Asian Immigrants’ Reliance on Social Ties in a Multiethnic Labor Market

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Abstract

We study how the social capital and closure properties of family- and ethnic-based social networks influence the incorporation of immigrants into their host society. In so doing, we examine the relationship between immigrants’ reliance on social ties and their employment. Data collected through ethnographic depth interviews of Asian immigrants in Los Angeles indicate that reliance on social ties usually operates informally, as when job seekers consult their more experienced and better-connected friends, relatives, and acquaintances and ask them to serve as intermediaries. These networks provide group-based resources that assist immigrants in making headway in their new society. Yet reliance on social ties is most common for moves into jobs of low occupational prestige that have low human capital requirements. Because of linguistic and cultural competence, immigrants who seek jobs from coethnic employers are often more self-reliant in the job search than those who seek work more broadly. In this way, ethno-linguistic closure encourages ethnic segmentation in the labor market. By contrast, reliance on social ties, another form of closure, facilitates job hunting in the wider domain of the labor market, where prospective employers may be of any ethnicity. Reliance on social ties thereby provides a mechanism by which immigrants gain employment throughout the multiethnic metropolitan labor market.

Social networks play a role in the matching and sorting of immigrants to jobs in the host society (Bailey & Waldinger 1991) and in establishing the basis for mutual trust and cooperation (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993). In extending the study of

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how immigrants develop and use network ties, researchers are improving our understanding of how reliance on such ties affects employment. We contribute to this literature by analyzing the relationship between job changes and immigrants’ use of interpersonal ties in the job search. The ties we focus on usually take the form of informal exchanges of information, introductions, and vouching for a person’s character.

Immigrant social networks are shaped by characteristics of the immigrant stream and by structural conditions in the host society (Gurak & Caces 1992; Kritz & Zlotnik 1992; Massey et al. 1987, 1993; Portes & Bach 1985; Portes & Borocz 1989; Waldinger 1986). Social networks can constitute a virtual reformation of social organization in the sending society (Grieco 1998). More often, however, these networks are embedded in emergent forms of social organization that reflect immigrants’ efforts to deal with the new circumstances they encounter (Waldinger 1994). These networks are largely based on family and ethnic ties, which constitute a form of social capital that immigrants can draw on in an effort to improve their economic and social circumstances (Portes 1995; Sanders & Nee 1996).

Information Diffusion and Employment Opportunities

The contemporary sociological study of immigrant labor markets is indebted to Granovetter (1973, 1985), who points to the importance of interpersonal ties in getting jobs and the advantage of examining economic action with regard to how it is embedded in networks of interpersonal relations. Acquaintances serve as bridge ties that link people to social networks to which they previously had no connections. New social connections encourage information diffusion and expanded opportunity. In this way, interpersonal ties play a role in expanding employment opportunities. For Granovetter (1973), it is usually weak ties (acquaintances rather than family or close friends) that serve as bridges between networks because strong ties such as family members are thought to be connected to the same networks. But Burt (1992) contends that focusing on the strength of a bridge tie misses the point. According to him, the essential structural element is the hole between networks. Once a hole is bridged, information flows and opportunities increase. The strength of the tie that makes a bridge has little or no bearing on the benefits that result from the bridging.

Burt’s (1992) point simplifies matters for those who study how people get jobs. Our experience suggests that the social connections that result in a job seeker gaining new sources of information can be difficult to attribute to a specific weak or strong tie. Such information often moves along a chain of actors, some of whom are weakly tied and some of whom may be strongly tied to the job seeker. The precise details of the information exchanged along the various points of the chain can be difficult to document. And sometimes two actors do not agree on the strength of
their relationship. Therefore, attributing the bridge tie to a particular individual, and measuring the strength of the tie, can be more difficult than observing that access to a new social network has occurred.

Waldinger's (1996b) account of why African Americans are underrepresented in the construction trades in New York City illustrates the importance of bridge ties and structural holes in affecting the diffusion of employment-related information. Access to training and employment in these trades is governed by access to particular social networks. Job-related information is passed along chains of ties within these networks. These chains often include both weak and strong ties. The disadvantage of African Americans is that they have few interpersonal ties that can bridge the structural holes between themselves and the social networks that control access to employment in the construction trades.

Information Diffusion and Ethnic Ties

The literature on immigrant labor markets emphasizes the use of ethnic ties in the development of ethnic enterprise (Light 1972; Light & Bonacich 1988; Light & Karageorgis 1994; Portes & Bach 1985). Research shows that competitive advantages secured by reliance on social solidarity in the ethnic community enable immigrant entrepreneurs to dominate specialized niches and compete in the broader metropolitan economy. Ethnic ties provide the basis for trust that supports forms of economic cooperation among coethnics that are less likely to obtain in the context of cross-ethnic transactions. This may include the greater willingness of workers to accept lower wages or poorer work conditions than would be possible in the absence of social solidarity between coethnic bosses and workers. In return, employers are sometimes responsive to the needs of their coethnic employees, as in the case of allowing flexible work schedules (Zhou 1992). Furthermore, the development of a critical mass of ethnic enterprises may facilitate the establishment of still more enterprises, which effectively increases opportunities for upward mobility through self-employment (Nee & Sanders 1985; Portes & Bach 1985; Portes & Zhou 1996; Rajjman & Tienda 2000; Sanders & Nee 1987, 1996).

Reliance on personal connections as a mechanism that instills trust implies a degree of social closure in ethnic networks (Nee & Sanders 2001a). The mechanisms that give rise to trust are more robust in closed networks because trust can be more readily monitored and enforced (Coleman 1988). Social closure is advantageous to ethnic entrepreneurs who depend on enforceable trust (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993). It is also advantageous for immigrant workers who rely on informal training systems to acquire human capital through work experience in the ethnic economy (Bailey & Waldinger 1991). This latter institutional arrangement serves as an alternative to the training function provided by internal labor markets in larger mainstream firms.
Much of the sociological study of closure originates from Weber ([1922] 1978) and is couched in the framework of comparative-historical analysis — usually applied to European-area studies (e.g., Brubaker 1992; Murphy 1988; Parkin 1974). Contemporary scholars have advanced the study of social closure to include nonsubordination processes (e.g., a minority group is able to monopolize opportunities within a limited part of the labor market), whereas Weber concentrated on subordination processes (e.g., the majority group closes off job opportunities to a minority group). The recognition that social closure can transpire as bottom-up processes (usurpationary closure) as well as top-down processes is highly germane for the study of immigrants. Reliance on ethnic networks in acquiring job-related information is an example of bottom-up closure. Gaining job information through impersonal means that rely on ethnolinguistic closure, such as reading the employment advertisements of ethnic-language newspapers, is another form of bottom-up closure.

From Parkin’s (1974) perspective, these forms of collectivist closure go against the more general trend of formal rationalized closure based on individual attributes such as education. Nonetheless, collectivist closure persists and research suggests that it sometimes takes on characteristics of what Parkin (1974) described as solidaristic closure. That is, social relations with underpinnings of ethnic solidarity can generate and channel opportunities, if governed by practical constraints against malfeasance (Portes & Rumbaut 1996; Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993), that assist a cross-section of the group. These opportunities can be generated largely from within the group, as in the case of opportunities for self-employment in ethnic economies (Portes & Bach 1985), or they can be appropriated from the larger social context, as in the case of immigrant concentrations in government employment (Model 1997; Waldinger 1994).

Some closure processes may be widely generalizable, whereas others may be tightly tied to the history of a particular group. Borocz (1997) cautions researchers to be sensitive to the historical and contemporary social contexts from which closure processes emerge. In critiquing Granovetter’s (1985) analysis of how people use interpersonal ties to find jobs, Borocz (1997) contends that research into the concrete (yet mostly informal) arrangements of social networks is illuminated when accompanied by a comparative-historical examination that considers the view of institutional embeddedness proposed by Polanyi ([1957] 1992). Borocz’s conceptual perspective may improve studies of immigrants’ reliance on interpersonal ties to find jobs, but the degree to which this is so probably depends on the extent to which the closure processes involving reliance on social networks vary in their historical bases across groups. Most importantly, it depends on the degree to which this variation results in closure processes that differ across immigrant groups in a host society.

