
"Girls in the office": recruiting and job search in a local clerical labor market[†]

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Abstract. In this paper I investigate local labor-market processes which are associated with clerical employment in the financial and business services. I use a case study of Columbus, Ohio, to examine the process by which individual workplaces go about recruiting women workers and how women search for paid work. This process is viewed from the perspectives of employers and women clerical workers through the interpretation of a questionnaire survey of a sample of workplaces, and interactive interviews with personnel managers and women employed as clerical workers. I analyze the strategies that establishments utilize to recruit clerical workers and the job-search methods of the women interviewed. The results indicate that formal techniques of hiring and searching (for example, newspaper advertisements and temporary agencies) are particularly important, but informal methods (for example, personal contacts) are also very significant. The popularity of these techniques varies by location within the metropolitan area. Downtown locations for establishments and women employees are much more likely to be associated with formal methods, whereas informal methods are more popular in suburban workplaces. I argue that these processes illustrate that employers and women are enmeshed in a complex web of localized sociospatial relations and networks in their efforts to fill positions and find jobs.

1 Introduction

For some time now, feminist geographers have been challenging conventional disciplinary divisions in geography. This challenge is reflected in a growing recognition of the fruitfulness (and necessity) of blurring the boundaries between various spheres of human activity previously viewed as mutually exclusive. One area that has received a great deal of attention in this regard is the geography of labor markets, as it sits at the interface of social and economic geography. Over the last twenty years it has become clear that economic restructuring, the expansion in women's paid employment, and the massive growth of service industries are inextricably linked. Feminist geographers have been steadily enriching our understanding of these links, as evidenced by the research activity around the intersection of gender and labor markets (see for example, Christopherson, 1989; England, 1993; Hanson and Pratt, 1991; 1992; Pratt and Hanson, 1994). These interconnections have not eluded the attention of economic and industrial geographers. Although they continue to focus much of their research on questions of flexibility, new production technologies, interfirm linkages, and new industrial spaces, there have been calls to place greater emphasis on social and political contexts, local processes, and individual workplaces (Gertler, 1992; Sayer and Walker, 1991; Tickell and Peck, 1992).

These broader issues act as the backdrop to my exploration of the geography of local labor-market processes associated with clerical employment. I explore a particular local intersection of labor supply and labor demand, with Columbus, Ohio, as a case study. I investigate the manner in which women search for clerical work, and individual employers in financial and business services go about recruiting women workers. This process is examined through the interpretation of a

[†] This paper is dedicated to the memory of Dominic Scott-Knight.

questionnaire survey of a sample of workplaces, and through in-depth, interactive interviews with personnel managers and women employed as clerical workers.

My case study mirrors a number of widely noted observations about labor-market processes. First, despite gains made in professional and managerial occupational categories, the typical paid job for women continues to be clerical work. Currently, about one third of all women in paid employment in the USA are clerical workers, and 80% of clerical workers are women. Second, there has been a resurgence of geographical interest in the service industries, especially financial and business services (see Daniels, 1992; Ó hUallacháin and Reid, 1991; Sui and Wheeler, 1993; Wood, 1991). Financial and business services are fairly labor intensive, particularly in terms of clerical work. For example, 44% of workers in financial services in the USA are clerical workers (Hunt and Hunt, 1987). Third, the banking and insurance industries have identified themselves as practitioners of human resource management policies, aiming to promote 'meritocratic objectivity' in recruiting and promotion decisions (Keep, 1989).

2 Finding workers, finding jobs: recruiting strategies and job-search methods

A number of scholars have argued that a thorough understanding of labor-market dynamics can only be achieved by exploring both the demand and the supply sides (Clark and Whiteman, 1983; Peck, 1989; Sayer and Walker, 1992). There has been a vast accumulation of literature in sociology, economics, and management studies investigating labor-market processes. However, the emphasis of this literature has tended to be on supply-side factors. Not surprisingly, then, much attention has been focused on the searching by job-seekers (see for example, Campbell and Rosenfeld, 1985; Granovetter, 1974; Holzer, 1988; Kahn and Low, 1988) and hence relatively little is known about the recruiting and hiring practices at workplaces (but see, Barron et al, 1985; Collinson et al, 1990; Curran, 1988; Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Ford et al, 1984; Holt, 1970; Rynes, 1990). The limited academic research (as opposed to practitioner's guides) does not mean that employers are passive in the labor-market process—far from it. Instead, it relates to the dearth of adequate data that, in turn, reflects the difficulty of obtaining information on the internal workings of firms (Devine and Kiefer, 1991; Foley, 1990).

