

An Exploration of Social Capital and Social
Networking Resources through the Post College Job
Search Process

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ABSTRACT

Social capital research suggests that access to well positioned job contacts and job information are important factors in landing prestigious jobs. With this in mind, I conducted a study exploring the use of social capital resources in the post college job search process. I was interested in finding out whether or not resources available at an elite liberal arts college—such as the use of career development services and access to alumni contacts—provided important social ties that may not be otherwise available to students who come from less connected, lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. In order to carry out this study, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with seniors at Kenyon College. I found that Kenyon does provide important social ties to those who come from backgrounds of lower socioeconomic status and who are less connected, but that these ties may not eliminate the inequalities that arise from unequal access to social capital resources. Students of higher socioeconomic statuses had both the fiscal privilege and the social capital resources that enabled them to have prestigious internships as their summer jobs. These work experiences provided five students in this study with a sense of stability and security as they approached the job search process. My findings support Nan Lin's (1981) theory of the importance of strong ties in helping individuals land their first jobs. Furthermore, my research provides evidence supporting James E. Rosenbaum et al. (1999) and Rohelle Parks-Yancy et al.'s (2006) claim that unequal access to social capital early in life may contribute to both advantages and disadvantages, respectively, in the workforce later in life. This makes both my research and further research important in order to make more conclusive findings as well as better suggestions on how to improve equal access to social capital resources.

INTRODUCTION

The Kenyon College Career Development Office's webpage proudly displays a link to the Kenyon Career Network (KCN), an online database of over 6000 alumni/ae and parents volunteering to provide information about their careers, workplaces, geographic regions, and the pursuit of advanced degrees to Kenyon students and graduates (<http://www.kenyon.edu/x26285.xml>). This webpage is the modern day manifestation of the phrase, "It's not what you know but who you know that matters."

According to their webpage, the Kenyon Career Development Office helps students "broaden their perspectives regarding options for careers." The emphasis on social networking is made evident by a separate web page dealing with "Networking Tips." On this web page the viewer will find the following two quotes:

Networking is the single most effective job search strategy. Yet, the primary purpose of networking is to gather information, advice, and referrals that may ultimately lead to interviews and employment offers. Thus, how you approach the process is very important.

Approximately 70% of all available positions are never advertised. That is why it is called the "hidden job market." Networking is the best way to uncover this hidden market. Most employers prefer informal and personal methods of identifying employees. Networking does not eliminate the need to use other job search strategies, but it typically provides helpful referrals from approximately 60% of your contacts (<http://www.kenyon.edu/x26807.xml>).

These quotes make networking seem like an absolute necessity. With this sentiment in mind, I designed a study to explore how seniors at Kenyon approach the job search process and how they make use of social networks.

From my preliminary research, I found that there was an existing body of literature on social capital, which addresses the issue of social networking. Social capital can be defined as the "investment in social relations with expected returns in the market place" (Lin 2001:19). Empirically, this concept has been applied to studies addressing the job placement process after high school and the job placement process between jobs.

Most of these studies deal specifically with occupational status attainment, but I have yet to find studies particularly addressing the transition between college and the workforce (Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn 1981; Lin 2000; Mouw 2003; Wegener 1991). I have taken both theoretical concepts and empirical results from these previous studies in order to conceptualize my study.

For my purposes, social capital will be defined as an individual's access to well-positioned job contacts that can provide both high quality job search information as well as significant influence when it comes to applying for a job (Mouw 2003:872). This definition allows me to explore the idea of unequal access to social capital resources through the lens of college seniors' job search process. It is with this theoretical framework in mind that I ask how Kenyon students use resources available to them as they begin to search for their jobs. In asking these questions I am primarily interested in examining whether or not the Kenyon resources, such as the Career Development Office and the Kenyon Alumni Network, serve as a substitute for personal social ties. Do these Kenyon resources provide important social ties that may not be otherwise available to students who come from less connected, lower socioeconomic status backgrounds?

In order to carry out this research, I employed an interview study that explored which resources students' use. I was curious to know whether students use Kenyon-specific resources, such as the Career Development Office and the Kenyon Alumni Network. Do they instead use outside social networking resources, such as an individual's inclusion in his or her parents' social network or social connections made through previous work experience? Or do they use a combination of these resources?

I hypothesized that indeed resources available at Kenyon would serve to slightly

level the playing field. I believed that less well-connected individuals would gain access to a wealth of job information and job contacts, but I did not believe that this would entirely make up for the preliminary disparity in socioeconomic status between the students. Rosenbaum et al. (1999) and Parks-Yancy et al. (2006) argue that unequal access to social capital resources early in life will lead to career advantages or disadvantages later in life. It is for this reason that this hypothesis is worth examining. If in fact unequal access to social capital resources does create workforce disparities later in life, it is important to understand how students utilize the resources available to them. In understanding this process, we will be able to see how resource utilization could be improved in order to promote more equal access to social capital resources early on.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to design my particular study I relied on social capital literature. Within this existing body of literature, I draw on Nan Lin's (2000) work regarding unequal access to social capital. The main idea from Lin's work that I employ is his understanding of social networks as being composed of peoples with similar socioeconomic statuses. I use Granovetter's (1973) theory of the strength of weak ties to provide an explanation of the importance of utilizing individuals outside a particular social network in order to gain access to more varied information. Bernd Wegener (1991) provides a critique of both Lin and Granovetter's arguments and states that actually social networks are heterogenous as opposed to homogenous. Peter Marsden (1987) builds on these theorists' understandings of social networks and claims that the individual's education level affects the size of his or her personal network. Additionally, I discuss Ted Mouw's (2003) understanding of

social capital, particularly his emphasis on the importance of access to job information. Finally, I use arguments made by Rosenbaum et al. (1999) and Parks-Yancy et al. (2006) in order to convey the importance of conducting this study.