The emergence of postimmigration social networks that are important to immigrants in the labor market has been documented for various groups in the
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U.S. (Campbell, Marsden & Hurlbert 1986; Gold 1992; Light & Bonacich 1988; Light & Gold 2000; Light et al. 1995; Lin 1982; Massey et al. 1993; Nee, Sanders & Sernau 1994; Scott 1996; Waldinger 1994; Zhou 1992). While no researcher argues that the historical underpinnings or the detailed operations of the social networks of various groups are absolutely identical, the emergence of information-diffusing networks of interpersonal relationships is a widely shared phenomenon. The largely informal processes through which these networks facilitate the employment of immigrants are also widely shared.

The shared emergent character of these networks shapes their forms and functions in similar ways. This can be illustrated with the following example: Among well-educated members of some Asian immigrant groups, social connections between schoolmates represent an important resource. This resource varies across societies and varies across time within societies. Once in the host society, however, social contacts that were useful back home are often unavailable because only a small proportion of the home society’s population moves to the host society. Furthermore, for any two or more individuals, what might have been a resource-rich connection in the home society may be a resource-poor connection in the host society because the value of the connection is limited to the circumstances of the home society. Out of necessity, therefore, the social networks that immigrants rely on for job information tend to arise in the host society — a process of emergent adaptation (e.g., Bailey & Waldinger 1991; Waldinger 1994).

The greatest overlap of pre- and postimmigration history is usually among family members. But here, too, the extent to which one family member can assist another is influenced by the larger social network of the former, and that network is shaped by processes of emergent adaptation. The informality and common occurrence of the types of action that account for how immigrant networks affect employment opportunities (e.g., job seekers consulting their more experienced and better-connected friends, relatives, and acquaintances for information and to serve as intermediaries) contribute to intergroup similarities in how social networks influence employment.

Ethnic Ties and Job Transitions

The extent to which information diffusion channeled through interpersonal ties expands the employment opportunities of immigrants is partly a function of how pervasively those ties reach into the labor market. We might expect that the employment opportunities of immigrants, particularly those with skills and credentials that have little currency in the host society, would be mostly limited to the coethnic domain of the labor market, where immigrant networks are presumably most useful. But research indicates that ethnic boundaries in large, ethnically diverse metropolitan labor markets are porous, and immigrants
frequently pass through these boundaries in search of better jobs (Nee, Sanders & Sernau 1994). Despite concluding that cultural pluralism best describes the experiences of earlier immigrants and native minorities in the U.S., Gordon (1964) also observes that the labor market, more so than other key institutions except for the government, gives rise to social action that breaks down ethnic boundaries. While interpersonal ties can be helpful in finding employment with coethnic bosses, these ties also have the potential to lead to jobs in the broader labor market characterized by mixed ethnic composition (Campbell, Marsden & Hurlbert 1986; Light et al. 1995; Lin 1982; Portes & Rumbaut 1996; Scott 1996; Waldinger 1996b).

The possibility that reliance on interpersonal ties expedites the job search is particularly important for those who are mired in low-end jobs with no immediate prospects for dramatically improving their situation. Our interviews indicate that, at the low end of the labor market, immigrants are constantly on the lookout for even a marginally better job since every penny counts and the conditions of work are frequently harsh. A progression away from the poorest jobs tends to gradually play out across a series of similar jobs. It is not surprising, therefore, that many immigrants move rapidly through a series of low-end jobs in an effort to improve their circumstances. This practice is widely viewed as a pragmatic strategy for achieving upward mobility among newcomers whose foreign credentials and lack of local experience make it unlikely that substantial advancement can be obtained by waiting for a single, especially attractive job opportunity to materialize.

To the degree that reliance on interpersonal ties facilitates job transitions, it is likely that immigrants with a proven track record of using their social connections to find work are advantaged in their ability to draw on these social connections in making subsequent job changes. This suggests that the rate at which job changes occur tends to be greatest among those who have previously used their social network to secure employment. Given the limited influence of interpersonal ties in opening up opportunities for prestigious jobs wherein the proper credentials and experience are requisite, however, the immediate prospects for many of those who rely on interpersonal ties to find employment may still be predominantly in jobs of low prestige. Notwithstanding, the ability to draw on social connections to expedite job changes may reduce the risk of becoming stuck in a dead-end job, which in turn may increase the possibility of gradually, through a series of similar jobs, moving up the occupational ladder.

The empirical part of our article focuses on one aspect of this hypothetical connection between reliance on ethnic ties and job transitions. That is, to what degree does having an established track record of relying on interpersonal ties to get jobs associate with the pace of job moves at the low end of the labor market? The hypothesis we test can be stated as follows:

**The greater the reliance on interpersonal ties in finding jobs, the greater the rate of job change at the low end of the labor market.**
Data

In exploring the relationship between immigrants’ job histories and their reliance on interpersonal ties in the job search, we draw on data collected through ethnographic depth interviews conducted during a 1989–90 field study of Asian immigrants in greater Los Angeles. Though the field study was intentionally exploratory, it nonetheless followed a structured research design. Depth interviews using semistructured schedules were employed, but unlike traditional ethnographic case studies, we attempted to use probabilistic sampling procedures. Interviews were conducted with immigrants from the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan, and China.

Los Angeles has the largest and most diverse population of foreign- and native-born Asians of any geographical area in the U.S. At the time of our study, greater Los Angeles was home to 1.33 million Asians, two-thirds of whom were foreign-born (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993). The first three chapters of the edited volume by Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (Laslett 1996; Sabagh & Bozorgmehr 1996; Waldinger & Bozorgmehr 1996) provide a detailed account of the development of Los Angeles into a multiethnic urban region.

Because our interviewing procedures encouraged probing and long discussions between interviewers and respondents, the resulting interview text provides detailed accounts of the social world of respondents. During the interviews, retrospective life histories were recorded with a focus on employment. Using depth interviewing to cross-check the timing and content of information provided by respondents revealed many discrepancies. Information initially recorded often required modification once respondents discussed events in detail. Sometimes spells were forgotten, and sometimes the content of reported spells was grossly simplified. For example, a Filipina listed a grocery store clerk position as paying the minimum wage and having a specific ending date. In the course of the interview, however, she disclosed that her boss, a family friend, actually paid her irregularly in cash based on the store’s receipts. After leaving the job, she was asked to return and assist in conducting a final inventory. The employer offered her a percentage of the value of the remaining inventory as remuneration, but payment was never made. Thus, the timing and content of this spell of employment differed significantly from its original listing.

Because we lacked complete lists of the target populations, we consulted sources as diverse as ethnic telephone directories, computerized lists developed by commercial firms that compile and sell mailing lists, and a list from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The latter was limited to naturalized citizens. We used this list only to augment the sample of Filipinos, whose names are often not distinctive because of centuries of colonialism. There was a good deal of overlap across the other lists; the ethnic (and regular) telephone directories provided the most comprehensive lists. With the exception of very poor immigrants from China, the modest cost of telephone service is almost always affordable for the groups we study. To compensate for sampling bias due to overlooking poorer,
usually recent immigrants from China, we conducted interviews of persons identified through snowball sampling in the old Chinatown near downtown. The potential limitations of snowball sampling are well documented, but as Heckathorn (2000) has shown, the method can be an effective way to obtain a diverse sample from a target subpopulation.

