who lack valuable social capital. By initiating programs that focus on the development of social capital, students can learn how to cultivate meaningful ties that will help them after college. Career counselors should possess a full understanding of the workplace (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008) and provide services for students with weaker capacity social capital who may need assistance as they transition from college to work.

For higher education policy, this study addressed concerns surrounding the social interactions and behaviors of college students. Educational institutions at the secondary and postsecondary levels should consider implementing initiatives to help extend the social network ties of students from lower social status backgrounds. Through integration programs and other practices, universities can bridge the social spheres of students from various race and class backgrounds.

### **5.1.4 Policy Implications – What Should Colleges Do?**

Students who enter college from lower social status backgrounds often have a structural disadvantage because of one-parent homes. In many cases, these students are first-generation college students who benefit significantly from the cultivation of new networks. For students with weaker capacity social capital, college networks function in much the same way as family networks, providing access to strategically positioned network members.

Universities should foster conditions that encourage the cultivation of new networks. Career counselors and transition programs are designed to deal with the inadequate preparation of college graduates for the workforce (Yeadon, 2010), but these programs fail to address students who lack social capital resources. Transition programs could eliminate some of these issues through the intentional design and facilitation of support services that train college students for work while also helping them develop social capital.

The low representation of minorities in colleges across the nation requires that admissions offices continue to make efforts to recruit these students. Additionally, it is important that these students and other first-generation college students are identified and supported academically and socially as they transition from high school to college and from college to work. This study's findings revealed that the high school-to-college transition was particularly challenging for students who came to KU from urban high schools. The development of social capital is equally important as the development of human capital for lower status students who need both social and academic support if their higher educational experience is meant to be a success.

Despite race and social status distinctions, college graduates are eager to utilize their credentials and compete in the job market. By interviewing college graduates who recently

entered the job market, the effects of race and class on the job search process are revealed. From these findings, employers, universities, and students can work together to establish programs and policies that will develop the human capital and social capital of every student.

### **5.1.5 Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. First, only two races were used to study the role of social capital in the job search process. As a consequence, the formulated explanations of job search apply to only two races: blacks and whites. The sample of 48 graduates from one university includes too few individuals to probe very deeply into the interactions that occur between social networks and the labor market; however, the research does shed new light on the college experiences of men and women and how they develop and use social capital in a variety of contexts.

The second limitation of this study is that job searchers are represented by only one university. Although it is not possible for a single university to represent the expansive network of higher educational institutions that operate in the United States, the selected university is an appropriate site for investigating how social network ties contribute to the variation of job search patterns among graduates. In an effort to develop new understanding about the role of social capital in the labor market, recent college graduates from different races and social backgrounds were selected for this study. Although the use of a single set of data from one university had its advantages, other universities could be studied, and changes that occur in the job search process over time could be discovered. Given the different contexts in which participants searched for jobs, comparisons made between graduates and other job searchers were sometimes strained. For instance, relating the job search efforts of black alumni to the job search efforts of white

alumni could possibly result in an unreasonable comparison depending on how each individual searched, and their interpretation of why they were or were not hired for various positions.

Individual experiences are so different that a valid relationship between the two may be difficult to adequately or fairly explain. Such comparisons might have been easier if the age and race of every alumnus were the same.

The fact that employers could not personally be interviewed was a third limitation of the study. This was one context where the analysis was based entirely on the applicant's story. Details of the experience that were omitted because employers were not interviewed may have resulted in inaccurate conclusions about the job search process.

A problem inherent in the re-conceptualization of the job search is another limitation of this study. Data for the study were collected through a single, thirty minute to one hour interview with each alumnus. As a result, the analysis of participant's high school and college social experiences, choices of whom to connect with, in what contexts, and for what purposes, depended on the participant's perceptions, interpretations, and recollections of events and experiences that occurred, in some cases, years ago. Nevertheless, this study extends other research that examines social network ties and labor market outcomes. Qualitative interviews provide rich descriptions of the job search process, as well as details about the development of social capital, but the implications of race and class on this process are difficult to quantify. Because there is a lack of research on how race and class structure social networks in college, the difficulty of comparing networks between college graduates is compounded.