Social capital theorist Nan Lin has specifically influenced my research question with his discussion of the inequality of social capital. Lin conceptualizes social capital as a resource that depends on the quantity or quality of resources that an actor can access or use through a specific location in a social network (Lin 2000:786). With this classification, there is an implication that individuals are not similarly situated when it comes to social capital. Lin clarifies that inequality of social capital can occur based on differences in socioeconomic status. He explains that there is a “general tendency for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics” (Lin 2000:786). The implication here is that individuals in social networks of lower socioeconomic status are networking with less “well-connected” individuals, limiting their access to beneficial social capital resources, also known as well-informed and well-connected job contacts. Individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses must seek out individuals from other social networks in order to gain access to better job information and to job contacts with influence that could help them land prestigious jobs (Lin 2000:793). With this theory in mind, I was curious to see how Kenyon students orient themselves to their specific social capital resources.

In “Strength of Weak Ties” Mark S. Granovetter provides a more specific conceptualization of how individuals are oriented within their social network. In this article, he argues that there are two types of ties: strong ties and weak ties. Granovetter writes that, “The strength of a tie is a (probably linear) [sic] combination of the amount of

time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confounding) [sic], and the reciprocal services which characterize that tie” (1973:1361). In social networking, weak ties are important because they link members from different groups, allowing access to different information than they would have received had they relied on their strong ties (Granovetter 1973:1371, 1376). These weak ties provide channels through which “ideas, influences, and information socially distant from the ego may reach him” (Granovetter 1973:1371).

With Granovetter’s conception of social ties in mind, Bernd Wegener argues that the strength of weak ties theory is only valid for individuals in high social strata (1991: 69). He argues against both Granovetter and Lin’s conception that social networks tend to be homogenous and argues that in fact they are heterogeneous. The heterogeneous aspect of these ties allows individuals of low social standing to contact persons of higher social standing within their own network, thereby still employing “strong social ties” (Wegener 1991:69). On the other hand, “Individuals who occupy high prestige positions in a network...must reach beyond the bounds of their network to contact persons of even higher prestige” (Wegener 1991:69). It is important to note that it may not necessarily be the type of the social tie, but instead the prestige of the contact person used that is important.

Building on Granovetter’s theory, I explore the individual’s relationship to his or her particular resource. I assessed whether or not the resource or contact was associated with the individual’s particular social network, or if the resource or contact was found outside of that particular social network. I have defined an individual’s particular social network as including his or her parents’ social networks, his or her friends’ parents

(including the parents of friends made at Kenyon), and contacts made through previous jobs. I count these ties as strong ties. The Kenyon Career Network, on the other hand, provides students with ties outside of their primary social network, thus qualifying these ties as weak ties. Kenyon resources, such as access to and use of professors here at Kenyon and use of the Career Development Office's resources are also included as ties existing outside the student's primary social network. Using Wegener's theory, I also looked at the occupational status of the contact in order to get a sense of how socioeconomic status affected a student's access to prestigious contacts.

Lin supports Wegener's idea that the prestige of the contact is important, and applies it to an individual's first job. He says that among all independent variables, the contact's status shows the strongest direct effect on getting a prestigious first job (Lin 1981:401). Lin returns to his discussion of inequality of social capital and says that for that first job, "personal resources (father's occupation and job seeker's education) [sic] have a significant effect on the status of the contact reached (1981:401). I also address this difference in personal resources in my study.

In my sample, the educational aspect of personal resources remains constant due to the fact that all the participants are Kenyon students. This grants each student equal access to the Career Development Office staff, the Kenyon Career Network contacts, and Kenyon professors. On the other hand, Kenyon students come from varying backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses; with regard to this personal resource, that of parental occupation, their contacts may vary. It is this discrepancy that allowed me to explore whether or not Kenyon resources provided students lacking in personal resources access to important social ties.

Peter Marsden (1987) argues that a student's access to contacts may also vary based on his or her parents' education level. In his study of core social networks of Americans, he found that education was the personal characteristic that most clearly influenced differences in individuals' network structures (Marsden 1987:129). As an individual's level of education increased, so too did their network range. Marsden writes, "Mean network size among those holding a college degree is nearly 1.8 times larger than among those who did not finish high school" (1987:129). He concludes that higher education levels are associated with larger, more varied networks, which provide the individual with access to diverse others. This finding is important because it implies that students whose parents have higher levels of education will have access to larger social networks than those students who may come from less well-educated backgrounds.

While Wegener and Lin suggest that the prestige of the contact is an important predictor of job status attainment, Ted Mouw argues that most importantly "We must focus on more concrete mechanisms by which information and influence are transmitted by social networks" (2003:891). It is this idea that influenced my decision to interview students going through the job search process as opposed to Kenyon alumni/ae, because it is important to see if socioeconomic status affects an individual's access to job information. Do Kenyon resources provide the necessary job information and connection to contacts of influence that may not be otherwise available to less connected students?

Finally, the exploration of access to social capital is important because early access to social capital resources can translate to later career advantages (Parks-Yancy, DiTomaso, and Post 2006). Rosenbaum et al. write, "Youths with good contacts get early jobs that lead to better future career advancements, even though these jobs pay no better

initially” (Rosenbaum, Deluca, Miller, and Roy 1999:180). In other words, the use of prestigious contacts early on is helpful in career advancement later on. This finding implies that initial disparities in social capital may contribute to long-term inequalities in the work force later on. My study explores how Kenyon students perceive the resources available to them and whether or not they recognize how important the use of these contacts may be.

All of these studies apply social capital theory to the job placement process after high school or the job placement process between jobs, but I have yet to find studies dealing particularly with the transition between college and the workforce. It is my hope that my exploration of the transition between college and the workforce and how social networking is utilized during this transition will fill that void.