Turndown rates varied considerably across the groups, reaching 50% for Koreans, compared to less than 10% for Filipinos. For the most part, field researchers conducted interviews (in the primary language of the respondent) and recorded observations in the workplaces and homes of the respondents. The turndown rate is a serious problem in studying Koreans (e.g., Hurh & Kim 1984; Light & Bonacich 1988). Part of the problem is the high rate of self-employment among Koreans and the busy work schedule they maintain in order to keep their businesses profitable (Nee, Sanders & Sernau 1994). To date, no researchers have found a way to overcome this difficulty. The main reason our response rate is higher than in most studies of Koreans is probably attributable to the financial incentive we offered.

Our interviews include detailed accounts of 164 individual job histories that contain 633 job spells, including 90 spells of business ownership. Of these spells, 276 were experienced by Chinese immigrants, 173 by Filipinos, and the remaining 184 by Koreans. The 164 job histories were obtained from the depth interviews of 79 Chinese, 36 Filipinos, and 49 Koreans. All the participants reported that they were in the U.S. legally, and most of the jobs discussed were clearly “on the books.” However, certain types of jobs (usually restaurant, store clerk, and sewing jobs) were sometimes described in ways that suggested underground employment.

The interviews were conducted during 1989 and 1990, approximately the same time as the 1990 census. In comparing our sample to the 1990 5% census sample (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993) of Chinese, Filipino, and Korean immigrants residing in the three greater Los Angeles counties (Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside) from which our sample is drawn, we found that our sample includes a lower concentration of married people (living with their spouse) (61% vs. 68%), is older (42.5 years [mean] vs. 39), is better educated (55% college-educated vs. 46%), and underrepresents women (43% vs. 49%). Despite efforts to sample in a representative way, we must be cautious in making inferences. Consequently, our analysis should be viewed as a case study, which needs to be replicated with large and clearly representative samples. A more elaborate account of the sample is reported in Nee, Sanders, and Sernau (1994). A convenient comparison of the historical underpinnings of Chinese and Filipino immigration to the West Coast of the U.S. is provided by Nee and Sanders (1985). Min (1993) offers a similar account of Korean immigration to the West Coast.
Informal Usage of Interpersonal Ties

Immigrants rely on interpersonal ties in finding jobs because their network of friends, family, and acquaintances often provides an immediate source of information about job opportunities. Such information is usually accompanied by advice and help from friends or relatives. Interpersonal ties between immigrant workers serve as a conduit of information about conditions of employment and opportunities for new jobs.

Our data document widespread reliance on interpersonal ties in job searches. The process is usually informal. Kin, friends, or acquaintances learn of a job opening, or know of a factory that is usually hiring, and pass along this information to the job seeker. Sometimes one of the job seeker’s social contacts knows the employer and can personally vouch for the applicant. In many cases, this simply involves a current employee bringing an acquaintance to the workplace and suggesting to his or her employer that the acquaintance is a good worker. Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore (2000) show that employers can gain significant economic benefits by being receptive to referrals provided by their current employees. Reliance on interpersonal ties leads job seekers to prospective employers, but the ties usually do not actually provide the job. In our sample, only one-fifth of the jobs found through interpersonal ties were provided by a family member, friend, or acquaintance. The three excerpts below convey a sense of how this largely informal process operates.

His mother asked her friend to help me. A niece of the friend was working in a clothing factory. Through this way I found the job.

(Chinese respondent)

My brother ran a coin laundry in LA. I worked there, cleaning or changing coins. While doing that, I got information about a cleaning job through a friend. So I did cleaning in beauty salons for two years. After two years, I could be hired as an assembler in a computer company. One of my friends had worked there.

(Korean respondent)

Sometimes our friends would tell us, “Oh, there is a vacancy here.” That is also how my son got hired. He went with a friend and member of the [ethnic] association who told me that her daughter-in-law is looking for one who will be working with her in that company.

(Filipino respondent)
Interpersonal Ties and Low-End Employment

The early employment histories of the immigrants we interviewed were disproportionately characterized by jobs of low occupational prestige. Immigrants frequently move on to better jobs, however, after gaining local experience. The data reported in panel A of Table 1 reveal that reliance on interpersonal ties in finding employment is most prevalent for jobs of low occupational prestige. Of the 633 spells of employment described by our respondents, 224 (35%) were obtained with the assistance of interpersonal ties. Almost 60% (129/224) of these were jobs of low occupational prestige. By comparison, less than one-half (314/633) of all the spells of employment were of low occupational prestige. More than 40% (129/314) of the jobs of low occupational prestige were acquired with the use of interpersonal ties, whereas 30% (95/319) of the jobs of medium or higher prestige were acquired with the use of such ties.

In panel B of Table 1, we see that employment in jobs of low occupational prestige also associates with whether immigrants, up to and including their current job, had ever relied on interpersonal ties to find work. More than three out of four of the low-prestige jobs were held by persons who had found employment at least once with the use of interpersonal ties. By comparison, fewer than two out of three of the jobs of medium or higher prestige were held by persons who had used interpersonal ties at least once to find employment. Hence, both current and past reliance on interpersonal ties to find jobs are most characteristic of immigrants in jobs of low prestige.

As indicated in Table 1, the greater reliance on interpersonal ties in obtaining jobs of low prestige than in obtaining jobs of medium or higher prestige is statistically significant. Furthermore, when spells of self-employment are excluded (not shown), this relationship remains statistically significant at .01 and the magnitude of the percentage difference is larger because the spells of self-employment are disproportionately in occupations of low prestige whereas none of the self-employed jobs can be attributed to reliance on interpersonal ties (see notes 2 and 3).

Table 2 examines the relationship between reliance on interpersonal ties and subsequent job transitions (i.e., moves into new jobs). There are 472 uncensored job transitions. In panel A, reliance on interpersonal ties is examined with respect to the current job, that is, the job immediately preceding the transition into the destination job. In panel B, reliance on interpersonal ties refers to using interpersonal ties up to and including the current job. The patterns of these job transitions are almost identical to those reported in Table 1, wherein jobs, rather than job transitions, are reported. Whether we consider reliance on interpersonal ties only in the current job or in all past jobs, moves into jobs of low occupational prestige associate with reliance on interpersonal ties. As in Table 1, this relationship is statistically significant. Also as in Table 1, when we omit moves into self-
TABLE 1: Employment and Reliance on Interpersonal Ties

### Panel A
*(Row Percentages)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job-Search Methods: Impersonal and Reliance on Interpersonal Ties</th>
<th>Impersonal</th>
<th>Interpersonal Ties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect Assistance</td>
<td>Direct Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of low occupational prestige</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of reliance on impersonal versus interpersonal job search methods by employment category: S.E. = 3.8, t = 3.0, p < .01

### Panel B
*(Row Percentages)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job-Search Methods</th>
<th>Always Relyed on Impersonal Methods</th>
<th>Relied on Interpersonal Ties at Least Once</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of low occupational prestige</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of reliance on impersonal versus interpersonal job search methods by employment category: S.E. = 3.6, t = 3.8, p < .01

**Note:** Occupational prestige is measured with the Duncan socioeconomic index. Occupations with the lowest prestige score that falls into the "medium or higher" category include postal clerks. As explained in the text, our interviews indicate that this occupation represents a substantively meaningful divide between relatively poor and relatively good jobs for the immigrant groups under study. Furthermore, the prestige score of postal clerks (42) is the same as that of other white- and blue-collar skilled jobs such as welder, payroll clerk, and tailor. More details are provided in the text (see note 1).
TABLE 2: Job Transitions and Reliance on Interpersonal Ties

### Panel A
*(Row Percentages)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Impersonal Assistance</th>
<th>Interpersonal Ties Assistance</th>
<th>Total Assistance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impersonal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of low occupational prestige</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of reliance on impersonal versus interpersonal job search methods by employment category: S.E. = 4.4, t = 3.3, p < .01

### Panel B
*(Row Percentages)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Always Relied on Impersonal Methods</th>
<th>Relied on Interpersonal Ties at Least Once</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impersonal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of low occupational prestige</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of reliance on impersonal versus interpersonal job search methods by employment category: S.E. = 4.1, t = 3.8, p < .01

We might assume that any connection between using interpersonal ties to find jobs and increases in the rate of moves into low-end jobs is most pronounced when the new employer and employee are coethnics. This assumption is appealing.
because of immigrants' heavy reliance on interpersonal ties to find low-prestige jobs and because immigrants' initial social networks tend to be densely coethnic. Yet several of our interviews reveal how job searches in the coethnic domain of the economy can be undertaken without relying on interpersonal ties. Formal institutions such as ethnic newspapers and job agencies that specialize in supplying workers in labor-intensive fields such as ethnic restaurants provide readily accessible information about job openings. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic familiarity results in greater self-sufficiency in seeking work in the coethnic domain of the economy as compared to the larger multiethnic economy. Sometimes this advantage is as simple as being able to read native-language Help Wanted signs in the window of a shop or being able to walk into a place of business and competently ask if there is a job opening. For some, self-reliance in the job search is a way to avoid burdening friends and relatives who are busy earning their own living and to minimize the extent to which they become obliged to provide assistance to those who have helped them.