### **5.1.6 Further Exploration**

This study targeted a specific population of college graduates from one university with a relatively small sample. There are different directions that could be taken for future study. Increasing the sample size could provide more data for analysis. Additionally, data could be collected through shorter surveys that may elicit more candid responses as well as increased participation from alumni. Replicating the study at a comparative university may provide similar data or possibly contrasting results.

Further exploration of college graduates and their transition from college to work may prove advantageous to those studying variation in job search outcomes of college graduates. By investigating how career services, university departments, and advisors support this process, universities and policy makers can develop effective practices and programs that will assist graduates in their transition from college to work by developing their social networks. Focusing on how college students connect and build relationships on campus, universities can then turn their attention to nurturing the relationships that exist between hiring employers, businesses, and other organizations with the university and its students. Campus career services and individual departments may need to reach out to students who struggle with the high school-to-college transition and the college-to-work transition if they hope to retain and support students. Universities have a responsibility to ensure that students develop important connections and contacts in school that will allow them to effectively exchange their credentials for work.

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**APPENDIX A: Email Interview Request**

Hello KU Alumni,

My name is Emily Coonfield and I am working on my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas.

I received your contact information from the alumni office at KU. I was wondering if you might be interested in letting me interview you for my dissertation to discuss how you searched for jobs after graduating from KU.

The interview will only last 30-40 minutes and I would be more than happy to meet at any location that is convenient for you. Phone interviews are also an option if you are out of state, or if it is easier for you than meeting in person.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating, and a date and time that might work for you. If not, let me know so I do not email you again.

My schedule is open, so feel free to suggest a time and we can arrange to meet or talk. I would really appreciate your help.

Thank you for your time,  
Emily Coonfield

## **APPENDIX B: Sampling Frame for High School Data**

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), and for the purposes of this study, a private school is a school not supported primarily by public funds. It must provide instruction for one or more of grades K-12 (or comparable ungraded levels), and have one or more teachers. Organizations or institutions that provide support for home schooling, but do not offer classroom instruction for students, are not included.

Demographics and district level data for the individual high schools of Kansas University alumni were provided by the US Census Bureau's Census Mapping Project. Each State's Department of Education provides the Census Mapping Project with a list of all regular school districts, student enrollment, district boundaries, median household income, and education level by sex. NCES's Common Core of Data (CCD) recognizes additional school districts that the Census Mapping project does not. Thus, the number of districts by state differs between NCES and the individual school district profile that is included in the School District Demographics System.

High school district level data was collected from seven states: Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. The original sample included Kansas University alumni from 5,494 high schools in the United States. The second sample was comprised of only 1,942 of the original 5,494 high schools from the selected seven states. From these states the data was organized again to include a sample of various types of high schools from each of the selected states: private, parochial, suburban, rural, and urban. Due to the high concentration of secondary schools categorized as rural in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, these schools form the largest representation in the sample, compared to the other states which

have a more balanced sample of schools. Private schools are the exception in every state, due to the fact that NCES classifies both parochial and non-denominational schools as private.

The breakdown of high school selection was based primarily on creating as representative a sample as possible from the various types of schools found in the United States. Each state had a fairly limited number of private schools. In the case of Colorado, only two schools were selected for the sample based on their classification as private schools, and 11 selected based on their classification as parochial schools. The representation of urban, suburban, and rural schools was more even, with 30 urban schools selected, 27 suburban schools, and 30 rural schools selected from the state of Colorado.

Illinois had a large number of parochial schools to select from. A total of 32 parochial schools were included from the list of high schools provided by the alumni office. 21 suburban and 22 urban schools were selected from the state. The entire sample of rural and private schools was selected, 17 and 8 respectively.

High schools selected from the state of Kansas were mostly classified as rural. 35 rural schools were included in the sample. Kansas had a large number of high schools that were classified as parochial, and for this reason 29 parochial schools were selected from this category. An equal number of suburban and urban schools were selected from Kansas, 17 from each category. The smallest representation of schools came from the private school category, of which only two were selected.