METHODOLOGY

I employed a single method approach consisting of semi-structured interviews of Kenyon students in order to gain a more complete understanding of the resources students use in their post college job search process. I interviewed 20 seniors at Kenyon College. I chose this population for a couple of reasons. First, I am a senior at Kenyon College and so not only did I have easy access to this population as a fellow student, but also, as a senior, I am going through the same process, a fact which potentially allowed my participants to feel comfortable discussing the process with me. As seniors, these students are in the midst of the post-college job search process and so both their methods and means are, at this point, fresh in their minds. Although it would have been interesting to speak with alumni/ae in order to discuss how they got the jobs they have now, this

would have expanded the scope of my project too broadly. Including this population would have given me a sense of how successful the Kenyon Career Network and the Career Development Office are at helping students get jobs, particularly those that are less well connected, but I am more interested in the process and how the students perceive and use the resources available to them while still in college. With that in mind, the senior population is of more value to me than the alumni/ae population.

I have chosen to do interviews instead of a quantitative analysis because the topic I am exploring is better addressed conversationally. The questions I ask require an in-depth explanation of what types of jobs these individuals have had in the past. I was curious to know how students got these jobs. I also asked for an explanation of how the students are orienting themselves towards the job search process now. Which resources are they using? Are they using social connections accessed through their parents' social networks, contacts made through previous jobs, or are they taking advantage of the resources Kenyon has to offer? Asking questions regarding past jobs ended up being a very valuable source of information. It turned out that many students were not as far along in the job search process as I had imagined so asking these questions allowed me to get a sense of how students may have utilized their social networks previously.

In order to recruit my participants, I relied on a random sample of about 50 students generated by the Registrar's office. I emailed the students on this list in order to ask them if they would be willing to participate in my study.¹ My study was approved by the Kenyon College International Review Board (Approval # 20090042). I made adjustments to this recruitment plan which I will discuss a little later on in the paper.

¹ Email Consent Form Appendix A

Each student was interviewed individually once. The interviews were held in Peirce Dining Hall. I chose this location because it is centrally located on campus and thus easily accessible. Furthermore, all students eat in Peirce so this location is familiar, allowing the students to feel as comfortable as possible. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. During the interview I relied on my interview schedule prompts and I took notes as the participants talked.²

As I conducted my interviews, I made revisions to both my recruitment protocol and to my interview schedule. In order to determine the socioeconomic status of my participants, I asked the students how they thought their parents would classify themselves socioeconomically. I chose to phrase the question in this way so that students would feel more comfortable answering the question. If students were potentially embarrassed or shy about their status, they were able to answer from a slightly removed position. After conducting 16 interviews with students from the randomly generated list of 50 seniors, I felt that my participant sample lacked variation socioeconomically; most of the students identified as upper middle class. In order to get a better variation in socioeconomic status I sent out an email to the all senior email distribution list at Kenyon asking if any first generation students would agree to interview with me. I defined first generational students as being the first in their family to go to college. This email once again served as my consent form.³ I received four positive responses to this email recruitment bringing my interview sample to 20 students. This change to my protocol was approved by the Kenyon College IRB.

² Interview Schedule Appendix B

³ Email Consent Form Appendix C

As I interviewed students I added some new interview questions to my interview schedule. During the interview process, as mentioned before, I became aware that many students were not very far along in the job search process. For those students that fit into this category I changed the wording of my questions to be more hypothetical. I would say, “Since you aren’t actually applying for jobs right now can you tell me how you think you will go about the process?” In order to better understand students’ thought processes regarding the job search process I added a question regarding their motivation to be as far along or not as far along in the job search process as they were. Finally, as I became more comfortable interviewing the students and I realized that they were not as shy about revealing socioeconomic information as I had imagined, I began asking students how they were paying for school. This question helped me to get a sense of how my sample reflected the Kenyon population as a whole.

After all the interviews were conducted, I typed up my interview notes and proceeded to read through them in order to find common themes. The themes that I focused on initially were evidence of “parental help in getting jobs,” “use of personal connections,” “use of Kenyon resources,” and “opinions of the Career Development Office.” After reading through the interview notes a few more times, I found new common themes which I labeled as “paid work”, “internships”, “fallback plans”, “parents are not a resource”, “new networks”, and “motivations”. After all my interview notes were coded, I created a Microsoft Word document in which I had the main categories of themes that I wanted to discuss in my paper. Under each heading, I placed quotes from as many different interviewees as they applied. I then went through those categories in order to find subcategories. I found subcategories within the “opinions of Career

Development Office” category as well as within the “motivations” category. Within the “opinions of the Career Development Office” category, I coded for evidence of “positive opinions,” “negative opinions,” and “do it on my own” sentiments. I will discuss the “motivations” subcategories in my Results section.

RESULTS

In order to determine socioeconomic status, I had each student self-identify with a class based on how he or she believed his or her parents would classify themselves socioeconomically. The participants could choose from these options: Upper Class, Upper Middle Class, Middle Class, Lower Middle Class, and Working Class. Please refer to the table below.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Breakdown of my Student Sample

Upper Class	UC-UMC	Upper Middle Class	UMC-MC	Middle Class	MC-LMC	Lower Middle Class-Working Class
1	2	9	2	4	1	1

I asked the students how they are paying for school in order to gauge how my sample reflected the Kenyon population as a whole. Kenyon’s Financial Aid Department’s website says that approximately 70% of students receive some sort of financial aid (<http://www.kenyon.edu/finaid.xml>). In my sample of 20 students I had 10 students identify as having or using some sort of financial aid in order to pay for school and 10 students identify as paying for their schooling with family money. That means

that 50% of the students in my sample receive financial aid which is 20% less than the statistic provided by the Financial Aid Department. Therefore, my sample is somewhat skewed towards students who are financially more well-off.

Motivations

Students provided four different types of reasoning in order to explain why they were where they were in the job search process. I labeled these types of motivations as, “still figuring it out,” “desire to move out of the family home,” “peer influence and pressure,” and an “interest in a specific career.”