In metropolitan areas, restaurants and food markets generate a large demand for low-wage immigrant labor:

I called [a job agency specializing in finding workers for Chinese restaurants] and they asked, “You want a job?” I said yes.

(Chinese respondent)

Other job seekers like this Chinese respondent simply walk in:

It is easy... You know where there are Chinese restaurants... tell them you are experienced and if they need people, and you get the job.

Still others, such as these Chinese respondents, find jobs by reading ethnic newspapers:

* * *

Question: How did you find... the job in the _____ grocery store?
Answer: I read ads in Chinese newspapers and I went to interview.

* * *

Question: And how did you find the housekeeper job[s]?
Answer: Basically all are from Chinese newspapers. And I can only read Chinese newspapers when I just came here.

* * *

Answer: This sewing work is easy to find, everywhere. There are many clothing factories.

Question: Did you find the job through your friend or ads?
Answer: Yes, I found the job through ads.

Similar experiences are reported by Korean respondents. Excerpts from two interviews follow:
Question: How did you find all the jobs [at Korean grocery stores]?

* * *

Answer: So I got a job at laundry, I found that in newspaper... I didn’t have any acquaintance here in LA... so I saw newspaper every day.

Question: Korean newspaper?
Answer: Yes.

Such examples are not as common among Filipinos, but this is probably due to their modest representation in business ownership. Yet sometimes Filipinos can take advantage of being an ethnic insider. The following example is similar to what Gold (1992) found among Vietnamese refugees:

Question: OK, well, let's move to the next job, working for the _____ [social service organization]. How did you find that, hear about it, get it?
Answer: I looked at the phone pages and looked under Filipino and voila, there it is... So I called them up and scheduled for an interview.

Question: Was your boss there Filipino?
Answer: Yes, all the staff down there were Filipino.

There are both advantages and disadvantages associated with working for coethnics (Bailey & Waldinger 1991; Fernandez-Kelly & Garcia 1990; Kim & Hurh 1985; Portes & Rumbaut 1996; Portes & Zhou 1992; Sanders & Nee 1987; Yoon 1991; Zhou 1992). The advantages seem to be most important during the initial years after immigrating, when many immigrants undergo a difficult adjustment process. But as the postimmigration period extends and valuable local experience is gained (e.g., improvement of host society language skills, acquisition of job experience in the host society, increased familiarity with host society customs), many immigrants expand their job searches and increasingly find work in what Nee, Sanders, and Sernau (1994) call the mixed economy, wherein employers, employees, and customers tend to be more representative of the ethnic demography of the metropolitan area.

Why consider low-end employment beyond the coethnic domain of the economy if it means entering into a less familiar social environment and may require dependency on family, friends, and acquaintances for assistance? The most compelling reasons are probably those suggested by Nee, Sanders, and Sernau (1994). Low-skilled jobs outside the ethnic economy often provide better work conditions and higher pay than similar jobs in ethnic enterprises. Moreover, because the scale of the overall economy is greater than that of ethnic economies, the number of job opportunities and the chances for eventually moving into better jobs are greater when immigrants are able to pursue employment throughout the metropolitan economy (Light & Karageorgis 1994). To benefit from this advantage of scale, however, immigrants must be competitive. Work experience in the larger economy is a way to accumulate human capital that is valued by noncoethnic
employers. In addition, gaining firsthand experience in the larger economy helps workers understand what they must do to become more competitive. As the following excerpts indicate, interpersonal ties can serve as a bridge between immigrants and noncoethnic employers.

Question: And what was that job?
Answer: I was just a cashier for [a fast-food chain] restaurant.

Question: How’d you get it?
Answer: Hm, . . . my aunt’s girlfriend’s daughter is working there . . . and that’s how I have a job.

Question: Was she a Filipina?
Answer: Yes.

Question: Was the boss a Filipino?
Answer: No, he’s . . . Chinese.

(Filipino respondent)

Question: How did you find the [first] job?
Answer: When I first immigrated, I stayed at my brother’s house for a month. At that time, he could find a man in his church who had worked in [a shipping firm] before. So I could be introduced there.

Question: What was the nationality of the . . . owner?
Answer: German American.

(Korean respondent)

Answer: The present job was my friend’s . . . because he told [me] that the job was too hard for him . . . [and] he wanted to quit. . . . I asked him to give me the company manager’s phone and address. . . . After I interviewed, one week later they hired me.

Question: Where did your boss come from?
Answer: He is Japanese, but he has lived here for quite long.

(Chinese respondent)

Our interviews reinforce the view that interpersonal ties are used heavily in the job search. These ties constitute an important form of social capital that facilitates the economic adaptation of immigrants. Yet the data also reveal that other job-search strategies are common. Many immigrants are effective in finding work without relying on social contacts. Several of our interviews reveal how cultural and linguistic familiarity reduces the need to rely on others for help in finding work. In the following section, we estimate the impact of reliance on interpersonal ties in finding work on the rate of job transitions. We focus on transitions into jobs of low occupational prestige, but for completeness we also examine transitions into jobs of medium and higher prestige. We also consider whether the effect of reliance on interpersonal ties differs by the sex and ethnicity of the employee and by whether or not the employer and employee are coethnics.
Modeling the Influence of Interpersonal Ties on Job Transitions

The hypothesis developed earlier in this article is tested with event history methods. This analytical approach is highly useful in studies of longitudinal processes of categorical change (Tuma & Hannan 1984). More specifically, the methods are well suited to studies of job histories (Carroll & Mayer 1986). The estimates of the event history analyses are reported in Tables 3 and 4. Three percent of the cases \( N = 18 \) are lost due to missing data. Consequently, there are 615 job spells available for the event history analyses. The duration of a job is measured in months.

Six equations are specified in Table 3. First, we examine how the rate of transition into jobs of low occupational prestige, regardless of the ethnicity of the new employer, is influenced by reliance on interpersonal ties (218 transitions). We test the same relationship with the second equation, but only for the subset of jobs of low prestige wherein the new employer and employee are coethnics (100 transitions). The third equation models the other subset of transitions into low-prestige jobs, that is, jobs in which the new employer and employee are not coethnics (118 transitions). The fourth equation models job transitions into all types of coethnic employment, regardless of the prestige of the job (157 transitions). The fifth equation models the rate of transition into coethnic employment for jobs of medium or higher prestige (57 transitions). The sixth equation also analyzes moves into jobs of medium or higher prestige, but in this case the new employer and employee are not coethnics (183 transitions).

Reliance on interpersonal ties is measured three ways. In the primary analysis, it is measured as the percentage of an immigrant’s jobs, up to and including the current job, that were obtained with the assistance of interpersonal ties. Alternative analyses are conducted with reliance on interpersonal ties measured as dummy variables indicating (1) immigrants who found their current job with the use of interpersonal ties and (2) those who relied on interpersonal ties in obtaining at least one of the postimmigration jobs thus far worked. The equations are also reestimated after omitting moves into self-employment. At an appropriate place in the text, comparisons are made between the findings of the primary analysis and the those of the alternative analyses.