Recruiting (and job searching) can take a range of forms and occurs internally and externally to workplaces. Internal recruitment (or, broadly speaking, internal labor markets) is particularly popular in the finance sector (Crompton, 1989; Egan, 1982; Ford et al, 1984; Hartmann, 1988). Internal labor markets (ILMs) mean that vacancies above entry level are filled by current employees, and involve some form of internal promotion or career ladders and training systems to retain and advance current employees. Recruiting from their ILM is often an employer's first choice because it reduces recruiting and training costs, and because the applicant's record is already known (Ford et al, 1984; Jenkins, 1986; Jenkins et al, 1983). The attraction of ILMs for the employee is that they serve to insulate them from competition with the external labor market (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Hartmann, 1988; Lovering, 1990; Osterman, 1984).

Generally, the most extensive use of, and most highly developed, job ladders and ILMs are associated with large establishments. However, evidence suggests that there has been an increase in the use of ILMs by establishments of all sizes. Even some small establishments have been introducing employment practices aimed at retaining current employees (Ford et al, 1984; Granovetter, 1984). In addition, ILM practices have begun to be extended to nonmanagerial or professional occupations, although often in a modified form, and some clerical workers (usually in large

establishments) have begun to enjoy the benefits of ILMs (Boddy et al, 1986; Ford et al, 1984; Hartmann, 1987; Lovering, 1990).⁽¹⁾

Recruiting and job searching in external labor markets can be categorized as 'formal', 'direct applications', or 'informal'. Formal strategies involve the use of impersonal or institutional intermediaries. These include newspaper advertisements, employment agencies, school and college placement programs, and professional organizations (including unions). Direct applications by workers include unsolicited letters of application or applying in person (what employers refer to as 'walk-ins'). Informal methods refer to those strategies which rely on personal contacts (including instances where people receive unsolicited information leading to a job). Employers describe an applicant from personal contacts of current employees or business associates as 'word-of-mouth' or 'referrals'.

Although it is difficult to get exact statistics, it seems that at least 50% of all jobs in the USA are obtained through informal strategies, and that formal job-search strategies may account for between 20% and 40% of placements (Corcoran et al, 1980; Granovetter, 1974; Saunders and Flowerdew, 1987; Schreier, 1983). Clearly, informal recruiting and job-searching methods are extremely important labor-market processes. From the supply side, information obtained through personal contacts is considered more reliable and thorough than that obtained through other means, including information gained formally through job advertisements or even from personnel managers. Personal contacts may provide a more accurate picture about the internal working of the prospective workplace, the working conditions, and the possibilities for advancement (Datcher, 1983; Granovetter, 1974; Hanson and Pratt, 1992). Moreover, obtaining a job through personal contacts tends to lead to more satisfying and better paid jobs than do other methods (Corcoran et al, 1980; Granovetter, 1974). On the demand side, employee referrals are a quick and cheap means of obtaining applicants, and it seems that employee referrals are among the best source of long-term employees (Collinson et al, 1990; Devine and Kiefer, 1991; Manwaring, 1984; Rynes, 1990; Wood, 1988). This strategy has been described by Manwaring (1984) as creating *extended internal labor markets* (EILMs), as employee referrals blur the distinction between closed, internal, and open, external labor markets. Thus, positions obtained through EILMs are not truly open to competition in the external labor market because only a select number of people hear about the job openings. In a sense, some of the protection of ILMs is extended to a specific segment of the external labor market—those people in the social networks of current employees.

Although employers use a variety of recruiting methods, formal methods tend to be favored when hiring skilled workers (especially regional or national newspapers, professional journals, and employment agencies), and informal techniques when seeking unskilled workers. Formal recruiting techniques are more time consuming and expensive than informal techniques, and as low-status, less skilled jobs have higher rates of turnover and more frequent openings, they are more likely to be associated with informal recruiting techniques (Schultz, 1962; Simpson, 1992).

⁽¹⁾ Although some establishments have changed their employment practices so that they have internal clerical labor markets, it is important to point out that clerical workers (and, indeed, women in general) face more truncated internal labor markets and more limited advancement—hence the recent media attention on 'the glass ceiling effect' for women managers (Crompton, 1989; Egan, 1982; Lovering, 1990).

