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ABSTRACT

Young blacks today are not obtaining jobs. One reason for this situation is the lack of opportunity available to them to learn about specific job vacancies and to be selected by a hiring employer. Recent data suggest that black youth are as likely to attempt to find work as are white youth. The discrepancy between the employment prospects of black and white youth can be found in (1) the sources of job information open to them, (2) recruitment channels used by employers, and (3) the means by which employers evaluate the worthiness of candidates. Jobs are often found and vacancies filled by the informal networks among employers, their employees and business associates, and the friends and relations of those intermediaries. To the extent that racial segregation in housing, schooling, and employment continue to prevent young blacks from having access to the information channels used to fill job vacancies and to the extent that employers continue to demand greater degrees of sponsorship for unknown black youth than for whites, the gap between the employment prospects of white and black youth will remain. (CT)

Personal Networks of Opportunity in Obtaining Jobs: Racial Differences and Effects of Segregation

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The U.S. economy--even with all of the publicly produced employment and job training programs that have been organized in recent years--no longer seems to have a place for the young black male.

Consider these facts: a generation ago, more than two-thirds of black male youth aged 18 to 19 had a paid job during any given week. This year, the figure will drop to nearly one-third. A generation ago, a majority of Negro boys 16 or 17 years old had jobs. By 1975, the figure dipped below 0% and it has stayed there. Meanwhile, over the same period, the proportion of white boys and young men the same age who had jobs remained almost unchanged. And although nearly every year the fraction of white girls and young women who have been finding employment has been rising, the proportion of black female teenagers employed at a paying job has been declining. These trends in racial differences in employment among youth have been even more dramatic in the last five years, as can be seen in Figures 1 to 4.

Certainly, our society and its economy have gone through much structural evolution during the past 3 decades, and an explanation of why so many fewer young blacks are gaining job experiences at an early age today is beyond the scope of my ambitions here. But the fact is that young blacks today are simply not obtaining jobs. In this paper, I would like to focus on just one of the factors that might be responsible for the racial differences in the job-finding abilities of white and black youth: the opportunities available to them to learn about specific job vacancies and to be selected by a hiring employer.

The Ingredients of Obtaining Employment

What are the ingredients of a successful transition between not having a job and having one? Briefly, there must be a personal value in becoming employed (that is, other goals must not dominate in all circumstances); there may be--but there need not be--effort expended to become employed (the initiative may be the employer's); there must be information about the physical location and characteristics of a job opportunity; fourth, the applicant must have the attributes in demand by the employer; and, finally, the employer must somehow obtain the assurance that the applicant has those attributes.

The issue, then, is where do current cohorts of black youth fall behind the whites with whom they are in collective competition: is it mainly in terms of the valuation of employment; the effort expended to seek work; information about job opportunities; attributes of employability; or being able to assure employers that they have the necessary attributes?

I would like to dispose quickly of value and effort and concentrate attention on the latter three. Black youth presumably value employment at least as much as whites; black family incomes are lower; more blacks marry and have children and other dependents at an earlier age; and consumption desires are no less for blacks than for whites.

Effort is a rather amorphous quality, but it might be measured by whether or not a person not employed but valuing employment actually took actions to find work--such as looking through classified advertisements, going to a place of business to ask about vacancies, or seeking the counsel of friends or relatives. Using such a definition, recent data suggest that black youth are as likely to attempt to find work as are white youth. For example, in 1977, among male youth 16-21 not in school, and not in a

paying job, 52% of the blacks and 51% of the whites made some effort to find work during the previous week (U.S. Department of Labor, 1975; computed from Table A-7).

We must look to the three remaining elements of our equation--personal attributes, job information, and employer confidence or assurance--for the real differences between black and white youth employability.

Academic Ability and Other Personal Attributes

Most researchers who have examined racial differences in occupational attainment have placed a great deal of emphasis on variations in black and white personal attributes. Mainly they have hypothesized that cultural differences in socialization patterns and differences in the productivity of their schooling experience are the factors responsible for racial differences in schooling outcomes. In these studies, the outcome most often specified has been educational accomplishment. Whether described in terms of test score performance, grades, or years of school completed, education has often been described as black youth's greatest handicap in the quest for socio-economic status.

Other research, including some fairly rigorous work by Jencks and his colleagues (Jencks, et al., 1972), has found that although academic ability and educational attainment are both among the strongest predictors of occupational rewards that we can identify, nevertheless much more variation in later-life attainment remains unexplained by such factors. Most individual variation in such outcomes as earned income, and many group differences as well, may have nothing to do with the respective academic abilities or credentials involved.

The median educational attainment and school performance statistics

of white women, for example, equals and by many measures exceed that of white men; yet the occupational attainments of full-time working women are commonly and clearly understood to have been restricted by structural barriers entirely unrelated to educational attainments. And, it may be pointed out, in recent years the school attainments of black and white youth have become more similar at the same time the rates of employment of these same individuals have become more divergent.

Although most jobs do require some reading and numerical skills, and although undeniably there remain large differences in the mean achievements in these areas of black and white high school graduates, for most jobs such attributes only constitute a part of the requisites for successful performance. Employers look for other attributes as well: adaptability to new tasks and procedures, reliability, and others perhaps particularly applicable under certain situations--personality traits useful in sales work, mechanical skills or aptitudes important in skilled labor, physical strength valuable for other blue-collar activities.

Assessments by Employers of Candidate Attributes

In these areas, where our measurement capabilities are so much weaker, an employer's evaluation of a potential respondent must be much more subjective. With these, it is not so much a candidate's actual attributes that count, but, more importantly, how he or she is perceived in these regards by the hiring agent. Prejudice and stereotyping will inevitably enter in whenever information that an employer would consider reliable is absent. A survey of major employers conducted in 15 large cities in the late 1960s found that between 1/5 and 1/2 of all personnel officials admitted to believing blacks to be less reliable, likely to produce increased

employee theft, likely to produce more employee intransigence, and less willing to accept authority than white workers (Rossi, et al., 1968; Table 7.11).