Studies of the socioeconomic progress of contemporary immigrants tend to control for demographic characteristics, human capital, language skills, and as much detail as possible about postimmigration experiences (e.g., Farley 1996; Nee, Sanders & Sernau 1994; Portes & Bach 1985; Zhou 1992). We control for the following: the number of prior jobs held in the host society (i.e., the U.S.); years since immigrating; dummy variables distinguishing those who have no formal education in the host society and those who earned a college degree before immigrating; a dummy variable indicating facility in the host society language (i.e., English); the natural logarithm of age (the logarithmic transformation is
specified to control for the likelihood that the rate at which job transitions take place gradually decelerates as age increases; we also specified alternative age functions [linear and quadratic] and found that the results are not sensitive to the functional form of the relationship); and dummy variables for sex, marital status, and ethnicity, with Chinese from the mainland serving as the reference group for the latter.

We also hold constant two characteristics of the current job that can affect the type and timing of subsequent job moves. These are dummy variables that distinguish (1) service-sector employment (excluding self-employment) and (2) self-employment. Spells of service-sector employment are disproportionately concentrated in jobs of low prestige, and these spells tend to be shorter in duration than other types of employment. As Cheng and Yang's (1996) study of Asians in Los Angeles reports, turnover is relatively high among workers in the low-end service (and operative) sector. Self-employment is held constant because the types of interpersonal ties we consider (exchanges of information, introductions, vouching for someone’s character) have limited impact on a person’s ability to establish a business (see notes 2 and 3). Also, self-employment is a highly sought-after goal for many immigrants, and once they achieve that status their subsequent employment activities usually concentrate on remaining self-employed (Min 1993; Sanders & Nee 1996). To control for economic conditions, years of recession in California (the findings are the same if the state unemployment rate is controlled) are distinguished with a dummy variable.

The coding of the dummy variables is indicated in Tables 3 and 4. Many of the independent variables are allowed to vary across jobs in the person-specific job histories (reliance on interpersonal ties, number of prior jobs, years since immigrating, no formal education in the U.S., English-language skills, age, service-sector employment, self-employment, and whether the state’s economy is in recession).

Our analysis, like many applications of event history methods, includes repeated events. Therefore, it is possible that the residuals are not independent with respect to time. For instance, residuals across adjacent events could be correlated, and the chances of such a correlation are probably higher when the events happen closer together, rather than farther apart, in time. In an effort to control for processes that could generate serial correlation, our model specifies the number of previous jobs, age at the start of a job, and the amount of time a person has spent in the U.S. (and part of the dependent variable is the length of time in a job). Specifying controls for an individual’s prior event history that can affect the time dependence of the hazard rate is an effective way to address serial correlation (Allison 1984). We also initially included an interaction between time in the U.S. and the number of previous jobs, but it was never significant.5
TABLE 3: Job Transitions As a Function of Reliance on Interpersonal Ties and Other Covariates: Event History Hazard Rates of Postimmigration Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equationsa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of jobs found through reliance on interpersonal ties</td>
<td>.579** (.192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of prior jobs in the U.S.</td>
<td>-.038 (.044)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in the U.S.</td>
<td>-.055** (.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education in the U.S. (none = 1)</td>
<td>.242 (.191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign college degree (yes = 1)</td>
<td>-.222 (.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-language skills (weak = 1)</td>
<td>.391 (.224)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged years of age</td>
<td>-.131 (.327)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (male = 1)</td>
<td>.220 (.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (single = 1)</td>
<td>.487** (.175)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-sector employee (yes = 1)</td>
<td>.398* (.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (yes = 1)</td>
<td>.026 (.248)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

Equation 1 of Table 3 yields findings that are consistent with our hypothesis. The parameter estimate of .579 indicates that, net of the controls, the hazard of a transition into a job of low prestige is approximately 80% greater \( \exp .579 = 1.78 \) for immigrants who have used interpersonal ties for every job change compared to immigrants who have never found a job through interpersonal ties. For those who have used interpersonal ties in finding half of their jobs, the odds of such a transition are about 30% greater \( \exp .579(.5) = 1.34 \) than for those who have never found a job through interpersonal ties. Reliance on interpersonal ties enables immigrants to be more informed in the job hunt and thereby expedites job transitions at the low end of the labor market.
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TABLE 3: Job Transitions As a Function of Reliance on Interpersonal Ties and Other Covariates: Event History Hazard Rates of Postimmigration Employment (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equations&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recession year (yes = 1)</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>-.123</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>-.043</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>-.587*</td>
<td>.748*</td>
<td>-.262</td>
<td>1.165*</td>
<td>.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>-.747**</td>
<td>-.868*</td>
<td>-.152</td>
<td>-.462</td>
<td>1.032</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>-.701*</td>
<td>-1.953*</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>1.148**</td>
<td>.469</td>
<td>1.200**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of transitions</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.*

<sup>a</sup> Transitions into the following types of jobs are modeled: equation 1 = all jobs of low occupational prestige; equation 2 = jobs of low occupational prestige (coethnic employers only); equation 3 = jobs of low occupational prestige (noncoethnic employers only); equation 4 = all employment with a coethnic employer; equation 5 = jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige (coethnic employers only); equation 6 = jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige (noncoethnic employers only).

<sup>b</sup> Reference category is mainland Chinese.

* p < .05  ** p < .01 (two-tailed test)

The rate of moves into jobs of low prestige also appears to be affected by some of the control variables. The odds of such a job transition decline by 5% for every year of residence in the U.S. The odds of transitions into jobs of low prestige are greater for single than for married persons, highest when the current job is in the service sector, and lowest for Taiwanese and Filipinos. The ethnic group differences are probably influenced by the tendency of immigrants from Taiwan to be more affluent than other immigrant groups and by the tendency of both Taiwanese and Filipinos to arrive relatively well versed in Western cultural and social practices.

The remaining equations in Table 3 allow us to test whether the effect of reliance on interpersonal ties in getting jobs varies depending on whether the new employer and employee are coethnics and whether reliance on interpersonal ties affects the rate of transitions into jobs other than those of low occupational prestige. Equations 2 and 3 continue to focus on job transitions into jobs of low prestige.
The new employer and employee are coethnics in equation 2, whereas they are not coethnics in equation 3.

The findings of equations 2 and 3 differ. When the new employer and employee are coethnics (equation 2), there is no net relationship between job transitions and reliance on interpersonal ties. In equation 3, by contrast, moves into low-prestige jobs are strongly related to the use of interpersonal ties in finding employment. The relationship in equation 3 is twice as strong as that found in equation 1. The $t$-ratio of the test that the coefficient in equation 3 is larger than the coefficient in equation 1 is 1.86, which is significant at the .03 level for a one-tailed test. It is clear that the finding in equation 1 is attributable to the job transitions examined in equation 3. When the employer and employee are from different ethnic groups, the odds of a transition into a job of low prestige are more than 200% greater ($\exp 1.21 = 3.4$) for those who have used interpersonal ties in finding every job compared to those who have never found a job through interpersonal ties. The comparable odds of such a transition are 80% greater ($\exp [1.21(.5)] = 1.8$) for those who have used interpersonal ties in finding half of their jobs compared to those who have never found a job through interpersonal ties. Reliance on interpersonal ties expedites job transitions at the low end of the labor market, but this relationship only obtains when the employer and employee are not coethnics.

If reliance on interpersonal ties fails to predict the rate of job transitions into low-end jobs under a coethnic employer (equation 2), what characteristics do predict such moves? Immigrants who have been in the host society for only a short time, who have held few jobs since immigrating, who are single, whose English skills are poor, and whose current job is in the service sector tend to make rapid moves into low-end employment under coethnic bosses. Net of these individual characteristics, immigrants from China are most likely to move into a job of low prestige under a coethnic boss. Immigrants from the Philippines are least likely to make such moves; this may be largely attributable to the low rate of business ownership among Filipinos.