Job search methods vary by occupation and gender.⁽²⁾ As a broad occupational category, blue-collar workers are more dependent upon personal contacts than are white-collar workers (Campbell and Rosenfeld, 1985; Rees and Schultz, 1970). White-collar workers are more dependent on formal methods, but more detailed occupational breakdowns conclude that higher status white-collar workers make more use of informal methods than lower status white-collar occupations (Gottfredson and Swatko, 1979; Granovetter, 1974). In general, women are more likely than men to employ formal job-search techniques, and, when women do use informal methods, their contact is more likely to be a woman with whom they have a close relationship, or what Granovetter (1982) calls "strong ties".⁽³⁾ Given that women are more likely than men to be in lower status white-collar occupations, women clerical workers are even more likely to employ formal job-search strategies. Certainly, women clerical workers, while still using informal methods, tend to rely on employment or temporary agencies and newspaper advertisements more than blue-collar workers of either gender (Campbell and Rosenfeld, 1985; Corcoran et al, 1980; Hanson and Pratt, 1991).⁽⁴⁾

To some extent local labor-market conditions influence the employer's choice of recruiting method. In times of labor scarcity, employers attempt to cast their net as widely as possible. They use informal techniques (essentially EILMs) and most formal recruiting techniques, including the use of employment agencies (under other conditions employment agencies are often dismissed as producing too many inappropriate and poorly qualified applicants). During recessions, there is less reliance on formal techniques (partly because of the cost of some of them), and internal recruiting is increased. Interestingly, informal methods are often also given priority during recessions. Presumably this is because EILMs are a cheaper and faster means of recruiting workers, and because employers assume that referrals will have similar qualities to the referring worker and will 'fit in', thereby reducing training costs and the rate of turnover at a time when economic resources are scarce. Of course, the implication of the intensified use of ILMs and EILMs during recessions means that it becomes even more difficult for those who are truly in the external

⁽²⁾ Early job-search studies tended either to disregard gender differences or to ignore women altogether by simply considering men. Presumably part of the explanation for this was the lower paid labor-force participation rates and more ephemeral employment history among women during the 1960s and early 1970s. However, as women have become a more significant and permanent feature of the labor force, more studies have begun to consider gender differentials in job-search strategies.

⁽³⁾ People that the job searcher knows well—relatives, friends, and neighbors—represent strong ties. Weak ties exist with those people whom the job searcher knows less well, and who operate in different social networks. Granovetter (1982) argues that people with whom the job seeker has weak ties are likely to have different information and thus may be more effective personal contacts in a job search. However, the social networks of most people are dominated by people of the same gender, and given the segregated nature of paid work, women's networks, compared with those of men, are less occupationally diverse. This is significant because, regardless of gender, the most effective contacts in job searches tend to be men with whom the searcher has weak ties. That women's personal contacts tend to be women with whom they have strong ties may result in their enjoying fewer opportunities for high-quality job-search information (Campbell and Rosenfeld, 1985; Corcoran et al, 1980; Hanson and Pratt, 1991).

⁽⁴⁾ Job-search strategies also vary by race and ethnicity. For example, African-Americans are more likely to use personal contacts to search for jobs (Campbell and Rosenfeld, 1985; Corcoran et al, 1980; Jenkins, 1986). This also reflects occupational segregation, because African-Americans are more likely than European-Americans to hold blue-collar jobs, which are more likely to be found through informal contacts (Jenkins, 1986; Williams, 1993).

labor markets (that is 'outsiders' with no personal contacts inside the employing establishments) to obtain jobs (Maguire, 1986; 1988; Manwaring, 1984; Rutherford, 1994; Wood, 1988).

3 The difference that space makes

Geographers have argued that information about labor markets is not homogeneous across space, and that the same piece of information may generate different behaviors in different places (Amrhein, 1986; Amrhein and Mackinnon, 1985; Clark, 1986; 1987; Clark and Whiteman, 1983; Clark et al, 1986; Hanson and Pratt, 1991; 1992; Miron, 1978). A number of studies have examined labor market processes theoretically (Clark, 1986; 1987; Clark and Whiteman, 1983) and through simulation models (Amrhein, 1986; Amrhein and Mackinnon, 1985). Unfortunately, geographers have produced few empirical explorations of the process through which people find jobs and/or employers find workers (exceptions include, Angel, 1989; 1991; Hanson and Pratt, 1991; 1992; Pratt and Hanson, 1993; 1994; Rutherford, 1994; Saunders and Flowerdew, 1987).⁽⁵⁾