Apart from the employer's own subjective impressions, how do judgments regarding the attributes of applicants get made? Two elements stand out: the prior employment record of the applicant--for whom worked, what kind of job, how stable the employment history--and personal references regarding the applicant's character. As a matter of fact, these two factors were the identical ones named by the same major employers discussed above as the factors they considered most important in selecting employees from among applicants. Previous job experience and recommendations were named by more employers than those who named "performance on tests of ability" regardless of the skill level of the job being applied for (Rossi, et al.; Table 7.10).

Given the fact that employers tend to regard blacks, and probably black male youth in particular, as less likely to possess the character attributes valued in an employee, it would seem to be even more crucial for black applicants than for whites for them to be able to produce (1) a stable prior employment record (most difficult when only 18% of black youth 16 and 17 years old have jobs); and (2) names of persons who could provide recommendations who would be the kind of persons whose opinions would be most respected and trusted by employers.

It is here that we begin to see the tremendously large role that racial segregation of U.S. society must play in the allocation of employment opportunities. The recommendations that job seekers provide for employers come primarily from three sources: friends and relatives of the applicant; employers from prior jobs; and intermediate agencies such as employment

agencies and student placement offices that function as filters and allocators of job opportunities.

All three of these sources reflect society's racial segregation. Blacks, of course, have overwhelmingly black relatives; because of widespread social patterns of housing, education, and voluntary activities, friendships are also largely within-race. In previous work, I have documented the extent of racial segregation in employment, in terms of the places of business where whites and blacks work (Becker, 1978). Also, I showed that the racial composition of higher-level workers, presumably those responsible for passing on recommendations for lesser skilled workers, is closely associated with the proportion of blacks at lower organizational levels.

And finally, there is even a fair amount of racial segregation among the staffs of employment agencies and counseling services who serve as formal intermediaries for employing--segregation that most certainly parallels the racial composition of their job-seeking clientele. The personnel of many large urban public bureaucracies and state employment agencies include a high proportion of blacks. They serve as conduits for jobs that include a high proportion of black incumbents--laboring, service jobs, jobs with city and state agencies, and so on.

Private employment agencies, as with private industry in general, I expect has a "whiter" staff and refers to jobs with employers with "whiter" work forces. It is no surprise that blacks more often than whites look for jobs through state employment agencies while the reverse is true for the racial composition of job-seekers who use private employment agencies. To the extent that racial segregation exists within each of these sources of evaluation, combined with the frequent racial stereotyping on the parts

of the largely white controllers of organizational hiring decisions, the black applicant is at a disadvantage in part because of the racial identity of his sources of recommendation.

To summarize this view of employer assessment of candidate qualifications: employers evaluate the non-quantifiable attributes important in the selection process by relying on personal judgments and the sponsorship of others; the employer will judge this evaluation to be more reliable the more confident the employer is that the source is using the same standards as himself; he is apt to trust a white more than a black, all things being equal; and white applicants are more likely to be able to provide a white evaluator than are black applicants, given the segregated acquaintanceship patterns and job-referral patterns that exist today.

Information From the Employer's Side: Recruitment Practices

Much of this discussion of employer assessment has been speculative at best. There has been almost no study of employer recruitment practices, particularly in the assessments they make of candidates whose recommendations come from different sources. What evidence concerning employer recruitment practices we do have, however, suggests that the channels of referral that employers use to obtain the names of possible candidates for vacancies also bias the recruitment of new employees towards white job-seekers.

Both of the published studies concerning employer recruitment practices I was able to locate indicate that the method of recruiting new employees most frequently used is obtaining referrals through current employees. Major employers in the 15-city study mentioned above as well as 600 employers in medium-sized cities studied for the United States Employment Service

recruited through current employees more frequently than any other method. More importantly, referrals from current employees was regarded as the "most effective" method, in one case by employer evaluation, in the other in terms of the proportion of firms using the method who obtained employees successfully through the method (Rossi, et al., 1968; U.S. Department of Labor, 1976).

The 15-city study found that recruitment through employees was particularly useful for recruiting lower-skilled blue collar workers although such methods were reported in use by nearly 3/4 of the firms recruiting white collar employees as well. The Employment Service study found current employees to be the major source of recruitment both by larger employers and smaller ones, with smaller companies reporting a higher level of usage of this method.

By using current employees to suggest names, employers contribute to the perpetuation of racial segregation across places of employment: white employees will more likely recruit whites; black employees to recruit blacks. Although we do not have data to support this, it might even be claimed that employers who recruit blacks might be more likely to use current employee recruitment methods than those who recruit whites. We would expect that white employers, given the stereotypes discussed above, are more concerned about obtaining information about the reliability of black applicants than they are of whites and, given their own friendship networks and cultural evaluations of other people's opinions, employers may be reluctant to trust the judgment of a black person's reference unless this person is an individual whom they already know, such as a current employee.

In the last several pages we have been examining employee recruitment from the employer's perspective. From this perspective the decision of whom

to hire is largely controlled by the employer's assessment of the value of recommendations regarding the attributes of people who have turned up as applicants, in one way or another. To a limited extent, the employer also controls the result by the methods he or she uses to recruit candidates--to locate applicants. I have tried to suggest that in both respects--the evaluation by employers of the evaluations of applicant attributes by the sources of recommendation; and the pattern of referral and recruitment used to obtain applicants--employers, particularly those with largely white work forces, are unlikely to obtain black applicants and unlikely to hire those who do appear.

Information from the Job-Seeker's Perspective: The Role of Personal Networks in The Job-Search

We now need to examine the question of employability from the job-seeker's perspective, particularly with respect to the information sources he is in contact with that would enable him to learn about possible job vacancies and the characteristics that such jobs might have.