The individuals that fell into the “still figuring it out” category were most importantly approaching the job search process as an opportunity to find something that he or she wanted to do, in other words, something that was “right for (him) her” (Student Interview). This theme, although not explicitly articulated by each student, was implied in the way each student discussed his or her search process. One male student discussed his feelings regarding graduate school. He is both pre-med and an english major at Kenyon so he is in the process of deciding which interest he would like to pursue. Another student is looking at a plurality of jobs in order to figure out exactly what each job entails. In describing the reasons behind where he is in the job search process, a third student said this:

I am mostly in the idea-working phase of finding what I want to do. I am focusing on my interests because I watched my sister have perfect credentials, get a fantastic job as a lawyer, a house on the beach, and then lose her job because of the economy. Ultimately, even perfect credentials don't work out.

One individual, whom I will call Andy, did not feel entirely comfortable with the idea of finding a job that is personally fulfilling, as opposed to finding a “real job” that could most importantly sustain him economically. Andy is one of my two participants

who identified himself as between working and middle class. He explained that he grew up in a familial environment that did not teach him to “get a job that fulfills you.”

Although he does not feel familial pressure to get the alternative, a “real job,” he does feel an internal pressure, due to the belief system he has grown up with, to get a “real job” instead of something that really interests him. As a psychology major, he labeled this internal debate “cognitive dissonance,” but he did end the interview by coming to a similar conclusion as other students; he said that most importantly this was a time when he was allowed to figure out what he wants.

The next reason three students provided as an explanation to be as far along in the process as they were was that they felt pressure to get jobs so that they could move out of their parents’ house. Additionally, three individuals explained that they felt pressure from their peers. One female student said that she would not be as far along in the process had she not heard how much her best friend was doing. Another female student expressed a similar sentiment regarding her friends as motivators, but this time in a more influential way. She explained that all of her best friends are older and graduated in 2008. Because of this she has already watched friends go through the job search process and struggle immensely to find work. In order to avoid this struggle, she is being extremely proactive. She said, “If it takes me a year to find something at least I started in September, as opposed to May.”

One of the other individuals who has applied to something already fits into the “interest in a specific career” category. This student is an economics major. He explained that financial jobs have very early deadlines and it was because of these early deadlines that he had the motivation to think about jobs early on.

Previous Jobs

Due to the fact that many students were still in the idea phase of their job search process, my questions regarding previous jobs proved useful in terms of getting a sense of how these students have utilized their social capital resources in the past. In asking each student about the jobs they have had in the past I found that 15 of my 20 participants used some form of personal connection to either get them the job they had, help them get the job they had, or put them in touch with someone who could help them. These 15 individuals were socio-economically varied in that there was at least one individual from each class identified who used a personal contact. Within the group of 15 individuals who used social networking contacts to help them get their jobs, eight individuals used these contacts to help them get both paid and unpaid internships. Of the eight individuals who had internship experience in the past, only one individual identified as middle class; six individuals identified as upper middle class and one as upper class. Within the group of eight individuals who used contacts to help them get their summer internships, I found that the majority of these students used high-level connections to get them these jobs (Table 2).

Table 2: Use of High Level Connections in order to get Internships

Class	Internship	Contact	Connection to Contact
Upper Class	NGO: International Youth Foundation	One of the organization's board members	Father's Business Partner (runs a private equity fund)
	Cosmopolitan Magazine	Member of the Marketing Department	The contact is a Kenyon Alumnae
Upper Class-Upper Middle Class	Internship at a Law Firm	One of the partners	His best friend's dad

	NYMX	Trader, owned a small company	Family friend, lived in the student's building
Upper Middle Class	Internship at the NBC affiliate in Cincinnati	Employee of Hurst, in charge of PR for North East and North West affiliates	Contact of his dad's through the church
Upper Middle Class	Internship at a boutique capital investment firm	One of the Cofounders and managing partners of the capital investment side of the firm	The father of a friend of the student's from high school
Upper Middle Class	PR firm in Boston	Head of the Massachusetts Pension Fund	Her cousin's best friend is friends with him
	Johns Hopkins Marketing Department	Vice President of Global Services	A friend of her Mother's
Upper Middle Class	Worked in a Children's hospital in Israel as well as in the Emergency Room of another hospital in Israel	Woman who had her own private practice in Israel	Colleague of his father's
Upper Middle Class	PA at a production company in Munich, Germany	Producer	Colleague of his father's
	HSI Productions	Director who works for this company	Friend of his mother's
Middle Class	Luxury Travel PR Firm	Creator/Founder of the firm	Acquaintance of her dad's

"Fallback" Plans

In coding my interview notes two themes revealed themselves that I had not considered as possibilities before the interview process. One of these was that seven of

the 20 individuals interviewed mentioned that they had “fall back plans” (Table 3).

Table 3: The Socioeconomic Breakdown of Students With “Fall Back” Plans

Upper Class-Upper Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Upper Middle Class-Middle Class	Middle Class
1	3	1	2

The idea of having a fallback plan is interesting in that it may be part of the reason some of these individuals feel comfortable in the fact that they are still in the thought process of the job search process as opposed to the more active applying for jobs part of the process. Even more interestingly, of these seven individuals, five of them explained that they could rely on previous jobs as opportunities for employment if the jobs they are more interested in do not work out as they had hoped. Please see Table 4 for a socioeconomic break down of these individuals.

Table 4: Employment by a Previous Employer

Upper Class-Upper Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Middle Class
1	3	1

Within this group of five individuals, only one individual did not use a familial connection to get him the job that could be his fall back plan.

A first generation student whom I quoted earlier, Andy, explained that, as opposed to these students, he does not have a safety net or a “fallback” plan.