Missouri, similar to Illinois and Kansas, had a fairly large number of parochial schools, and in all, 22 parochial high schools were included. A fairly equal representation of schools from the remaining categories was selected for the study from the state of Missouri, 20 suburban

schools, 22 urban schools, and 20 rural schools. Missouri had the largest number of private schools among the seven states, and a total of 16 schools were included from this category.

The Nebraska sample is the most unique in terms of its representation of schools from each category. First, no schools listed in the CCD, from the state of Nebraska, who sent students to the University of Kansas, were classified strictly as private, or non-denominational. The Nebraska sample did however include 29 parochial schools that were selected from the larger sample. Additionally, the number of suburban and urban schools was limited, therefore, only 8 suburban and 14 urban high schools were included in the final sample.

Schools in Oklahoma are largely classified as rural. For this reason, 49 schools selected from the Oklahoma sample are rural, and no schools are classified as private. The remaining schools selected for the study are parochial, suburban, or urban. Eighteen parochial schools, 16 suburban schools, and 17 urban schools were included in the final sample.

The sample of Texas schools includes a limited number of private schools, with a total of six from the state. The largest number of schools were classified as suburban, and for this reason, 30 suburban schools were selected. Twenty-five parochial schools, 22 urban and 17 rural schools round out the sample from the state of Texas.

Although the number of schools selected from each category is not equally balanced, the best possible sample was constructed in an effort to provide the truest representation of the types of schools found in each state. In all, each state provided a total of 100 schools with each category represented, except in the cases of Oklahoma and Nebraska, which did not include any private high schools with alumni from the University of Kansas. The sample at this point was comprised of 700 high schools.



According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Colorado is comprised of 176 school districts, Illinois, 897 districts, Kansas, 304 school districts, Missouri, 523 school districts, Nebraska, 275 school districts, Oklahoma, 545 school districts, and Texas, 1,041 school districts.

After the high schools were selected, the following information was then requested from the University of Kansas. Requested student records (undergraduate and graduate) included: alumni name, address, city, state, zip code, email, phone number, alumni ID, degree, school, major, student activities, extracurricular activities, and information on any type of campus involvement, estimated age, high school GPA, college GPA, gender, race/ethnicity, financial assistance information (loans, grants, scholarships, work study), income level information, alumni class/year, KU ID number for each student (for the purposes of merging this data with data from the registrar's office, such as EMPLID, and date of birth, when available).

Following the collection of this information, a programmer from the University of Kansas created an excel sheet that included the above information on graduates. The alumni office was interested in knowing exactly what the information was going to be used for, and why I was interested in alumni outside of the Education Department. The information and reasons were emailed, and the purpose stated was for sampling. I wanted to use the high school information as a key sampling variable because for many students, neighborhood schools are consistent with socioeconomic status. In this study, for example, middle and upper class students tend to attend private and suburban high schools while lower class students tend to attend urban high schools. I wanted to base the selection, in part, on the high school the participant graduated from. The central reason for this decision was that the high school would serve as an important proxy to gauge the social status (SES) of the student before they came to

the University of Kansas. Regardless of race, high schools and social status were usually consistent. This detail was critical to the argument my dissertation set out to test. If I were to only focus on Education alumni, it would limit the scope of the study. I considered working with data on specific years, such as 2005 and 2010, rather than all the years in that time frame in order to limit the actual sample, but, decided instead to ask the programmer to extract data from several years in order to insure a high response rate. The University of Kansas had high school data on their alumni starting in 1991. I received the first excel spreadsheet with all the high schools that had alumni who attended the University and how many were included in their system from each particular high school. They asked that I use the list and remove any schools that I was not interested in taking a sample from. Once I selected the schools I wanted, I sent the final list back. I did not use the entire data I obtained from the University of Kansas Alumni Office, but I needed that data to create the sample in the first place.