My starting point here is that different recruiting and job-search methods are associated with catchment areas of different spatial reach. Formal recruiting and job searching cover a wider geographic area than informal techniques reliant on social networks that are often quite localized. At the same time, the spatial extent of recruiting and searching for highly skilled jobs is far greater than for low-skilled jobs, because of the scarcer availability of people with the requisite high skills. Certainly labor markets for clerical workers are almost always local, unlike, for example, the regional, national, and even international labor markets for well-paid high-status professional occupations (Angel, 1991; Hanson and Pratt, 1991; 1992; Huang, 1989; Pratt and Hanson, 1994; Saunders and Flowerdew, 1987; Simpson, 1992).

Until recently, most studies have considered labor markets at the metropolitan or regional scale, or dealt with migration between regional labor markets. As cities become more polynucleated they increasingly consist of multiple 'local' labor markets that are made up of different internal and external labor markets (Lovering, 1990; Peck, 1989; Simpson, 1992). In short, a single urban area consists of distinct, but overlapping, labor markets and, even at the intraurban scale, labor-market and occupational segregation are manifest in and through space. Studying labor markets at the intraurban scale is particularly important when dealing with women's paid employment, as women conduct more localized job searches and have shorter commuting distances than men (Hanson and Pratt, 1991; 1992; Johnston-Anumonwo, 1988; Pratt and Hanson, 1993; 1994; Preston et al, 1993). In this respect it is significant that the suburbanization of financial and business services has received a great deal of attention, particularly the emphasis on supplies of highly localized, female clerical labor as a locational factor (England, 1993; Huang, 1989; Nelson, 1986).

The local nature of clerical labor markets is reflected in the employer's choice of recruiting channels. When formal strategies such as newspaper advertisements are used, vacancies in clerical work are advertised in local newspapers, whereas advertisements for professional vacancies appear in newspapers with more extensive catchment areas. That there are different geographies associated with different

⁽⁵⁾ Research on intraurban labor markets usually requires the use of primary data, and recent empirical research on local labor markets employs data gathered from individual workplaces (for example, Elhance and Chapman, 1992; Ley, 1985), questionnaire surveys, or interviews with workers and managers (for example, Angel, 1989; 1991; Hanson and Pratt, 1991; 1992; Pratt and Hanson, 1993; 1994).

techniques and skill levels suggests that employers are well informed about local labor-market conditions, especially for lower status occupations. A strong grasp of current local conditions may relate to the higher rates of turnover and more frequent hiring in lower status, lower skilled jobs. This means that employers constantly have their information updated and enriched, which, in turn, increases the effectiveness of their informal recruiting techniques. For instance, Hanson and Pratt (1992) found that in "their locational decisionmaking, recruitment strategies, and hiring practices ... employers ... disclosed a firm grasp of the social geography of the Worcester area" (page 380), which suggests that employers have a good feel for the nuances in the local landscape of labor, and play an active role in shaping local labor markets (also see Pratt and Hanson, 1994). In her classic study of clerical labor demand and supply in the San Francisco Bay Area, Nelson (1986) claimed that clerical labor demand was a major determinant of the location of back offices that are heavily reliant on clerical labor. She argued that employers were well aware of the varied geography of their 'preferred clerical labor supply' and made their location decisions accordingly (for a sympathetic critique of the spatial entrapment thesis, see England, 1993).

The general notion of employers as applied social geographers is supported by recent management literature that indicates that personnel managers have begun to conduct 'recruitment research' in order to employ a particular sort of employee. Recruitment research includes generating employee profiles describing the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the populations from which the employer has had the best success in recruiting (Caruth et al, 1988; Harding, 1988; 1989; Knights and Morgan, 1991). Part of this research often involves employers becoming social geographers, analyzing local conditions regarding potential labor supplies, other opportunities for employment, the local housing market, and commuting patterns. Research of this nature appears to be particularly relevant to the recruiting of clerical workers. For example,

"Other organizations have identified sources of employees by determining where their current employees live. This type of research, however, is likely to be more revealing where entry level production or clerical workers are concerned. If a firm discovers that the majority of its lower level employees reside within twenty miles of the work-place, recruiting efforts for these kinds of employees should be concentrated within that geographical area" (Caruth et al, 1988, page 144).