Summarizing his response to this question, my notes indicate:

He will not go back to Kentucky. Other students feel safe and comfortable at home but this is the fire that is burning under him, the thing that is pushing him to figure out what he wants. He senses a separation between himself and his friends who aren't fiscally challenged. He specifically feels geographically challenged in the sense that he goes

home to Kentucky where his family is not a resource for contacts. Kids who go back to New York City over breaks have their parents as outlets. He lacks contacts.

As mentioned earlier, other students were motivated to find work out of a personal desire to move out, but all these other students qualified this statement and by saying they would have family support if they needed it. Andy was the only student to address this matter in a negative and more desperate way.

Extended Kenyon Networks

The second new theme that came to my attention as I interviewed students was that the Kenyon resources, specifically sources of career information and connections, are more extensive than I had initially conceived. Initially, I defined these resources as consisting of access to the Career Development Office staff, access to the contacts available through the Kenyon Career Network, and access to the wealth of career path knowledge, as well as contacts, that professors may be able to provide. I realized instead that students have access to even more information and contacts based on the organizations they are involved in and sports team they play on. Two of the boys I interviewed discussed their fraternity membership as an important source of contacts. One fraternity member explained that fraternity members have been able to get jobs through alumni in the past. The other student discussed fraternity alumni as both a source of career information and contacts, as well a resource to fall back on. He explained:

Fraternity contacts provide a resource to fall back on, at the least a place to stay in order to get started. My fraternity has an entire booklet with alumni contact information as well as potential business information. Many of the alumni are lawyers so if a brother is ever in need of legal advice or help that is a huge resource. A number of fraternity alumni live in D.C. so I could live with any number of people there.

I spoke with one student who was a member of a sorority. She has found her sorority

alumnae to be incredibly forthcoming with advice, especially now that she is a senior. She explained that the alumnae from 2003, 2004, 2005, are very useful resources particularly because they are already established in higher up jobs. Sorority alumnae are also a good resource because this sorority, as an organization, is composed of many different people with very different interests. On the other hand, I spoke with two other students, one male and one female, who both said that his fraternity and her sorority respectively are not sources of information or connections. It seems that the ability to have an extended personal network based on fraternal or sororal membership is dependant upon membership in particular fraternities or sororities.

In addition to sorority and fraternity membership, two students discussed their participation in sports as expanding their network of individuals to draw on in the job search process. The male student was a member of the football team. He explained that many of the football parents have given him their business cards and said that they would be happy to talk about the student's career interests. The female student discussed her membership on the soccer team as extending her network in the sense that the soccer alumnae may be potential workforce contacts. If she wanted to, she could talk to them about what they are up to; she may even be able to get involved with their organizations.

The third type of extended network that was brought to my attention was the use of the Board of Trustees as workforce contacts. Sarah, the one interviewee who identified as upper class, brought this source of contacts to my attention. In her discussion of the services offered by the Career Development Office she explained that the office's strength was its ability to connect students with alumni for externships. One of its many weaknesses, on the other hand, was that it did not force students to seek contacts outside

of the alumni network. Sarah offered the Board of Trustees as a group of well-positioned contacts that should be utilized. She said, “One of the number two guys at Bloomberg is a member of the Board of Trustees. People should get coffee with him and find out who he knows.” Sarah makes an interesting point, but it must be acknowledged that Sarah’s mother is a member of the Board of Trustees so her comfort level with using these contacts as well as her personal access to these contacts is very different from students whose parents are not members of the Kenyon Board of Trustees.

Use of Career Development Services

This brings me to my findings regarding student use of Kenyon resources. Due to the fact that my participant sample was small, and that the majority of my interviewees were not far along in the job search process, my results with regards to whether or not student use of Kenyon resources varied due to socioeconomic status aren’t conclusive. I found that six students felt very strongly that they would not use the Career Development services.

Table 5: Socioeconomic Breakdown of Students who will not use the Career Development Office

Upper Class	Upper Class- Upper Middle Class	Upper Middle Class
1	1	4

Within this group, two students, lying within the upper middle class category, said that they do not plan to use the career services because they like to do things on their own.

Both students felt comfortable with their personal networks as sources of contacts.

Although the female student said she would not use Kenyon services she did apply to an organization that the Career Development Office brought to Kenyon. Perhaps she does

not see this as taking advantage of the resources Kenyon offers.

Three of the other students have no plans to use Kenyon resources at all. One of these three students, the economics major, who identifies as a member of the upper middle class, has already gotten a job. He applied to work at a bank and was put in touch with the Program Director by a family friend. This family friend is the Executive Vice President of Commercial Banking and is in charge of the umbrella division of the bank this student will work in. The student still had to go through the interview process, but the Program Director helped him schedule around his football conflicts. The other two, one of whom is member of the upper middle class, the other whom is between upper middle class and upper class, have negative opinions about the Career Development Office's ability to actually help them. They feel comfortable in the personal networks they have and are utilizing these networks as well as doing research on their own.

The final individual in this category is Sarah, the one participant who identified as upper class. In discussing her job search process she emphasized most importantly that she is utilizing her familial connections. Not only will she rely entirely on familial connections, but also she is seeking out high-level connections. Sarah made this distinction regarding the prestige of the contact when we discussed her interest in working at Cosmopolitan Magazine. Sarah was able to get an externship at Cosmopolitan Magazine with the help of the Career Development Office's externship program. At the end of this externship she was offered an unpaid internship position for the following summer. Due to her previous work at Cosmopolitan she now has access to what she referred to as "mid level" contacts, contacts that have been with Cosmopolitan for only a few years. On this topic she said:

These mid-level contacts are not as strong of connections as I would like. They are my

own personal connections. My parents are nervous about my lack of familial connection at Cosmopolitan. Because of this I plan on relying more heavily on family connections to get jobs. My family knows lots of Vice Presidents and higher ups and it is these higher up contacts that will put the appropriate pressure on employers to get me the job. I definitely plan on using the people my family knows in higher places to get me jobs.