The findings of equations 4 and 5 extend those of equation 2. That is, reliance on interpersonal ties in finding jobs is not significantly related to the rate of job transitions in the coethnic domain of the economy. This holds when all types of jobs under coethnics are considered (equation 4) and when only coethnic employment in jobs of medium or higher prestige is considered (equation 5).

The findings of equation 6, by contrast, do not extend those of equation 3. Whereas equation 3 shows that reliance on interpersonal ties is important to the process whereby immigrants move into jobs of low prestige beyond the coethnic domain of the economy, equation 6 reveals that moves into jobs of medium or higher prestige beyond the coethnic economy are not significantly associated with reliance on interpersonal ties. During the initial years after migrating, the social networks of immigrants tend to be mostly coethnic and family based. These
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networks have little pull in creating opportunities for prestigious jobs outside the coethnic domain of the economy. Who gets these jobs? Equation 6 indicates that it is the younger immigrants with competency in the English language who most often move into prestigious jobs beyond the coethnic domain of the economy. The odds of such moves are highest for Filipinos.6

That interpersonal ties appear to be unhelpful in finding jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige, while English-language skills strongly predict such job moves, suggests that the findings of equation 6 may be a generic feature of the labor market. That is, desirable jobs in the mainstream economy may be obtained largely through the acquisition of competitive skills and knowledge. Other processes, such as reliance on interpersonal ties, may be less important. Yet a good deal of research indicates that “who you know” can play a role in the attainment of prestigious jobs (e.g., see the review in Granovetter 1983). Perhaps one of the difficulties faced by immigrants is that their interpersonal ties tend not to reach high enough into the corporate sector to help them acquire good jobs (Petersen, Saporta & Seidel 2000).

Why does reliance on interpersonal ties fail to significantly affect moves into coethnic employment, whereas it strongly influences moves into low-prestige jobs when the employer and employee are not coethnics? Our interviews indicate that this finding is due to immigrants being comparatively more self-sufficient in learning about job opportunities and applying for positions when the prospective employer is a coethnic. Seeking jobs in the ethnic economy enables immigrants to use their own language and to seek work through formal mediums such as job listings in ethnic newspapers.

The multivariate analyses indicate that the closure properties of reliance on family- and ethnic-based interpersonal ties influence employment net of English-language skills. The findings also indicate that processes of ethnolinguistic closure, as indicated by English-language skills, affect employment net of reliance on interpersonal ties. As reported (see note 6), these relations tend not to interact. The dual impact of these closure processes is also suggested by an examination of the descriptive data. Reliance on interpersonal ties is more common when English skills are weak (42%) than when they are stronger (29%). This suggests that interpersonal ties are used to buffer the negative effects of the language barrier. Notwithstanding, in almost three out of five examples of weak English skills, immigrants get jobs through impersonal means such as consulting ethnic-language newspapers. This suggests that ethnolinguistic closure is also an important resource in the job search.
TESTING FOR INTERACTION EFFECTS OF RELIANCE ON INTERPERSONAL TIES

To test whether the effect of relying on interpersonal ties differs by sex, we added the interaction term to each of the six equations that were reported in Table 3. The interaction is significant in equations 1 through 4 and clearly not significant in equations 5 and 6. The findings for equations 1–4 are reported in Table 4. In addition to reporting the interaction and main effect terms, we also report the unique male and female hazard rates (and their standard errors). The difference in these two hazard rates is the interaction coefficient.

The significant interaction terms in equations 1 and 3 of Table 4 lead to the conclusion that the hazard rates of women are more strongly associated with reliance on interpersonal ties than the hazard rates of men. In equation 1, moreover, the interaction reveals that it is only among women that reliance on interpersonal ties expedites moves into jobs of low prestige. For women the estimated effect of interpersonal ties implies that, net of the controls, the hazard of a transition into a job of low prestige is more than 300% greater \((\exp 1.47 = 4.3)\) for those who have used interpersonal ties for every job change compared to immigrants who have never found a job through interpersonal ties. For those who have used interpersonal ties in finding half of their jobs, the odds of such a transition are about twice as great \(\exp [1.47(.5)] = 2.1\) as for those who have never found a job through interpersonal ties.

In equation 3, by contrast, the effect of interpersonal ties is significant for both men and women. Among men, the odds of a transition into a low-prestige job under a boss who is not a coethnic are about 40% greater \(\exp [.74(.5)] = 1.4\) for those who have used interpersonal ties in finding half of their jobs than for those who have never found a job through interpersonal ties. The comparable effect for women is approximately four times greater than that for men (170%) \(\exp [2.02(.5)] = 2.7\). This difference is significantly stronger for women, as shown by the interaction. The findings for women appear to be stronger in equation 3 than in equation 1, but the difference in the magnitude of these coefficients is not statistically significant.

Although the interaction of sex and reliance on interpersonal ties is also statistically significant in equations 2 and 4, it is only the difference in the male and female coefficients that is significant. Neither the male nor the female hazard rates are significantly different from zero. This means that one coefficient (males) is negative and nonsignificant whereas the other coefficient (females) is positive and nonsignificant. The difference between these two nonsignificant coefficients is large enough to reach statistical significance. In equation 2, therefore, with the interaction (Table 4) or without it (Table 3), the hazard of a move into a job of low prestige when the employer is a coethnic is not significantly associated with reliance on interpersonal ties. The same finding obtains with respect to equation 4, which models all job moves when the new employer is a coethnic.
The estimates reported in Table 4 suggest that women are more reliant on interpersonal ties than men. Among immigrants from Asia, it is common for women to be gainfully employed when they did not work outside the home prior to immigrating. A lack of employment and job-search experience may lead women to be more dependent than men on family and friends for help in the job search.

We also initially specified interactions between ethnicity and reliance on interpersonal ties (18 coefficients, 3 per equation), but these estimates were almost always nonsignificant, and none of the significant estimates replicated with the alternative measures of reliance on interpersonal ties. Consequently, the ethnic interactions were not retained. We do not know the degree to which the unreliability of these estimates may be attributable to the size of our sample, but the finding is consistent with the literature cited earlier that describes similar ways in which members of various immigrant groups use social ties in the labor market. We hope future studies will have larger samples with which to undertake tests of cross-group differences in the effects of reliance on interpersonal ties.

**ALTERNATIVE SPECIFICATIONS**

As reported earlier, we also conducted analyses after omitting moves into self-employment and with two alternative operationalizations of reliance on interpersonal ties. The findings reported in Tables 3 and 4 replicate when moves into self-employment are omitted. Likewise, the analysis that specifies reliance on interpersonal ties as whether or not at least one of the postimmigration jobs thus far worked was obtained with the use of interpersonal ties yields the same findings as those obtained from the analyses reported in Tables 3 and 4. A difference emerges, however, when reliance on interpersonal ties is operationalized as whether or not such ties led to the current job. In this case, the interaction between sex and reliance on interpersonal ties is not statistically significant in equation 3 (as reported in Table 3, the effect with both sexes combined is significant).