The process of job-search and job-finding is often quite complex. It involves elements that are nearly unmeasurable, such as the general understandings a job-seeker may develop from friends about which companies are more apt to hire young people walking in off the street and for which ones you need inside connections. It involves complexities that are rarely considered when job-finding information is recorded in labor market surveys, such as whether influence had to be used even to become eligible for consideration or whether it was merely a passing acquaintance who alerted a job-seeker to a possible opening--without whose chance comment, nevertheless, that person might easily never have heard about the opening. Additionally, one's friends may be able to provide assessments of the work environment that a

job provides--for example, whether other blacks feel comfortable working there. In other words, the ways that one's personal channels of information and acquaintanceship enter in to the allocation of jobs to job-seekers is multitudinous.

Unfortunately, in describing what we now know about the job-search methods of black and white youth and their effectiveness we are limited to the ways that current research describes the phenomenon. Typically, respondents choose from among several categories of methods used to find work: for example, "direct application," "friends and relatives," "private employment service," or "school counseling service." It is generally up to the respondent to determine whether or not a particular category played any part in his effort. Given this methodological background, we know only a limited number of facts.

There are two major empirical sources of descriptive information about job-finding--a 1973 Current Population Survey with a job-search self-administered questionnaire appended to it (U.S. Department of Labor, 1975); and the longitudinal survey of labor force behavior conducted by the Department of Labor, the Parnes survey (for job-finding information specifically, see Saunders, 1974). Both of these report that although "direct application" was the method most frequently used to look for work, younger people were more likely to use "friends and relatives" than they were to claim "direct application" as a method used. Also, overall, blacks are slightly more likely to use informal personal contacts to look for jobs than are whites, according to these surveys. Much of the racial differences, though, can be accounted for by occupational differences--blue collar and service jobs are more often filled by people who said they found their job through friends

or relatives than are white-collar jobs (U.S. Department of Labor, 1975; Table C-2).

The category of "friends and relatives" was analyzed intensively by Harvard Sociologist Mark Granovetter in an in-depth study of the job-finding process in a small sample of professional and managerial men in the Boston area (Granovetter, 1974). Granovetter's influential work emphasized a number of points about personal networks and their place in the allocation of jobs.

First, he found for his sample that men who obtained jobs through the information or the personal intervention of friends obtained better jobs than those people who used only formal sources of recruitment like employment agencies or who directly applied to an employer without any suggestion from a personal source. By better, Granovetter meant jobs that paid more and that these were jobs men were more satisfied with, expected to remain longer employed, and so on.

Secondly, Granovetter suggested that the acquaintance networks most likely to yield jobs were those that were loose-knit networks of "weak ties" rather than strong ones. In other words, people who knew a wide variety of other people (who did not necessarily know one another) and people who had personal associations with individuals whom they might see only on a rare occasion were the job-seekers most likely to be able to use their networks in obtaining their job.

Information about jobs, in other words, is widely diffused and the more one is able to tap into diverse information networks the more likely one will happen upon a job opening in one of these many networks that happens to arise at the time one is looking for work. Similarly, interpersonal networks of former work associates are more useful, according to Granovetter, than are close family members, since they are apt to be in information

situations more appropriate to the job-hunter's immediate needs and, again, in a wider variety of such situations.

Granovetter's work made a strong case for the value of interpersonal networks, but it is a theory tested on a relatively unique class of people--people whose personal networks may allow them to tie in to the hiring process at a fairly influential level. One might expect, on the other hand, that, in general, people's friendships, regardless of how "non-overlapping" they may be, may be just as excluded from significant amounts of job-relevant information as the job-seeker himself. As a matter of fact, people who rely on friends with little resources themselves may unnecessarily restrict their own job possibilities to the less imaginative alternatives. By ignoring those techniques that might require pioneering into new parts of the metropolitan area, different kinds of jobs, talking to agencies or employers who seem distant, or employers who rarely employed "people like themselves," they may end up with a job of lesser quality than if they had broadened their search.

One national retrospective study has attempted to study whether job-finding by personal networks led to better jobs than the use of formal or direct techniques. Ornstein reported for separate large national samples of white and black men (born between 1929 and 1938) that formal and direct methods were in fact better job-search methods, than was the use of personal contacts. This was more clearly so for whites than for blacks, but the result held with many background variables such as parental socio-economic status and educational attainment held constant (Ornstein, 1976).

On the other hand, even such multivariate techniques as Ornstein employed cannot control on the intangible differences between job-seekers using various methods. It may be, for example, that persons who find their jobs

through friends have somewhat less confidence in themselves than those who use more direct methods or formal channels and could not have obtained a job using other methods anyway.

Moreover, it seems unlikely that formal methods or personal networks or any other classification would prove to be uniformly superior to other methods for all situations, for all combinations of personal attributes and labor market conditions. Clearly, it does seem likely that personal networks with less resources may be inferior not only to personal networks with greater resources, but to methods for the same individuals that would expose them to a wider variety of job-relevant information.

Even Granovetter's concept of the significance of "weak-tie" networks may be situation-specific: As Ericksen and Yancey point out in their study of the consequences of using personal networks among a heterogeneous sample in Philadelphia, for people with fewer marketable credentials what may be more important than the breadth of the personal network is the commitment and motivation of close friends and family relationships to expend a great deal of effort on the job-seeker's behalf. They found, in opposition to Granovetter, that people with strong ties (people who saw their relations and friends most often) and with connected networks (whose friends knew one another) were more apt to obtain their current job by personal networks than were those with weaker ties and non-connected networks (Ericksen and Yancy, 1976). In other words, what may be important for most people is not the extent of job-information networks into which they may be tied, but the effort and commitment of the people they do know in helping them find a job. This may be particularly true for young people, who are most likely to get help from relatives; and possibly for blacks as well.

Personal Network Effectiveness and Racial Differences in Employment

I would like to return now to the topic we left some time ago: to what extent inadequate information networks per se may account for the relative inability of young blacks to find employment.