"[The company] must seek answers to a range of questions. Is there a noticeable movement of population in the area? Why? What is happening to residential real estate prices? What are the trends in residential real estate construction, and what do they imply about the future mix of the population? Is there significant pressure to control growth? How are the reputations of the communities within the 30-minute [commuting] zone changing? Why? Are there likely to be changes in the quality of the education students receive at local schools? Will road improvements or increased congestion change the recruiting radius in coming years?" (Harding, 1989, page 12).

Such recruitment research also supports findings of labor-market studies that employers prefer to recruit from specific neighborhoods where they assume the residents have particular employment-related qualities. And that employers believe that recruiting locally will reduce absenteeism and turnover caused by transportation problems (Curran, 1988; Dick and Morgan, 1987; Rees and Schultz, 1970; Rees et al, 1989). Evidence of employers conducting recruitment research also adds substance to claims that attempts to exploit and reproduce the social relations of the

locality of the workplace are one means through which employers attempt to gain social control in the workplace (Blackburn and Mann, 1979; Dick and Morgan, 1987; Knights and Morgan, 1991; Littler, 1982; Maguire, 1986; 1988; Rutherford, 1994).

In most previous geographical studies either the supply side or, less often, the demand side of labor markets was examined (reflecting the general nature of the literature on labor markets). Hanson and Pratt's recent work is an important exception (Hanson and Pratt, 1992; Pratt and Hanson, 1993; 1994). They show the spatially grounded and localized nature of the knowledge employers and workers use to make labor-market decisions. In their study of Worcester, they found that employers were aware of, and acted upon, the intraurban geography of labor supplies in their choice of location and medium of recruiting. For example, many utilized particular recruiting strategies (personal contacts as opposed to newspaper advertisements) to yield a highly localized labor-force. Expanding on earlier work (1991), Hanson and Pratt also showed that the job searches of employees were embedded in the localized sociospatial relations of everyday life, including the workplace. In essence, they illustrate the interdependence of employers and workers in constructing local labor markets, and the importance of geography in that process. Their work underscores the need to consider, in an integrated fashion, the demand for and the supply of labor, in order to gain a thorough understanding of labor-market processes.

4 Recruiting and job searching in Columbus

The City of Columbus has a population of 630 000 and is located in Franklin county (980 000) which forms the focus of the Columbus MSA (1.4 million). Columbus has a diversified economy but, unlike many other 'snowbelt' cities, it has never had a strong heavy-industry base. Columbus has become increasingly associated with service-sector industries and occupations. Half of the labor force is employed in managerial, professional, and technical specialties, and in administrative support occupations; and about two thirds of the total labor force is employed in finance-insurance-real estate (FIRE), public administration, retail trade, and services. Nationally these industries employ the largest shares of all clerical workers and/or have labor forces with a high proportion of clerical workers (Hunt and Hunt, 1987).

Columbus has a number of economic characteristics that make it distinctive. First, as the economic profile of Columbus is dominated by industries that are reliant upon clerical workers, it has an unusually large clerical labor force (22%, compared with the national average of 16%, of the labor force). Second, the local labor market is quite buoyant. Unemployment is consistently the lowest in the state and often lower than the national average, even during recessions. Third, during the 1980s, Columbus often led the country in terms of job creation, and numerous business-climate indicators (for example *Louis Harris*, and *Standard and Poor's*) and business magazines (for example *Business Week*, *Forbes*, and *Fortune*) often ranked Columbus as one of the 'best places to do business'. Moreover, the business magazines (and, subsequently, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce) often emphasize the relatively low rate of union membership in Columbus and point out that, in comparison with other US metropolitan areas, wages are below average, especially in clerical work.

Over the last thirty years, office functions in Columbus have undergone suburbanization—a process which has been fastest among FIRE and business services. The most notable growth in office space and office employment has been towards the north (reflecting the general trend of suburbanization) in a number of well-established, very affluent residential suburbs. Initially, this growth occurred in the

northern segment of Franklin county but, more recently, Delaware county, the northern county in the MSA, has also shown growth. Indeed *The Wall Street Journal* recently described Delaware county as one of "America's 20 hottest white-collar addresses" (Swasy, 1994). Many of these northern suburbs have among the highest median household-incomes, median property-values, proportion of owner-occupied housing, and proportion of residents in high-status occupations in the Columbus MSA.