**Conclusions**

Inquiry into the social capital properties of ethnic networks is adding to our understanding of how immigrants become incorporated into host societies. In contributing to this literature, we examine how employment is affected by reliance on interpersonal ties in the job search. In treating ethnic networks as a potent source of social capital, the literature is making progress in explicating how attributes of social relations, as opposed to simply the attributes of individuals, affect the life chances of newcomers in their host society (Gold 1992; Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993; Sanders & Nee 1996; Waldinger 1996b). Ethnic networks generate group-based resources that assist individuals in mitigating the hardships associated with
TABLE 4: Interaction Models of Reliance on Interpersonal Ties and Sex: Event History Hazard Rates of Postimmigration Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equationsa</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main effect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of jobs found through reliance on interpersonal ties</td>
<td>1.470**</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>2.022**</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.325)</td>
<td>(.486)</td>
<td>(.455)</td>
<td>(.362)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction effect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex × percentage of jobs found through reliance on interpersonal ties</td>
<td>-1.371**</td>
<td>-1.325*</td>
<td>-1.286*</td>
<td>-1.020*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.386)</td>
<td>(.574)</td>
<td>(.535)</td>
<td>(.438)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex-specific effects of percentage of jobs found through reliance on interpersonal ties</strong></td>
<td>1.470**</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>2.022**</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.325)</td>
<td>(.486)</td>
<td>(.455)</td>
<td>(.362)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female hazard rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of prior jobs in the U.S.</td>
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<td>-.132</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.073</td>
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<td>(.044)</td>
<td>(.069)</td>
<td>(.060)</td>
<td>(.053)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male hazard rate</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in the U.S.</td>
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<td>-.097**</td>
<td>-.041*</td>
<td>-.101**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(.016)</td>
<td>(.028)</td>
<td>(.020)</td>
<td>(.021)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education in the U.S. (none = 1)</td>
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<td>-.437</td>
<td>.594*</td>
<td>-.367</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.192)</td>
<td>(.302)</td>
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<td>Foreign college degree (yes = 1)</td>
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<td>English-language skills (weak = 1)</td>
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<td>-.187</td>
<td>1.065**</td>
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<td>(.226)</td>
<td>(.514)</td>
<td>(.268)</td>
<td>(.286)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logged years of age</td>
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<td>-.841*</td>
<td>.367</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.332)</td>
<td>(.564)</td>
<td>(.423)</td>
<td>(.408)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (male = 1)</td>
<td>1.028**</td>
<td>.997*</td>
<td>1.025*</td>
<td>.846**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.292)</td>
<td>(.424)</td>
<td>(.411)</td>
<td>(.306)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (single = 1)</td>
<td>.467**</td>
<td>.996**</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.746**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.176)</td>
<td>(.283)</td>
<td>(.242)</td>
<td>(.215)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-sector employee (yes = 1)</td>
<td>.389*</td>
<td>.809**</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.426**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.163)</td>
<td>(.264)</td>
<td>(.222)</td>
<td>(.189)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed (yes = 1)</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.436</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.740*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.249)</td>
<td>(.498)</td>
<td>(.299)</td>
<td>(.360)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recession year (yes = 1)</td>
<td>-.105</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>.384</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.168)</td>
<td>(.262)</td>
<td>(.223)</td>
<td>(.208)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 4: Interaction Models of Reliance on Interpersonal Ties and Sex: Event History Hazard Rates of Postimmigration Employment (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Equationsa</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>-.612*</td>
<td>.743*</td>
<td>-.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.199)</td>
<td>(.288)</td>
<td>(.318)</td>
<td>(.235)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.788**</td>
<td>-.886**</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>-.495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.248)</td>
<td>(.344)</td>
<td>(.379)</td>
<td>(.262)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.745*</td>
<td>-1.986*</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>-1.166**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.300)</td>
<td>(.804)</td>
<td>(.400)</td>
<td>(.405)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of transitions</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N = 615)

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses.

The estimates reported in Tables 3 and 4 are reproduced if moves into self-employment are omitted from the analysis (see text).

Two alternative measures of reliance on interpersonal ties were also analyzed (see text), and the findings reported in Tables 3 and 4 are reproduced with one partial exception. That is, the interaction of sex and reliance on interpersonal ties is nonsignificant in Table 4, equation 3, when reliance on interpersonal ties refers only to the job immediately preceding a job change. The pooled effect for women and men (Table 3, equation 3), however, is statistically significant for this (and all) measure(s) of reliance on interpersonal ties.

For each of the three measures of reliance on interpersonal ties, the interaction of sex and reliance on interpersonal ties is nonsignificant in the equations that model moves into jobs of medium or higher occupational prestige (Table 3, equations 5 and 6). Consequently, these equations have been omitted from Table 4.

Transitions into the following types of jobs are modeled: equation 1 = all jobs of low occupational prestige; equation 2 = jobs of low occupational prestige (coethnic employers only); equation 3 = jobs of low occupational prestige (noncoethnic employers only); equation 4 = all employment with a coethnic employer.

Reference category is mainland Chinese.

*p < .05   **p < .01 (two-tailed test)

immigration. These resources, such as the dissemination of information that helps people to obtain employment, can strongly affect the well-being of immigrants.

Our findings suggest that one of the strengths of ethnic ties is that they contribute to the employment of immigrants throughout a metropolitan labor market. This process of diffusion has the potential to facilitate the incorporation of immigrants more fully into the social mainstream by increasing their economic opportunities while engaging them in a wider slice of society. This is somewhat
irrastic because reliance on family- and ethnic-based social networks has properties of a social closure process, yet such a strategy expands the minority group’s opportunities in the larger social system. Researchers working in New York City (Waldinger 1994, 1996b) and in Los Angeles (Light et al. 1995; Scott 1996) have drawn similar conclusions.

Once a process of usurpationary closure based on ethnic ties is established, it becomes self-reinforcing. Immigrants who are employed in the mainstream economy serve as conduits of information about opportunities outside the ethnic economy. This often informal exchange of information is an important resource for immigrants who are on the lookout for a new job. Such information expands the employment opportunities of those who might otherwise limit their job searches to the ethnic domain of the economy where they are most knowledgeable and self-reliant. In this sense, ethnic ties operate as bridge ties. As suggested by both Granovetter (1973) and Burt (1992), the bridging of formerly unconnected social networks increases the potential for information diffusion. Job seekers who have kin, friends, or acquaintances whose social connections are expansive are likely to receive more useful information and assistance than job seekers whose social network is poorly developed.

The incorporation of immigrants into the host society’s labor market is a dynamic process. As immigrants establish themselves in a new country, their experiences involve a trajectory of job transitions. These trajectories reveal important information about the underlying processes that are instrumental in determining how well newcomers fare in their host society. In the initial period after immigrating, it is common for immigrants to find employment in occupations of low prestige. According to our interviews, most immigrants with such jobs are constantly on the lookout for better opportunities. Although many voluntary job moves represent only marginal advancements, highly motivated immigrants often jump at such advancements inasmuch as each small step forward is seen as part of a longer-term cumulative process that can eventually result in substantial upward mobility. Consequently, the processes by which immigrants expedite their rate of job transitions have important implications for social mobility.

We find that reliance on interpersonal ties in finding work increases the rate of transitions into jobs of low prestige. This relationship, however, obtains only when the new employer and the job seeker are of a different ethnicity. Our interviews indicate that even recent immigrants are sometimes self-reliant in seeking work within the coethnic domain of the economy. By virtue of their knowledge of the home society’s language and customs, immigrants often find jobs quickly through impersonal means such as ethnic newspapers and employment agencies that specialize in finding labor for ethnic enterprises. Such processes reveal the importance of ethnolinguistic social closure.

Our findings also suggest that women are more reliant on interpersonal ties than men in the process of getting low-end jobs beyond the coethnic domain of
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the economy. This relative lack of self-reliance in the labor market may be attributable to women typically having less preimmigration employment and job-search experience than men. However, the sex interaction fails to replicate in one of the three analyses that specify alternative measures of reliance on interpersonal ties, and therefore this finding should be viewed with caution. We also remind readers that our analysis is limited to documented workers from Asia. Consequently, we do not know the extent to which the social capital and closure properties of interpersonal networks may help undocumented workers, or documented workers who are members of other large ethnic groups (e.g., Mexican immigrants), gain access to jobs beyond the coethnic domain of the economy. Waldinger’s (1996a) finding that Latinos are often employed in mobility traps in Los Angeles suggests the need to extend our analysis to other groups.