The value of personal networks for a group of individuals is a function of two factors: (1) the job-relevant resources held by persons in those networks--primarily information about and influence in the job market; and (2) the quality of alternative search strategies that may be available. The value for black youth of using personal networks is reduced because their networks are so information- and influence-poor; but at the same time, the value of the personal network job-search strategy is increased because many other job-search channels also have many disadvantages.

Most black youth suffer, first of all, because social class in America plays such an important role in the opportunity structure. White youth from backgrounds of limited advantage--although there are proportionately fewer of them--also lack the job-contacts and information-orientations of youth from homes of greater material wealth. But beyond this, black youth have fewer informational resources because our social networks are so race-segregated.

From studies of the stratification system such as Jencks' (1972) analysis of occupational mobility and Farley's (1977) examination of social-class residential segregation, it is apparent that white youth from poorer circumstances are likely to have friends, relatives, and contacts from prior jobs that cross class boundaries. But this is not so for blacks. Completely apart from class, it is clear that we have much within-class segregation in employment, housing, and schooling. Combined with the lower level of job resources in the black community, the racial segregation that exists erects further barriers against informational opportunities reaching the largest

majority of black youths in search of employment. What might happen if black job-seekers' prior experiences had included whites as colleagues can be shown by the work of Crain (1970). Crain studied black adults who had attended desegregated schools in Northern cities (prior to 1954) and compared their later careers with blacks who had attended predominantly black schools in those cities. He found that blacks who had attended desegregated schools were more likely to be holding jobs in occupations that traditionally had had few blacks. This was true even controlling on the general socio-economic level of the occupation.

The Effectiveness of Different Job-Finding Methods: Some Data

Since school desegregation has progressed only minimally since Crain's respondents were in school, most young black job-seekers may still have only black friends and still may have little inside information about where good jobs may be had. Yet what other job-search strategies are available to them, and how useful are these alternatives in any event?

A self-administered questionnaire on the job-search methods of people who began their current job in the previous year was included in the Census Bureau's January, 1973, monthly Current Population Survey. Among other data, this file contains information on the method the respondents judged most helpful (most useful) in finding his or her current job. The hourly wages and occupational characteristics of the current job of the sample can also be compared with the hourly wages and occupational level of the immediately preceding job, if any, to see whether the job search led to an improvement in these two aspects of employment. I will discuss only the data for job-finders aged 16 to 24, who constitute about half of the survey sample.

Table 1 shows the methods that the black and white youth under age 25 felt were most helpful to them in obtaining their current job. Remember, this file contains information only on successful job-seekers. Also, the

categories used here are mutually exclusive according to the emphasis placed on the search-process by the respondent and not according to the degree to which personal networks would be judged by an outside observer as the most significant factor leading to the new job.

I have grouped the methods into three categories: first, those that necessarily involve a personal contact such as a friend or relative; secondly, those involving the use of a formal intermediary. For these, conversations with friends and associates may have been responsible for leading the job-seeker to this source, but the respondent, in any event, considered the formal agency to be the most operative factor in his obtaining the job. The third group includes the methods of direct application and responding to classified advertisements, methods which are least likely to imply a significant involvement of social networks in the choices that were made. (It is clearly possible, however, that a friend's suggestion to apply at a particular employer was more significant in the overall job-finding process than the respondent gave credit for.)

Two major racial differences stand out. A much higher proportion of black youth than of whites found certain of the formal intermediaries most useful in their recent job hunt. This group includes public employment agencies; community organizations such as the Urban League and welfare agencies (and presumably others although only these two were mentioned in the questionnaire form); and taking a civil service test or filing an application for a federal, state, or local government job. As I suggested earlier, agencies such as these, often having a heavily black staff themselves, in many cities have a reputation for being approachable by blacks in need of employment and for being successful in placing black people in jobs.

The other major racial difference in this table is that a much higher proportion of white youth obtain their job by being offered one, without

even taking any actions to find one! This is perhaps the best indication in these data of the superiority of personal networks for young white job-seekers in comparison to young blacks. For such a job offer to occur, the personal network must include, not necessarily information about job-openings, but rather it must contain other individuals who themselves control the right to make job offers. Young blacks are certainly much less in a position to take advantage of these job contacts.

A third point should be noted from this table. Although the absolute percentage differences are small, white youth are relatively more than twice as likely as blacks to report private employment agencies useful for finding their current job. This suggests that it is not necessarily that black youth are most successful when appealing to formal institutions for assistance in job-finding, but that the characteristics of the formal intermediary are important as well.

Of all the methods presented to the respondents, more black youth say that they got their job by walking in off the street and applying directly to their employer than report any other method as the most helpful. It may be asked, however, whether walking in off the street led to better jobs among these job finders than did using other methods "successfully." Of course, with a population with the high unemployment rates of young blacks, any job may be a big step up. Still, it may be useful to know among the successful job-seekers which methods led to jobs of higher income and other indicators of job quality. Since it may be the case that different methods are used by people with different "employabilities," we might ask this question in a different way. How much improvement over the respondent's previous job did this job search method bring?

We can answer this question for our Current Population Survey sample using as our outcome variable the increase over the previous job in the

hourly wage earned by the worker and the increase in the occupational prestige score from last to present job. Table 2 shows these results for white and black youth. Since this table is based on youth with prior job histories, the results apply to a more limited population than we considered in Table 1. About 23% of the blacks and 20% of the whites considered in the previous table are eliminated (in addition to those excluded because of missing wage or prestige data).

Since the number of black youth surveyed here was limited in any event, these reductions bring the number of blacks in Table 2 to under 200 cases. Statistically significant differences between blacks and whites are noted. I shall try to limit my discussion to those differences (black vs. black or black vs. white) that, if not significant, are at least sizeable.