## **APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol and Guiding Questions**

### Guiding Questions:

- A brief overview of the purpose of the research project: Job Search Patterns of College Graduates.
- The organization that they applied to and the position they were/were not hired for.
- Current job and satisfaction (the ideal job).
- Career goals.
- Decisions to attend college, choosing a major and field of study.
- Other considerations in the job search: location, hours, pay, position, family, children...
- Discussion about the job search process in terms of employer perspectives on the applicant's race, class, and gender.
- A brief overview of their social networks and any additional information regarding the structure and composition of these networks.
- Campus experiences—friends, academic networks, acquaintances, roommates, friends of friends, associates from campus organizations, clubs or other involvements.
- Detailed history of their involvement with various contacts.
- Suggestions for college freshman regarding things to do socially and academically, as well as other things, that could help with their future job search.
- As issues and topics emerge, participants were invited to elaborate on areas that needed clarification or more time. Participants were asked to address specific areas if they were not covered in the unstructured portion of the conversation. The questions were used to fill in missing information on particular issues.
- Methods of application: walk-in, mailed resumes, referrals, on-line applications, social contacts, family members, etc.
- Specific interview questions and procedures-formal or informal

### **Section I: Pre-College/High School Characteristics**

#### Academics

- Describe your academic experience in high school.

- What kind of student were you?
- Did you apply for any academic scholarships?
- Did you receive any academic scholarships?

#### Socialization

- Describe your social experiences in high school.
- Who were your friends?
- When did you meet them?
- How did you meet them?
- What kinds of activities did you participate in?
- What did you do for entertainment?
- Did most of your friends go to college?
- Do you know if their parents are college educated?

#### Athletics

- Describe your experiences with sports?
- Were you an athlete?
- Did you apply for any athletic scholarships?
- Did you receive any athletic scholarships?
- If so, what sports did you play? If not, did you attend sporting events?
- Did you socialize with other athletes? Did you socialize with athletes?
- Describe some of those relationships. Describe some of those relationships.

#### Family Background

- What do you believe to be your parent(s) philosophy on education?
- What academic expectations did your parent(s) have for you?
- What academic expectations did you have for yourself?
- What career/work expectations did your parent(s) have for you?
- What career/work expectations did you have for yourself?
- Does your mother have a college education?
- Does your father have a college education?
- What is your mother's profession?
- What is your father's profession?
- Tell me about your parent's friends, who are they, what type of work do they do?
- Describe your neighborhood and the relationships you and your family have with your neighbors.
- Do you have siblings?
  - If so, are they college educated? What are their jobs/professions?

## Section II: College Experience

#### Academics

- What influenced you to go to college?
- Describe your academic experience in college.
- What kind of student were you?
- What was your major? Why did you choose the major you did?
- Did you belong to any academic clubs or organizations?
- If so, did you associate with these people outside of the school context?

- During college, and as you approached graduation, what were some of your career goals and aspirations?

#### Socialization

- Describe your social experiences in college.
- How did you socialize and with whom while you were in college?
- Who were some of your friends?
- How did you meet/know these people?
- What kinds of activities did you participate in? How did you spend your time?
- What did you do for entertainment?
- Who did you live with? Tell me a little about these people?
- Did you continue to spend time with people you knew before college, or did you meet new people?

#### Campus Experiences

- What about your campus experience, were you involved in any other clubs or activities, government, volunteering, or any other involvements in terms of extra-curricular besides sports and Greek life?

#### Athletics

- Describe your experiences with sports?
- Were you an athlete?
- If so, what sports did you play? If not, did you attend sporting events?
- Did you socialize with other athletes? Did you socialize with athletes?
- Describe some of those relationships. Describe some of those relationships.
- Who was on your team?
- How did you get involved in this sport?
- How did you meet these people?
- Are you still in contact with these people? What are they doing?

#### Organizations

- Were you a member of any Greek organizations? If so, which one?
- How did you find out about this organization?
- What influenced you to join?
- Did you know anyone who was a member of this organization before you joined?
  - If so, how did you meet these people?
- Can you describe the process involved to join this Greek organization?
- Why do you believe you were selected?
- Can you describe the organization itself?
  - What sort of activities did you participate in with the members of this organization?
  - Tell me about the other members.
  - How did you get involved in this organization?
  - Why did you want to join a Greek organization?
  - Who did you associate with mostly? Why?
  - Are you still in contact with the other members? What are they doing?
- Were there any other Greek organizations you wanted to join but were not admitted to?
- If so, can you think of any reasons why you were not admitted?

### Section III: Pre-College Graduation/Job Search

How did you search for jobs as you were getting out of college?