This explanation is interesting because she was the only student to articulate the importance of networking with “well-positioned” contacts. Other students recognized that networking is an important means to getting a job, but they did not provide clear explanations of why that is so.

Andy, one of the first generation college students, also had an interesting opinion regarding the Career Development Office. He plans to utilize their services heavily but my notes indicate that:

He is also curious how people of privilege see the resources the CDO offers, specifically referencing menial jobs advertised by e-recruiting. If he doesn’t want to do them he can’t imagine that people of privilege would want to.

Mixed Resources

Nine students have plans to use a combination of resources. These students will rely on their personal connections, specifically their both their parents’ social networks, contacts made through previous jobs, grandparents’ social networks. They will also use the Career Development Office, professors, and the Kenyon Career Network in their job search process (Table 6).

Table 6: Socioeconomic Breakdown of Students Using a Mixture of Resources

UC-UMC	Upper Middle Class	UMC-MC	Middle Class
1	4	1	3

The remaining five students will rely on their own research as well as on Kenyon

resources such as professors and the Career Development Office. They will not use their parents' personal networks.

Table 7: Socioeconomic Breakdown of Students Who Will Not Use Personal Networks

Upper Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class-Lower Middle Class	Lower Middle Class-Working Class
2	1	1	1

Within this breakdown the two upper middle class students explained that their interests do not align with their parents' careers and so they will not be using their parents' personal networks in their job search process. One of the students also said she has no plans to use her parents' connections because they are all within the state that the student lived in and she did not want to remain in that state. The next three students are first generation college students. None of these students see their parents as resources. The importance of these numerical breakdowns will be discussed in the following section of my paper.

DISCUSSION

My research question asked whether or not Kenyon resources provide important social ties that may not be otherwise available to students who come from less connected, lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. Although many students were not far along in the job search process I do believe I was able to answer this question. From my results, I argue that there is a trend that as one moves down the socioeconomic ladder the use of Kenyon resources does increase. Not only does the use of Kenyon resources increase, but

also it is clear that these resources do provide important social ties that the less connected, lower socioeconomic status students were lacking. This is made the most obvious in the exploration of the resources gained and used by three of the first generation college students. Further my study did reflect aspects of Rosenbaum et al. (1999) and Parks-Yancy et al.'s (2006) concern that unequal access to social capital resources contributes to inequalities later on. This unequal access to social capital resources manifested itself in student access to prestigious jobs, which within the realm of the undergraduate world, I will define as internships. Not only were these internships more readily available to students of higher socioeconomic statuses due to their ability to accept unpaid internships and their access to well-positioned contacts used to get these internships, but for five students the access to these internships provided a sense of stability, security, and freedom in their post college job search process.

Although my sample was small and economically swayed in favor of individuals who are financially more well-off, the inclusion of first generation college students helped support Lin's conception of the inequality of social capital. To reiterate Lin's theory, individuals occupy a specific position in a social network, a position that is based on an association with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics. The implication here is that individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses network within that lower socioeconomic status preventing access to well-positioned contacts. I can't make an argument on who exactly the lower socioeconomic individuals, in this case the student's parents, were networking with, but I can argue that this lower socioeconomic status did prevent the student's access to beneficial social capital resources.

I am able to make this claim because these students were the only students who

conclusively said they will not be using their parents as resources in the job search process. There were some other students who were better positioned socio-economically who said that they too would not use their parents as resources, but these students qualified that statement by explaining that the connections their parents have are not particularly useful with regards to the student's particular career interests. The first generation students, on the other hand, did not even consider their parents as a resource. On the topic of socioeconomic status Andy expressed his sense of confusion regarding his own socioeconomic status. He said, "Kenyon is a place of transition where I have just gotten four years of schooling that enable me to look at jobs which offer the same pay check that my dad has received his whole life. This is both a good thing and a weird thing."

The students who were of higher socioeconomic status, but who will not be using their parents as resources in the job search process, had used some aspects of their parents' resources in the past. An upper middle class student whom I will call Natalie, used her parents' connections in order to get two of her summer jobs. The first was as a river assistant with her mother's company. Her mother is an engineer/hydrologist and works with rivers in the river restoration field. The next job Natalie got through her parents was as a receptionist at her parents' friends' private doctor practice. One of the other upper middle class individuals, whom I will call Elizabeth, was also able to use her mother's connections in order to get a summer internship. In Elizabeth's case, her mother is the CEO of a small company that works with doctors and pharmaceutical companies. Johns Hopkins has a contract with Elizabeth's mother and so she has become close friends with the Vice President of Global Services at Johns Hopkins. Elizabeth used this

connection in order to get an interview with the marketing department. This interview led to an internship that allowed Elizabeth to work rather closely with the head of international marketing. One of the first generation students, James, who identifies as between middle and lower middle class, did also manage to get jobs through his mother's boyfriend as a bar tender and a landscape worker. In each case the students were able to utilize parental resources in order to get jobs in the past. They do not, however, plan on using these resources in the future because they are not interested in these lines of work.

While it is hard to tell the benefit other students will derive from Kenyon resources, due to the fact that many students have access to and will use both Kenyon resources as well as aspects of their personal social networks, it may be easier to tell how the first generational students will benefit from Kenyon resources based on a comparison of their parents' occupations to the student's career plans. I will only discuss the two male students because they have more concrete ideas of what they would like to do.

James identified as being a member of the middle to lower middle class. His father is the branch or regional manager of an insulation company and his mother is a hair stylist. James hopes to eventually get a PHD in Clinical Psychology. At this point in the process he has spoken with a staff member at the Career Development Office who has helped him plan out what he should do in order to actualize his goal. James has also sat down with three of his psychology professors and has received both help in looking for research opportunities and masters programs as well as a pledge to put him in contact with some colleagues of one of the professors. Furthermore, he has gained access to a practicing clinical psychologist through a friend of his at Kenyon. He hopes to use this contact as a source of information and more ideally as a connection to jobs, research

opportunities, and masters programs.