First, although more young black job-finders claim to have used direct methods for finding their job than any others, those who used the method found jobs with lower mean occupational prestige than blacks who used most other methods. Their prestige increment was not only negative but also significantly worse than that of whites using the same job-finding method. Wage increments, on the other hand, were even somewhat better for blacks using direct methods than for blacks using some of the other strategies.

Successful use of formal intermediaries resulted in the opposite pattern: generally good increments to occupational prestige, but only slight increases in the average hourly wage. Still, the prestige increment for blacks was not as high as for whites using the same general method. As we noted from Table 1, though, whites used a different mix

of formal intermediaries than did blacks. This is likely to be one cause of the black-white difference in the efficacy of formal intermediaries, although since the number of cases is so small, it is hard to be sure. (For example, whites who used public employment agencies fared no better than did blacks using this source to find their job.)

Thus, direct methods and formal methods have ambiguous results: in one respect they seem to have produced better jobs for blacks using them; in the other respect they seem inferior to other methods. This is not true for the other three categories of job-finding methods: for these the earnings and prestige results were consistent.

Let us consider the use of friends as a primary job-finding method: This method was associated with decreases of 2.7 points in prestige for black youth. This was significantly inferior to the 3.1 point increment gained by white youth using their friends. The mean wage gain for blacks of 2 cents per hour was also much lower than for whites (36¢) and lower than those for blacks using other methods as well.

Although friends were not useful job-finding contacts for black youth, their relatives were. Blacks using relatives gained 68¢ per hour in wages over their previous job, in comparison to the 2¢ per hour gain by blacks using friends. However, whites who used relatives made even slightly greater gains than blacks. But the whites did not do significantly better than whites who got jobs through their friends; whereas for black youth, there was a large difference, along both earnings and prestige dimensions.

Of all the methods used to obtain employment, the one that was most advantageous for blacks was the method of not looking for work at all! That is, those blacks who were offered employment without going out to

find it obtained jobs with the highest prestige increments and the second highest earnings increments of the five categories.

For both prestige and earnings, the increments for blacks who were offered their job by employer initiative was even higher than the increments to whites getting their job this way (4.6 vs. 3.1 prestige points and 54¢ per hour vs. 28¢). Even greater racial differences in increments show up in the sample of job-finders over age 25, again with blacks holding the advantage.

In assessing these results for their implications, we must remember that we are not dealing here with an experimental design. That is, it may be that blacks offered a job by an employer would have obtained prestige and earnings increments regardless of how they eventually found their current job. Perhaps, in other words, they are more "employable." And perhaps, as I suggested earlier, black youth whose friends helped them find employment may not have had an opportunity to find <u>any</u> work if they had relied solely on other methods.

Such an explanation for these results would be consistent with data indicating, for example, that blacks using friends to get their current job started off with fewer resources than other black youth; or that blacks who were offered employment without a job search had more "qualifications." Although we are dealing here with "weak tests of strong hypotheses," we can report that the educational attainments of the job-seekers finding jobs through different methods are not very different, except for the greater educational attainments of youth using formal intermediaries. In fact, the trends are opposite to the pattern predicted by the "differential attributes" hypothesis: blacks finding jobs through friends started with greater educational attainments, on the

average, than those who were offered their job by an employer without their engaging in any job-search effort.

This suggests that the five groups of black job-finders distinguished in Tables 1 and 2 differ more because of their access to different social networks of varying job-related resources than because of corresponding differences in attributes or employability. Blacks who are known by employers or who can be recruited by short chains of intermediaries in whom the employer has great confidence are likely to experience greater gains in occupational rewards than those whose search networks are limited by the information-poor conditions of their friends. On the other hand, black relatives, in spite of their generally limited job-finding resources, are helpful as well. In most cases they are older than the job-seekers' "friends," and they have had more job experience and have had an opportunity to build up the trust of employers. But probably a greater part of their success is due to their greater effort and interest in their younger relative's economic security. Recall that our data show relatives to be useful for white youth as well.

Summary and Conclusions

The Current Population Survey data which we have been examining in these last pages may seem to have carried us somewhat afield from the earlier discussion. The question raised at the start of the paper was whether a partial explanation for the discrepancy between the employment prospects of black and white youth can be found in (1) the sources of job information open to them, (2) the recruitment channels used by employers, and (3) the means by which employers evaluate the worthiness of candidates who become known to them. Against this explanation, primarily an

"opportunity structure" argument, we contrasted the point of view that black and white youth bring with them to the job-hunt objectively different capacities to perform work for employers.

Much of the argument that the opportunity structure plays an important role in the allocation of jobs to young people has been based on conjectures combined with appeals to widely known or easily presumed facts. We have cited empirical literature where any has been available. And finally, with respect to the effectiveness of job-finding methods for black and white youth, we contributed slightly to our knowledge of relevant facts.

But clearly, the answer to the questions posed at the beginning remain largely without empirical basis. We will not really know how the social network of job-relevant information functions to allocate a disproportionate share of youth employment to whites, or to what extent black youth's lack of employer-respected references makes a difference, until more detailed research is done in this area. The most detailed data we have available about the job-finding process, on any large sample of blacks and whites, simply does not contain the kind of information about the job-allocation and job-search processes that we need to address the questions raised here.

The hypothesis, however, remains plausible. Obtaining a job requires much more than having certain attributes like the ability to read and write. It requires information about where, when, and how different job opportunities arise and are filled (and particularly for the "best" jobs, since you have to "hear early"); and it requires that one's references and "sponsorship" impress the potential employer regarding the attributes the employer deems important.

Jobs are often found and vacancies filled by the informal networks among employers, their employees and business associates, and the friends and relations of those intermediaries. To the extent that racial segregation in housing, schooling, and employment continue to prevent young blacks from having access to the information channels used to fill job-vacancies and to the extent that employers continue to demand greater degrees of sponsorship for unknown black youth than for whites, the gap between the employment prospects of white and black youth will remain.

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Figure 1: Proportion of Males, 18-19 Years Old, Employed During an Average Week, by Race, 1948-1977.