In this case study I explore the recruiting strategies of a group of employers and the job-search methods of women clerical workers. The demand side is explored with the aid of overlapping data sets: a questionnaire survey of employers; lengthy interviews with personnel managers; and data based on the zip code of residence of female clerical workers employed at a sample of workplaces. The questionnaire survey provided an overall picture of popular strategies employed to hire clerical workers. In 1990 questionnaires were sent to 250 FIRE and business services establishments, selected from various publicly available Columbus business directories. To reflect the decentralization of office functions, half the questionnaires were sent to employers located in and around the downtown area, whereas the remainder went to employers located in the suburbs. The survey included questions regarding the size and occupational composition of the establishment's labor force, procedures for recruiting clerical workers, and policies regarding career ladders and promotion opportunities for clerical workers (internal labor markets). A total of 136 (54.4%) completed questionnaires were returned, with downtown and suburban locations being represented equally.

The responses to the questionnaires were subdivided along two axes. First, to take account of multiple labor markets at the intraurban level and to examine whether different recruiting methods are associated with different locations, the responses were subdivided according to whether the establishment was located downtown or in the suburbs [the sample was subdivided into 'downtown' if the zip-code address was within the central business district (CBD) zip code, and 'suburban' if the employer had a suburban zip code]. Second, given that ILMs are more likely to be associated with establishments with large numbers of employees, the responses were subdivided by number of employees to investigate whether smaller establishments used different recruiting techniques compared with larger establishments. The responses were subdivided according to the guidelines suggested by Granovetter (1984). In his study of establishment size and labor markets, he found that the average establishment size for FIRE and services industries was about 11 employees (whereas the figure for manufacturing, for example, was about 60). He divided his samples into those with fewer than 20, 100, 1000, and 10 000 (most private-sector establishments had fewer than 1000 employees). In my sample, 41.2% of the responses were from establishments with over 100 employees, 32.3% from those with between 20 and 100 employees, and 26.5% had fewer than 20 employees.

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with the personnel managers of 20 of the establishments which responded to the questionnaire, again evenly split between downtown and suburban locations. The interviews, which lasted between sixty and ninety minutes, were focused on the manager's strategies to recruit and retain women clerical workers. The size of establishments ranged from 15 to 2268 (in the case of multibranch firms, only those employees at the specific site studied were counted). Where possible, efforts were made to interview the personnel managers of the workplaces of the women clerical workers whom I interviewed.

The job search of clerical workers was explored by analyzing in-depth, interactive interviews with 30 women clerical workers. Their interviews lasted approximately three to five hours. Among other things, the questions dealt with how the women

went about obtaining their present jobs, and the promotion and career development opportunities offered by their employer. Most of the women worked full-time (24 out of 30), four worked part time, one job-shared, and one worked as a 'temp'. The women interviewed were evenly split between downtown and suburban workplaces, and about half worked at large establishments, six at medium-sized workplaces, and seven at small workplaces, and if they worked downtown they were more likely to work for a large establishment.

4.1 Internal labor markets

The questionnaires and the interviews with the personnel managers indicated that almost all the large, and a number of the medium-sized, establishments had some approximation of an ILM for clerical workers. The suburban-based establishments were (slightly) more likely to favor internal recruiting. Generally, employers sought to limit recruitment and training costs for clerical workers, especially when, as one personnel manager (employing 63 people) put it, "our business is one in which the labor cost is the primary cost of doing business". Many remarked that a favored strategy to reduce labor costs was to introduce policies aimed at curbing turnover and at advancing employees. This usually meant choosing to promote current employees rather than looking externally when vacancies occurred. As one personnel manager of a large establishment said:

"We look internally first. We look within the department and see if there's anyone there who might be wanting to move into that position. And if there's no one in that particular department, then we post the job so that people in other departments in the company can have a shot at it if they're interested in being promoted or transferred to another department. And if nothing comes up that way, then we look externally" (1892 employees).

Most of the large establishments had a policy of advertising and searching for jobs internally for a certain length of time, before any effort was made to recruit from the external labour market. Among the women whom I interviewed about half worked for large establishments, and most of these had such policies. A number, including Sarah, had taken advantage of them.