Andy identified as being a member of the lower middle to working class. He is not certain what he wants to do, but his dream is to work in the fashion industry. His father was a dietician and his mother was a hair stylist; they are both retired now. Although Andy harbors much bitterness about the fact that he has not been able to have an internship as his summer job, Kenyon has provided him with both job resources and externship opportunities. For two summers he has had a paid job at Exploration Summer Programs. Exploration Summer Programs recruited at Kenyon during Andy's freshmen year providing an informational meeting and an opportunity to interview with the program on the Kenyon campus. Additionally, Andy took advantage of the Career Development Office's externship program. He has now had two externships, one with a fashion designer, and another at a marketing company. All three of these opportunities allowed Andy the chance to leave his home state in order to work elsewhere. With these externship opportunities he was able to explore industries that interested him as well as make connections within those industries. Both Andy and James have gained access to social ties that they would not have been able to access through their own personal social networks.

These students' lack of social capital resources through parental networks is further emphasized by the higher socioeconomic status students' access to social contacts that helped them get internships in the past. Not only are these individuals of much higher status socio-economically, but also each of them got their internships through well-positioned job contacts. Please refer back to Table 2 on page 17 for a breakdown of the internships obtained as well as the contact's used and the student's connection to these

contacts. It can be seen that these students greatly benefited from both their positions in social networks of higher socioeconomic status and from their use of weak and strong ties (Granovetter 1973; Lin 2000).

“Fallback” Plans

Not only did these students have the opportunity to work at these internships, but also five of these students consider their internships "fallback" plans. Two of these students discussed the internships as a place where they could go back and work. The implication was that they would have a similar job to their internship, but this time they would be paid. The third student, due to his internship, is a contender for an entry-level assistant job that makes 50,000 dollars a year. Based on the connections he made and these connections' opinions of him he has been made to believe that he has a high possibility of getting this job.

The fourth student with a fall back plan worked at her dad's engineering company for two summers and is pretty certain that after two years of working closely with a set of five employees she would be hired. The fifth student to have a fall back plan was the only student who did not use a parental contact to get his internship.

These results have important implications in favor of the strength of strong ties as well as implications regarding inequalities perpetuated by unequal access to social capital. In contrast to theories about the strength of weak ties, my data provide support for the strength of strong ties in helping individuals of high socioeconomic status get prestigious internships/jobs. Of the eight individuals discussed as having a prestigious internship, and the one individual discussed as working at her father's engineering company, only two of these opportunities were accessed through weak ties. The use of

weak ties was employed by the one upper class individual, Sarah, who worked at Cosmopolitan Magazine. She got an internship with Cosmopolitan Magazine because of her use of the Kenyon Career Network and Kenyon's externship program. Additionally one of the upper middle class individuals got her PR job through her cousin's best friend's friend. Otherwise all the other students used either their parent, a friend of a parent, a parent's colleague, an acquaintance of their parents, or a personal connection to the student—specifically referencing the two students who utilized the fathers of their friends as their contact—to get their internships or jobs.

The importance of strong ties in this data better aligns itself with Lin's theory of the importance of personal resources in gaining access to well-positioned contacts. Lin says that among all independent variables, the contact's status shows the strongest direct effect on getting a prestigious first job (Lin 1981:401). Additionally, in this argument Lin returns to his discussion of inequality of social capital and says that for that first job, "personal resources (father's occupation and job seeker's education) have a significant effect on the status of the contact reached (1981:401). In my data high status parental networks were most importantly responsible for allowing the student access to high status contacts.

These findings may have implications regarding Rosenbaum et al. (1999) and Parks-Yancy et al.'s (2006) discussion of access to social capital and how that access early on can translate to later career advantages and disadvantages respectively. I cannot claim that my findings conclusively support these theorists' argument, however, I can say that the fact that five of the 20 students I interviewed have entered the job search process with a prestigious "fallback" plan, a fact which places them at least a few steps ahead of

other students, does support the idea of unequal access to social capital. This unequal access to social capital and its benefits in favor of those already well-connected individuals may lead to workforce inequalities in the future. Due to both the small scale of my study as well as the lack of longitudinal data, I can only suggest that this may be the case. More research is necessary in order to conclusively support this theory.

CONCLUSION

With this study I offer an exploration of how college seniors at an elite liberal arts college approach the job search process. I wanted to explore how students perceive the resources available to them and whether or not their use of resources differed based on socioeconomic differences. I hoped to find out whether or not Kenyon resources, defined as the Career Development Office and the Kenyon Career Network provided important social ties that may not be otherwise available to students who come from less connected, lower socioeconomic status backgrounds.

I do believe that my study successfully addressed this question of access to important social ties. I was able to see that less well-connected individuals did gain access to more “important” social ties. After conducting the study I can say that these ties are deemed “important” based on the fact that the students did not have access to these ties before, but to truly be able to judge the importance of a social tie I would have to have access to longitudinal data. Access to this data would allow me to study the particular resources that enabled students to get the jobs that they ended up having in their first year out of college.

With that point in mind, I will say that in order to improve this study it is

important to get a participant sample that better reflects the student population as whole. According to my measure, my participant sample represented financially well-off students more heavily than less well-off students. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that this study would be most effective if it were done in three parts. The initial phase would resemble the study I just did to understand how students initially perceive and approach the job search process. The second phase would consist of follow up interviews some time in the spring in order to check in with these students and monitor their progress. For those individuals who demonstrate that they have successfully gotten a job, this interview would be their last. The point of this final interview would be to ask how these students actually got the jobs they now have. For those individuals who have not landed their post college job yet, there would be a third follow up interview in November. I suggest November because this would mark the passing of a year since the first interview. If time constraint weren't an issue it is this type of study that would better address my research question.