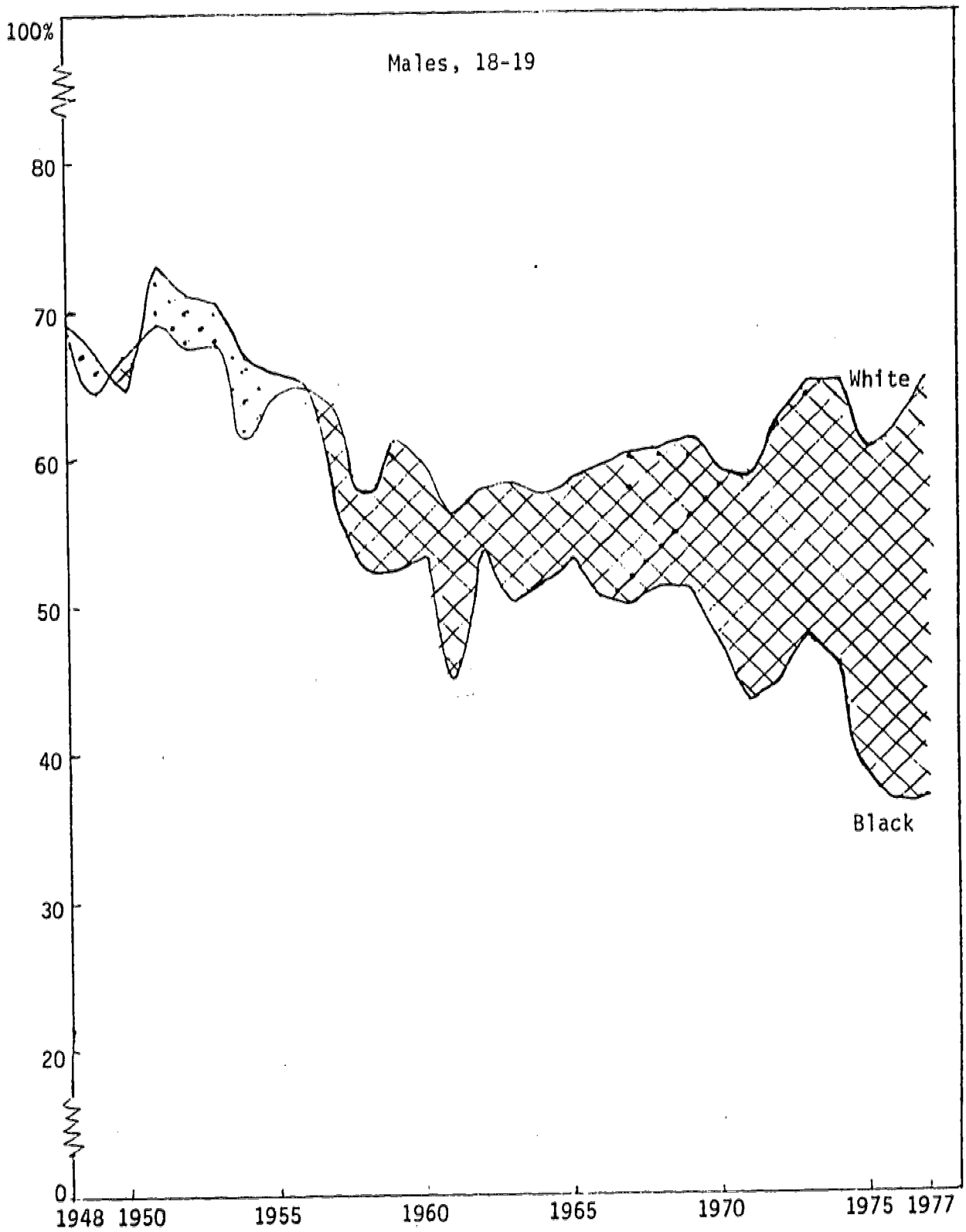

Figure 2: Proportion of Males, 16-17 Years Old, Employed During an Average Week, by Race, 1948-1977.