"Jobs are posted on a bulletin board on a weekly basis. I'm *always* at the bulletin board. You can apply for any job when it comes available. If you have the skills, then they'll hire you for it. They post the opening for three days and then, after the three days, they'll put it in the newspaper. After those three days people from inside cannot apply for it. You have to do it within those three days." (Sarah)

The interviews confirmed previous studies regarding the advantages ILMs offer employers and employees. Employers felt that they benefited from prior knowledge about an internal applicant's job-related abilities and personality traits, whereas an applicant from the external labor market is largely an 'unknown quantity'. Many also pointed out that emphasizing promotion from within seemed to enhance worker motivation and boost morale. Most of the firms which had ILMs had introduced them during the 1980s. A number believed that there was a direct link between the introduction of ILMs for clerical workers and the increase in their productivity and slowed rate of turnover. As one manager (employing 94 people) pointed out: "We're looking for meritorious performance, and hopefully we manage the business well enough that the people are inclined to do a good job as they go through the promotions". The women I interviewed generally remarked that internal labor markets meant that they could expect to enjoy promotion prospects. This was often

reflected in their ambitions and career aspirations. Toni provides an example of this: "I'm currently getting offered the executive secretary job, which is the only job like it—secretary to the president. But I've interviewed for three jobs (within the company) in the last eighteen months. ... They make room for raises. I was top of my grade, so the only raise I could get was general cost of living. This new job puts me in a new grade and I can now work again for some raises." (Toni)

Internal labor markets were not feasible for small firms. Instead, these employers stressed mutual loyalty and said they offered a friendly working environment (which they felt larger firms did not). For example, a manager of a small establishment (18 employees) remarked: "We have not needed to recruit for clerical workers since 1974. Our people want to stay with us," and another (15 employees) said: "All our clerical workers have been with us anywhere between 10 and 30 years". So, instead of promotion prospects, small establishments appeared to be emphasizing long employment histories and, supportive, personalized working conditions. This sense of reciprocal obligations was very attractive to many of the women interviewed who worked for small firms.

"I prefer a small company. You get to know the people and they get to know you a lot better. Camaraderie is a good word to describe it. If someone in the office is having a problem you know them well enough that you can just tell. I'm one who believes if you talk about it and get it out into the open, a solution may come to you or will make you feel a little bit better. If it is something that you can't change, at least you know that someone else cares, and that you're not just a number on an ID card." (Jenny)

When questioned about the disadvantages of small workplaces, the managers and women almost always mentioned the lack of opportunities for promotion or even lateral movement. Interestingly, and in spite of the mutual loyalty and reciprocal obligations espoused by the personnel managers, a number of the younger women interviewed commented that limited opportunities did not really bother them. However, this is not because they lacked ambition, but rather that they were hoping to further their education and use those qualifications and their work experience to apply for jobs with other employers who offered greater prospects for promotion. Carolyn exemplified much of this:

"The only disadvantage in working for a small company is in the case of advancement. It would be very, very hard for me to advance here. But that doesn't concern me right now because I don't plan on being a secretary for the rest of my life. I eventually want to go back to school because so many companies are degree oriented these days. I know that there are several large corporations that won't even consider you without a degree, not even an associates degree. I want to be able to walk into a large corporation some time and start working for them." (Carolyn)

4.2 External labor market

Previous research suggests that in external clerical labor markets, the favored techniques are formal (particularly newspaper advertisements) and direct applications, although there is evidence of the importance of informal techniques that effectively create EILMs. The responses to the question "What are your major strategies for recruiting clerical workers from outside the firm?" are summarized in table 1. The question was open-ended, so there was no limit on the number of strategies that the respondent could record. The percentages, then, represent the frequency with which a particular strategy was mentioned by employers in that particular category.

The results in table 1 indicate that various formal techniques were the most frequently used strategy, followed by informal methods, with direct applications a distant third. In comparison with previous studies, informal methods were more important and direct application much less important (this might be because the questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the recent recession). Among formal techniques, newspaper advertisements were especially popular for all but the small, downtown establishments. Columbus-wide newspapers tended to be favored, especially *The Columbus Dispatch*—the only metropolitan-wide daily newspaper.

Table 1. Major strategies for recruiting clerical workers, by location (source: author's questionnaire survey).