- What various methods of application did you use: career services, campus information or job fairs, walk-ins, mailed resumes, referrals, on-line applications, social contacts: professors, friends, neighbors, family members, dorm mates, fraternity or sorority affiliations, etc., to find out about these jobs?

Formal/Traditional Job Search

- Tell me about your formal/traditional applications?
- Do you recall how many jobs you applied for using formal/traditional methods?
- What were the outcomes?
- Besides your first job, were there any jobs you applied for and were not hired for after college?
- Were there any jobs you were offered that you did not accept?
- Were there any jobs you were not offered that you would have accepted?
- Can you tell me about those jobs?
- Can you think of or remember any reasons you were not hired for certain jobs?
- Were there any jobs you knew about that you chose not to pursue? If so, why?

Informal/Non-traditional Job Search

- Tell me about your informal/non-traditional applications?
- Do you recall how many jobs you applied for using informal/non-traditional methods?
- What were the outcomes? Besides your first job, were there any jobs you applied for and were not hired for after college?
- Were there any jobs you were offered that you did not accept?
- Were there any jobs you were not offered that you would have accepted?
- Can you tell me about those jobs?
- Can you think of or remember any reasons you were not hired for certain jobs?
- Were there any jobs you knew about that you chose not to pursue? If so, why?

### Section IV: Post-College Graduation-Job #1 (Part I)

What was your first job after college?

- How did you eventually get your first job? How did you find out about the job?  
(No social contacts follow Part I) *Formal Search-Follow-Up Questions:*
- On a scale of 1-5, 1, being you hated the job, 5, being you loved the job, and how would you rate the first job you took after college?
- Was this your dream job?
- If so, why? / If not, what is your dream job?

Did you accept the first job you were offered?

- If so, why? / If not, why not?
- For what reasons did you take this job over another job?
- For what reasons do you believe you were hired for this job over another person?  
Education, skill set, connections, experience, personality?

Which considerations, if any, were a factor in your job search and selection?

- Location, Hours, Pay, Position/Job requirements and responsibilities
- Family, Spouse/partner, Children

Can you recall any details about the employer who hired you, or the interview process?

- Any impressions from the employer or hiring agent?
- Do any specific interview questions or experiences stand out to you?
- Was the interview formal or informal? In what ways?

Tell me a little about your first job.

- What did you do? What were your responsibilities?
- What hours did you work?
- What were the hiring requirements?
- How long did you work there?

#### **Section IV: Post-College Graduation-Job #1 (Part II)**

What was your first job after college?

- How did you eventually get your first job? How did you find out about the job?  
(Social contacts follow Part II) *Informal Search-Follow-up Questions*
- On a scale of 1-5, 1, being you hated the job, 5, being you loved the job, and how would you rate the first job you took after college?
- Was this your dream job?
- If so, why? / If not, what is your dream job?

Did you accept the first job you were offered?

- If so, why? / If not, why not?
- For what reasons did you take this job over another job?
- For what reasons do you believe you were hired for this job over another person?  
Education, skill set, experience, connections, personality?

Which considerations, if any, were a factor in your job search and selection?

- Location, Hours, Pay, Position/Job requirements and responsibilities
- Family, Spouse/partner, Children

Probing Questions:

- Describe your relationship with the referral/contact?
- How long have you known him/her?
- Where and how did you meet him/her?
- Why do you believe he/she told you about the job?
- Do you believe this contact helped you get the job? If so, in what way?
- Did you mention or use this contact during the interview process?

Can you recall any details about the employer who hired you, or the interview process?

- Any impressions from the employer or hiring agent?
- Do any specific interview questions or experiences stand out to you?
- Was the interview formal or informal? In what ways?

Tell me a little about your first job.

- What did you do? What were your responsibilities?
- What hours did you work?
- What were the hiring requirements?
- How long did you work there?

#### **Section V: Post-College Graduation-Job #2**

What about your second job?

Tell me a little about your second job.

- What did you do? What were your responsibilities?
- What hours did you work?
- What were the hiring requirements?
- How long did you work there?

How did you find out about it? Were you actively searching for a new job?