Up to a point, our findings are consistent with the spirit of Granovetter’s (1973) original statement. But while Granovetter (1973) focuses on prestigious jobs obtained by white men who are well endowed in human capital (see Granovetter 1983 for a review of related studies), we consider immigrant minorities of both sexes who are often disadvantaged in human capital. We are unable to test Granovetter’s strength-of-weak-ties argument because we find that critical exchanges of information often flow through chains of actors, chains that can be weak, strong, or ambiguous. In many cases, the chain character of these information exchanges makes it difficult to attribute the bridge tie to a particular individual. While this situation means that we cannot always attribute the bridging of a structural hole to a particular person or to a particular tie strength, we can observe that a bridge is established. From Burt’s (1992) perspective, this latter observation is more critical than is the strength of a tie. The scope of a network is strongly affected by its structural holes. When a hole is bridged, regardless of the strength of the tie (or ties) involved, the network becomes characterized by a greater flow of information.

The finding that interpersonal ties link prospective employees who are immigrants to prospective employers who are often noncoethnics is also partly consistent with the spirit of assimilation theory. Reliance on ethnic networks may facilitate utilitarian linkages to outsiders, which set in motion a process whereby immigrants expand their involvement with mainstream institutions and increase their association with members of various ethnic and racial groups. Gordon (1964), however, argued that processes of secondary structural assimilation can disperse ethnic workers into the larger labor market while society as a whole moves toward cultural pluralism. Furthermore, the major assimilation perspective that emerged during the early twentieth century was primarily based on multigenerational social psychological processes involving a gradual reduction in self-identifying as a foreigner accompanied by a gradual increase in self-identifying as a member of the host society (Park 1926; Park & Burgess 1921). Perusal of the literature reveals that little attention is paid to this fact in debates over the degree to which a set of
findings (usually based on cross-sectional data with no measures of social psychological processes) supports or challenges assimilation arguments (Sanders 2002a). We are also in a poor position to test the classical assimilation perspective. Notwithstanding, because the socioeconomic starting point of contemporary immigrants is much more diverse than it was in the wave of European immigrants that peaked almost a century ago, few researchers would argue that the classical assimilation perspective provides an adequate account of the adaptive processes undertaken by contemporary immigrants in the U.S. (Min & Bozorgmehr 2000; Nee & Sanders 2001b; Waldinger & Bozorgmehr 1996).

In conclusion, our research helps explain how family- and ethnic-based social networks, through their properties of social capital and closure, influence the incorporation of immigrants into their host society. These networks provide group-based resources that facilitate the advancement of immigrants in their new society. Because of linguistic and cultural competence, immigrants who move into jobs under a coethnic employer are often more self-reliant in the job search than those who seek work beyond the ethnic economy. In this way, ethnolinguistic closure encourages ethnic segmentation in the labor market. By contrast, reliance on social ties, another form of closure, extends job hunting into the wider domain of the labor market where prospective employers may be of any ethnicity. Reliance on social ties thereby provides a mechanism by which immigrants gain employment throughout the multiethnic metropolitan labor market.

Notes

1. Occupations are defined in accordance with the three-digit codes used in the 1990 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993). Occupational prestige is measured with the 1990 Duncan socioeconomic occupational prestige index (SEI). We define jobs as having low occupational prestige if their SEI score is lower than that of postal clerk, which has an SEI score of 42. Jobs with prestige scores of 42 or greater are defined as having medium or higher prestige. This operational definition is used for substantive reasons. Our interviews indicate that postal clerk jobs are highly sought after by male and female immigrants. The night shift in distribution facilities in Los Angeles is often made up of a largely Asian and Hispanic workforce. The reason that they are so concentrated in the night shift is a lack of seniority. Due to hiring and promoting criteria that are legally required to be applied universally (e.g., civil service exams), postal service jobs are viewed by many immigrants as one of the best opportunities for competing on an objective basis for jobs that provide a middle-class salary and benefits (Sanders 2002b). One of our informants summed up the attraction of working for the postal service in the following way:

   Question: What do you think is the main reason to recommend the post office to immigrants?

   Answer: It is because it does not need any special skill. However, we have to wait at least two to three years after passing the exam. Further, the payment level is almost the average, considering the other salary men or the small shop owners.
Occupations with the same SEI score as that of postal clerk include tailor, payroll clerk, and welder. Additional occupations of medium or higher prestige that appear frequently in our data include nurse, health care technologist/technician, bank teller, precision machinist, electrician, real estate salesperson, insurance salesperson, engineer, and accountant. Occupations of low prestige that are common in our data include sewing machine operator, sewing shop cutter, motel clerk, hotel and motel housekeeper, restaurant waiter, restaurant kitchen worker, sales worker in apparel shop, cashier, laundering/dry cleaning machine operator, assembler, day care worker, clerical/office clerk, swimming pool cleaner, and painter/paint-spraying machine operator. Minor adjustments in the SEI score that is used to distinguish jobs of low prestige from jobs of medium or higher prestige do not alter the findings of the multivariate analyses that follow.

The cross-sectional occupational distribution of Chinese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants in greater Los Angeles as of 1990 (obtained from the 5% PUMS file of the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993) reveals that approximately one-third of the immigrants held jobs that we define as having low occupational prestige. This figure is lower than that in our data, which it should be inasmuch as our data include the current job (the job reported in the census) as well as earlier jobs. Earlier jobs tend to be of lower quality than later ones.

2. The interpersonal ties we focus on are most relevant for immigrants seeking paid employment. Nonetheless, we include spells of self-employment in the analysis in order to be as complete as possible. Throughout the article we report how the findings differ when spells of self-employment are omitted from the analysis.

3. The transfer of information through interpersonal ties sometimes involved only the job seeker and one other person. As reported earlier, however, the flow of information often involved a chain of people. In many cases, the chain character of these information exchanges makes it impossible to attribute the provision of specific information to a particular individual. We distinguish between indirect ties, wherein jobs were obtained with the assistance of kin, friends, or acquaintances (e.g., exchange of information, introduction to the employer), and direct ties, wherein the job was actually provided by kin, friends, or acquaintances. Most jobs that are found with the assistance of interpersonal ties involved reliance on indirect ties. It is not surprising that we found no cases wherein self-employment was achieved simply by reliance on indirect ties. In principle, self-employment could be obtained through direct ties (being provided a business or the capital and other assistance needed to establish a business), but in our sample none of the direct ties resulted in the job seeker being set up in her or his own business.

4. We initially considered ways to estimate separate parameters for the extent to which immigrants relied on indirect ties and the extent to which they relied on direct ties (see note 3). The number of cases that used direct ties, however, was so small that we were unable to make this distinction in the multivariate model. Also, for a few cases that utilized indirect ties, information was exchanged along a chain of persons wherein a noncoethnic participated. It would be interesting to distinguish such cases, but they are so sparse that we were unable to do so.

5. A violation of the nonserial correlation assumption should not affect the hazard estimates (this assumes a well-specified model), but the standard errors can be biased
either upward or downward depending on whether serial correlation is negative or positive.

6. A reviewer asked for a test of the interaction between English-language skills and the use of interpersonal ties. It is only in equation 6 that this interaction approaches statistical significance. For this reason, the equations reported in the tables do not include the interaction. When the interaction is specified in equation 6, the finding is that the hazard of a move into a job of medium or higher prestige under an employer who is not a coethnic is comparatively low for those with both poor English skills and a history of relying on interpersonal ties to get jobs.

Another question raised by a reviewer was whether distinguishing between government employees and workers in the private sector would affect the findings. Our data include 45 moves into government jobs, and 38 of these are captured by the censoring event in equation 6. Therefore, it is only in equation 6 that we tried to address the question. Given the small number of such events, we decided to reestimate the equation without moves into government jobs and see if the findings change. They do not.

References
Campbell, Karen, Peter Marsden, and Jeanne Hurlbert. 1986. “Social Resources and Socioeconomic Status.” Social Networks 8:97-117.
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