I do believe further research is required in this area due to the claim that unequal access to social capital early on contributes to inequalities later on in the workforce. If this is in fact the case, these results have important implications for the necessity of figuring out a way to better reach out to less well-connected students. In interviewing the students, I found that the Kenyon services do seem to provide beneficial resources, especially to those lacking in personal resources. Many students, however, have negative opinions of these services and/or choose not to use them. In order to better encourage the use of Kenyon resources, I suggest an idea that one of my interviewees, Andy, recommended. As an individual who is incredibly frustrated with his inability to have an

unpaid internship over the summers, Andy recommended that an internship fund be created. This fund would be for the students who cannot fiscally afford to have prestigious, unpaid internships. Although this idea may be difficult to operationalize on a large campus, it is much more conceivable on a small liberal arts campus of 1600 students. This fund would allow students the opportunity to have experience working at prestigious jobs before entering the workforce. Additionally, this work experience may provide students access to “fallback” plans of their own allowing them to feel more security and stability as they begin their post college job search process.

Although my research is inconclusive, I did find that in fact Kenyon resources do provide important social ties to those less connected individuals. I provided evidence supporting Nan Lin’s theory that it is personal resources, specifically parental networks, that allowed student access to high status contacts and thus prestigious jobs. Ultimately it is important that more research is carried out, specifically with a larger more representative sample, as well as longitudinally, in order to report more conclusive findings and make suggestions on how to improve equal access to social capital resources.

Appendix A

Subject: Request for Participation in my Comps Project (not a student info)

Dear Senior,

My name is Kate Kellman and I am a senior sociology major. I am contacting you in order to ask you if you would be willing to participate in my research project on the job search process. (I understand this is a really busy time of the semester, but I would really appreciate it if you would consider participating in my study)

I am specifically interested in how students use resources available to them as they begin to search for their post-Kenyon jobs. I am curious to know which resources students use and whether or not the Kenyon resources, such as the Career Development Office and the Kenyon Alumni Network, provide important job contacts that may not be otherwise available to students.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It would consist of one interview that would last between 30-60 minutes. The information obtained from this interview will remain confidential and will be used for no other purpose than for my research project. There is no risk associated with your participation in this interview.

If you do chose to participate you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me, Kate Kellman, at (323) 449-9777 or via email at kellmank@kenyon.edu. You may also contact Professor Jennifer Johnson at (740) 427-5596 or via email at johnsonj@kenyon.edu. If you have other concerns or complaints, contact the Institutional Review Board at Kenyon College, Edelstein House, College Drive, Gambier, OH 43022. (740) 427-5748.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this.

I look forward to hearing from you.

-Kate Kellman '10

P.S. It would be greatly appreciated if you could respond to this email by Friday November 13th.

Appendix B

(Access to Job Information and Job Contacts)

Interview Schedule

Demographics:

Name:

From:

Major:

Some background questions in order to get a sense of where you come from...

What is your mother's education level? (if she went to College where did she go?)

What is your father's education level? (if he went to College where did he go?)

Most importantly to get a sense of the working world impressions you have been exposed to growing up...

What is your mother's occupation?

What is your father's occupation?

How would your parents classify themselves in terms of Socioeconomic status?
Upper Class, Upper Middle Class, Middle, Lower Middle Class, Working Class?

Would you classify yourself similarly? If no why? If yes why?

How are you paying for school?

Questions:

Previous Work Experience

Have you had jobs in the past?

How did you get these jobs?

(Through Kenyon, through your parents' friends, high school connections, by yourself through the internet, college friends' parents?)

Have you made potential workforce contacts through these jobs?

Would you say that these jobs have extended your network of people to draw on when looking for jobs later on?

If yes, have you used these contacts already? Do you plan on using them?

Do you find some contacts more useful than others? Why or why not? (getting at prestige of contact)

Do you have a job at Kenyon? If not, why not? If yes, what is your motivation to have that job?

Post College Job Search Process:

I know this is the most common question you get these days, I have to deal with it as well, but please bare with me....What ideas do you have for finding a job now?

Where have you gotten your job search information from? What resources are you utilizing in order to find a job after Kenyon?

(possible answers: parents, parent's friends, relatives, previous colleagues, previous bosses, Kenyon College Career Development Office, Kenyon Alumni Network)

Have you used any contacts in order to set up meetings, get interviews and so on?

If you have used contacts how would you describe this contact's relationship to you?

How well do you know your contact?

Was the contact a close acquaintance, distant, or an accidental acquaintance?

What was the contact's position/occupation?

Was the contact in the same occupational field as the individual's desired job?

Why are you where you are in the job search process? What is your motivation to be where you are?

Appendix C

Subject: [SENIOR] Are you a 1st Generation College Student? (Please read, this is not a Student Info)

Dear Senior,

If you are the first in your family to go to college I would really appreciate it if you would consider participating in my research project on the job search process.

Information Regarding My Project:

My name is Kate Kellman and I am a senior sociology major.

I am specifically interested in how students use resources available to them as they begin to search for their post-Kenyon jobs. I am curious to know which resources students use and whether or not the Kenyon resources, such as the Career Development Office and the Kenyon Alumni Network, provide important job contacts that may not be otherwise available to students.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It would consist of one interview, during the week of November 30th, which would last between 30-60 minutes. The information obtained from this interview will remain confidential and will be used for no other purpose than for my research project. There is no risk associated with your participation in this interview.

If you do chose to participate you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me, Kate Kellman, at (323) 449-9777 or via email at kellmank@kenyon.edu. You may also contact Professor Jennifer Johnson at (740) 427-5596 or via email at johnsonj@kenyon.edu. If you have other concerns or complaints, contact the Institutional Review Board at Kenyon College, Edelstein House, College Drive, Gambier, OH 43022. (740) 427-5748.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this.

I look forward to hearing from you.
-Kate Kellman '10

P.S. please respond by Wednesday November 25th.

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