- If so, why?
- How many jobs did you apply for?
- How many were you offered?
- Were there any jobs you turned down?
- If you were not actively searching for a new job, how did you learn about the second job?
- For what reasons did you take this job over another job?
- Were you offered any other jobs?

Describe the hiring process.

- Can you recall any details about the employer who hired you, or the interview process?
- Any impressions from the employer or hiring agent?
- Do any specific interview questions or experiences stand out to you?
- Was the interview formal or informal? In what ways?

For what reasons do you believe you were hired for this job over another person? Education, skill set, experience, connections, personality?

- Which considerations, if any, were a factor in your job search and selection?
- Location, Hours, Pay, Position/Job requirements and responsibilities
- Family, Spouse/partner, Children
- Did you make any connections at your first job that were important, useful, or influential in your second job?

### **Section VI: Follow-up Questions: Explanation of themes, concepts, and events**

- Do you have any suggestions that you would share with a college freshman regarding things to do socially and academically, as well as other things, that could help with the job search upon graduation?
- How have your relationships, from high school, college, and after, influenced or affected your job and career?
- How have your family relationships and connections influenced or affected your job and career?
- To what extent have you, if ever, relied on these relationships to help you acquire job information?
- If you had little involvement/contact with your family, and none of their friends or connections to rely on, how might you proceed in the acquisition of job information and opportunities?
- Can you think of any other people you might turn to if you needed help finding out about job information and opportunities?
- To what extent do you believe your college education has prepared you for the workplace?
- Do you rely heavily on your education to perform and carry out your work responsibilities?
- In what ways do you believe your college education influenced your job search and outcomes?



## **APPENDIX D: HSCL-Human Subjects Committee Lawrence**

### **ADULT INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

Job Search Patterns of College Graduates: A Study of Social Network Effects

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine why college graduates have different outcomes in the labor market, and how their social networks affect these outcomes.

#### **PROCEDURES**

For the purposes of this study I selected University of Kansas alumni from the following states: Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. The sample includes graduates since 2005. Participants will be asked to partake in a phone or a face-to-face interview that will last approximately thirty minutes.

#### **RISKS**

There are no risks anticipated for those who participate in this study.

#### **BENEFITS**

Participation in this study will benefit scholarship on college students and their job search behaviors. This research will also have important practical implications for universities like KU, who seek to improve graduates' outcomes in the job market.

#### **PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS**

Participants will not be paid.

#### **PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless required by law or you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future."

**REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. But, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

**CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to:

**Emily Coonfield**  
**2511 West 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue**  
**Kansas City, KS 66103**  
**913-710-3616**  
**escoon@hotmail.com**

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION**

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

**PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:**

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

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 Type/Print Participant's Name

---

 Date

---

 Participant's Signature
**Researcher Contact Information**

Emily Coonfield  
 Principal Investigator  
 1122 West campus Road, JRP 407  
 University of Kansas  
 Lawrence, KS 66045  
 785-864-1826

## APPENDIX E: Internet Information Statement

### Internet Information Statement

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand the job search process for equally credentialed individuals. This will entail an interview, either by phone or email that is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

The content of the interview questions should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of why graduates have different outcomes in the labor market and how social networks affect this process. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact me by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least age eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, or email [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

Sincerely,

Emily Coonfield  
Principal Investigator  
2511 West 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Kansas City, KS 66103  
(913) 710-3616  
[escoon@hotmail.com](mailto:escoon@hotmail.com)

## **APPENDIX F: Interview Narratives**

In order to establish a causal sequence for the “story of the job search,” Smart’s model (1986) was implemented to create categories for alumni characteristics that guided and informed the interview and write up on each participant:

1. Pre-college Student Characteristics:
  - a. Family socioeconomic status
  - b. High-school academic achievement
  - c. Sex and race
  - d. Educational and occupational aspirations
  
2. Collegiate Performance and Experiences:
  - a. College major
  - b. Academic performance
  - c. Social integration
  - d. College Experience
  
3. Educational Attainment Level:
  - a. Degree earned in college
  - b. Highest degree earned to date
  
4. First Job:
  - a. Part or full-time work during college
  - b. First full-time job following completion of undergraduate program