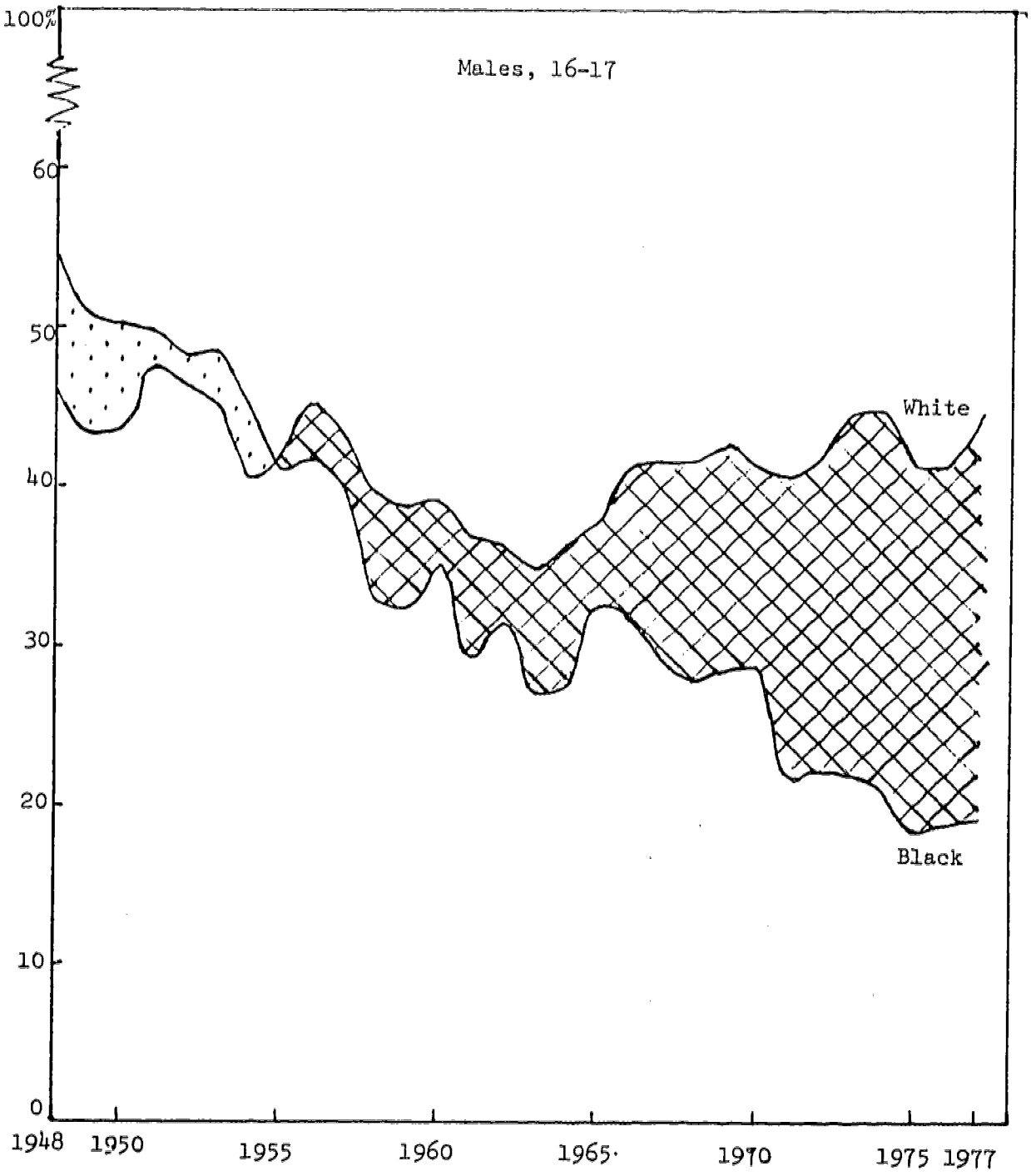

Figure 3: Proportion of Females, 18-19 Years Old, Employed During an Average Week, by Race, 1948-1977.

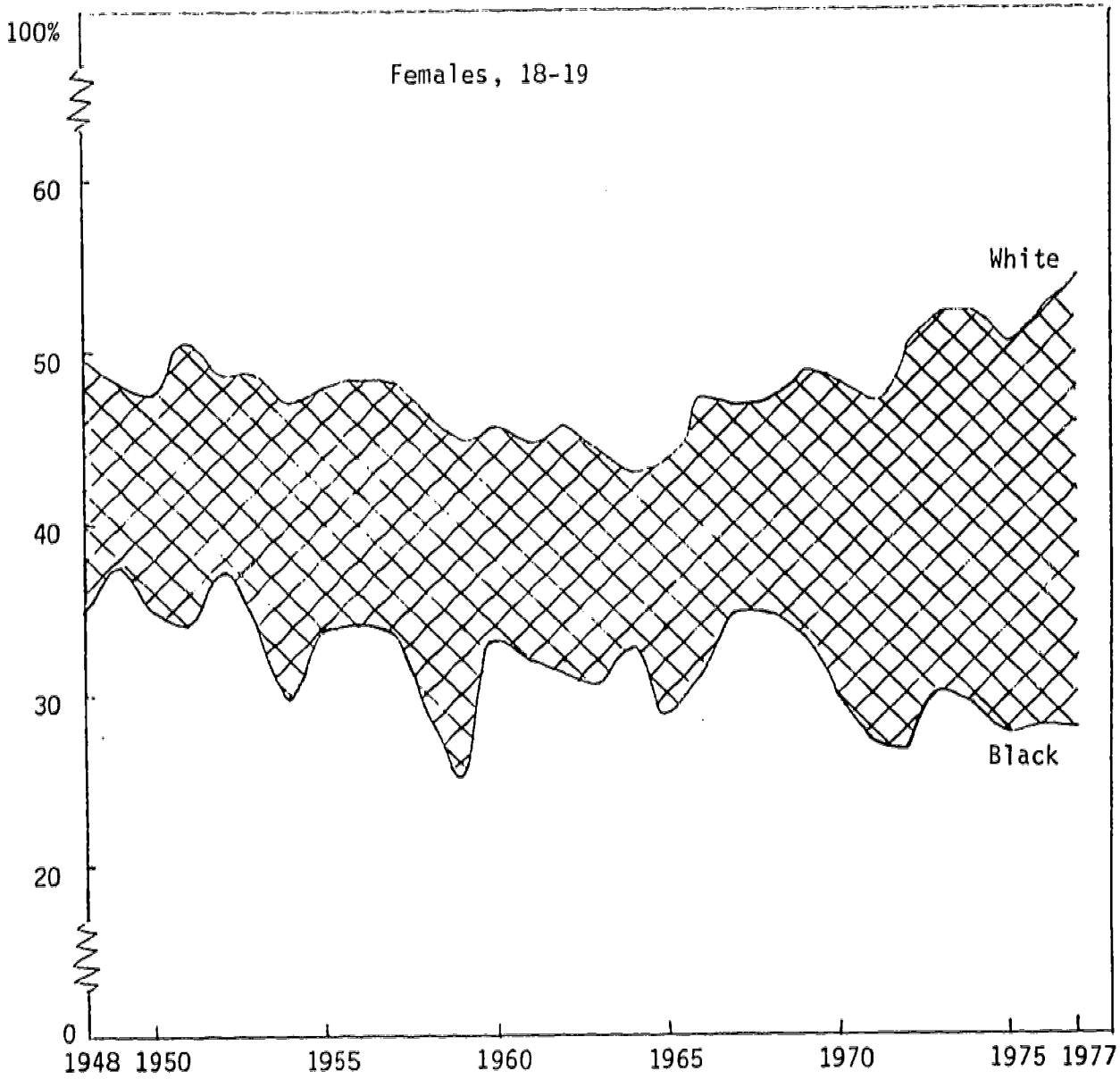

Figure 4: Proportion of Females, 16-17 Years Old, Employed During an Average Week, by Race, 1948-1977.

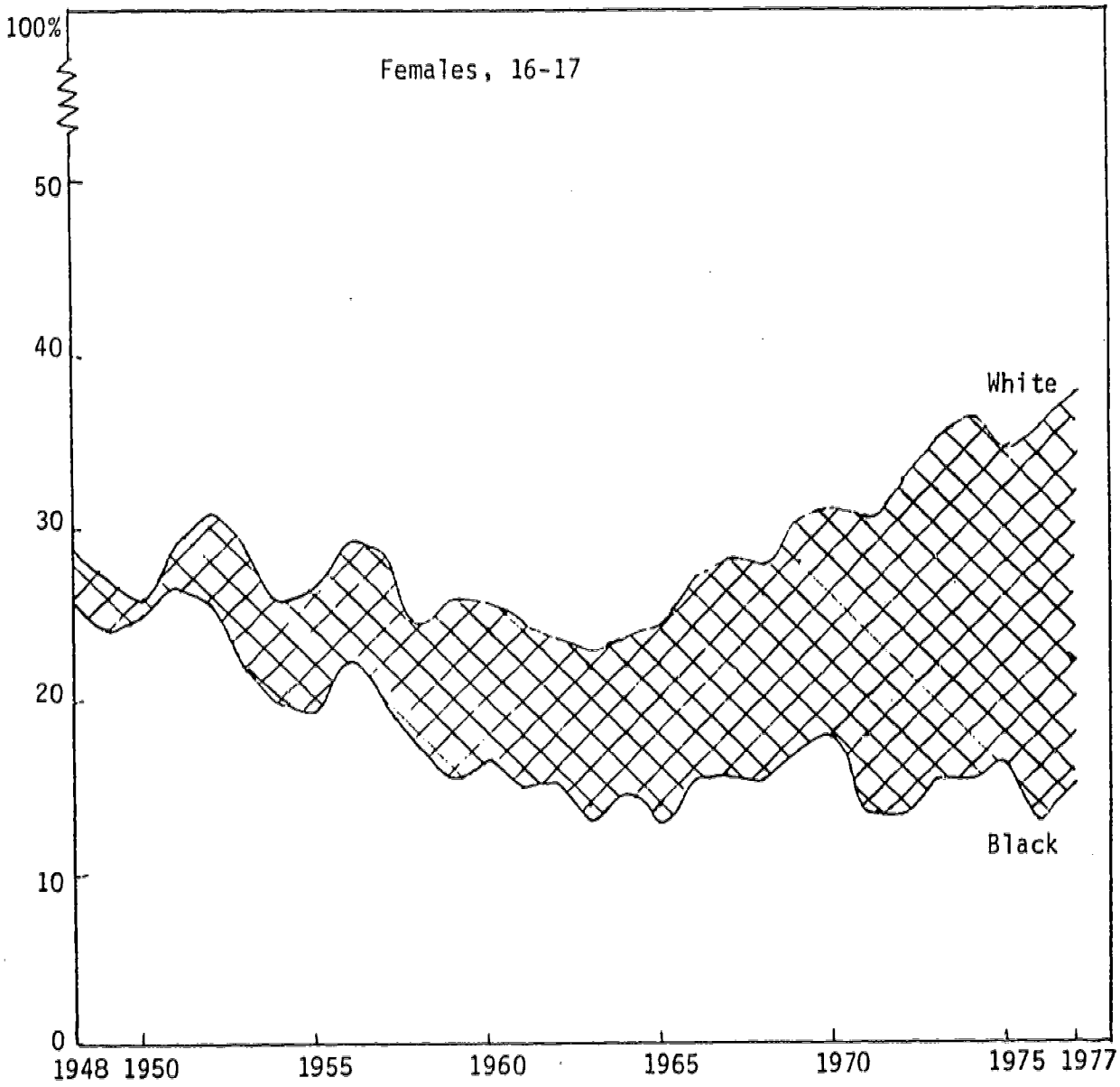

TABLE 1: METHODS MOST USEFUL FOR FINDING CURRENT JOB, PERSONS 16-24, BY RACE

	Blacks (N=231)	Whites (N=3272)	Ratio of Black to White Proportions
Personal networks heavily implied			
Offered a job without actually looking (includes return to prior job)	15.2%	24.8%	0.61
Friends and teachers	13.4	17.5	0.77
Relations	12.1	8.1	1.49
Use of formal intermediaries (personal networks possibly channel use)			
Private employment agencies	1.7	3.9	0.44
Public employment service; community organizations (Urban League, etc.); Government test or application form	15.2	4.0	3.80
School placement service	4.3	3.5	1.23
No formal or personal intermediaries			
Direct application to employer	26.8	25.7	1.04
Use of classified ads	6.9	8.1	0.85
Other methods most useful	4.3	4.5	0.96

TABLE 2: INCREASE IN MEAN PRESTIGE AND HOURLY EARNINGS FROM PREVIOUS JOB, PERSONS 16-24, BY RACE

	Mean Increase in Prestige		Mean Increase in Hourly Earnings	
	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites
Total, 5 Categories	0.6 (156)	3.4 (2252)	35¢ (160)	36¢ (2409)
Offered Job	4.6 (25)	3.1 (575)	54¢ (25)	28¢ (602)
Friends and Teachers	-2.7* (27)	3.1 (378)	2¢ (19)	36¢ (431)
Relatives	2.0 (15)	2.7 (185)	68¢ (16)	77¢ (194)
Formal Intermediaries	2.1 (38)	5.5 (290)	14¢ (42)	39¢ (312)
Direct Ap/Want Ads	-1.2* (156)	3.1 (824)	43¢ (58)	33¢ (870)

* black-white difference, $p < .05$.