	Establishments employing							
	fewer than 20		20 to 100		over 100		total	
	sub	down	sub	down	sub	down	sub	down
Formal techniques								
Columbus-wide newspapers	57.1	28.6	54.5	64.0	73.0	63.2	63.6	60.0
Neighborhood newspapers	42.8	0.0	45.5	0.0	46.6	0.0	45.5	0.0
Employment/temporary agencies	14.3	71.4	9.0	64.0	20.0	26.3	18.2	48.6
Visit schools/colleges	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.6	10.5	3.0	5.7
Professional organizations	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.6	5.3	3.0	5.7
Informal techniques								
Word-of-mouth, including employee referrals	14.3	28.4	45.0	30.0	53.3	21.0	42.4	25.7
Direct applications and 'walk-ins'	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.6	5.3	3.0	3.0

Note: sub, suburbs; down, downtown; values expressed as percentages.

Suburban employers, regardless of size, favored their local neighborhood newspapers. Notice that no downtown employer specified neighborhood newspapers, which are particularly associated with suburban and exurban places. These newspapers are not merely community newsletters, but are fairly lengthy, employ relatively large staffs, and have substantial listings of job advertisements. However, they have very spatially circumscribed circulations: the majority of their subscribers reside within the same zip-code area in which the newspaper is based. Interviews with the personnel managers of suburban establishments indicated that they had a deliberate strategy of advertising in the local neighborhood newspaper, and a few also advertised in the local newspapers of the surrounding exurban and rural areas. The attraction of this strategy is illustrated by the comments of the personnel manager of a large suburban establishment:

"If I ran an ad in Columbus for ten job openings, and I employed people from Columbus, and then I ran that same ad in the newspaper that hits [the small towns north of Columbus] and I filled them with ten people from up there, I'll bet you five years later that I had kept more people from that group up there than I had from the Columbus group." (190 employees)

This comment reflects previous studies that have found that employers have a strong sense of fine-scale local variations in social relations, and exploit them through their recruitment strategies. Indeed, employers actively define the spatial extent of the local labor market through their recruiting techniques.

A large number (13) of the women interviewed obtained their present job by responding to an advertisement in a newspaper (especially if their job was downtown).

Of these, Linda and Pat remarked that they used newspaper advertisements because they had begun looking for a job as soon as they had moved to Columbus. Mary said that she liked to 'browse' through the advertisements and occasionally apply for jobs "just to see what happened" (further questioning revealed that this was motivated by lack of self-esteem rather than irreverence). Jennifer was looking specifically for an office job in the downtown core, where she felt the working atmosphere was more professional and "cosmopolitan" than in the suburb where she had been employed previously.

"I looked in the paper for office jobs downtown. I think the main reason was that I wanted to get into the downtown area and, you know, be around people who worked downtown. They're more cosmopolitan than people isolated in the suburbs. I meet more people, make more contacts than I did at my old job."
(Jennifer)

Employment and temporary agencies were the next most frequently employed formal method, although, interestingly, this was not reflected in the most recent job searches of the women interviewed. Only three had used this approach. Agencies were generally very popular downtown, especially among small and medium-sized establishments.⁽⁶⁾ The interviews indicated that smaller, downtown employers could not always rely on internal labor markets to fill vacancies and so they often had to hire clerical workers (from the external labor market) faster than larger establishments that could draw on their current employees. At the same time, their small size meant that it was difficult to justify carrying the overhead costs of a full-blown personnel department. This is illustrated by the personnel manager of a medium-sized, downtown establishment:

"Clerical workers are not recruited from newspapers due to time constraints. Traditionally, they only give two weeks notice. We use employment agencies to fill clerical positions quickly, that is if we can't find someone within to fill openings." (90 employees)

These results also corroborate Hanson and Pratt's (1991) findings that women in female-dominated occupations search for much shorter lengths of time than those in male-dominated occupations (for example, managers). Agencies provide a quick way of finding jobs or filling vacancies. The attraction of agencies for downtown employers also reflects the agglomeration economies associated with the reduced job-search and recruiting costs connected with the high density of clerical jobs in the downtown office district. Indeed, about half of the 25 largest temporary agencies in the Columbus metropolitan area are located in the downtown core. A few more than one third of the other largest temporary agencies are located in the northern suburbs that contain most of the decentralized offices: this reflects the intraurban geography of offices in Columbus. However, although suburban employers did rely on employment and temporary agencies to hire clerical workers, these agencies came in a poor third in comparison with other formal, and even informal, techniques. A few of the large, and even a couple of the medium-sized, suburban establishments have circumvented temporary agencies altogether by creating their

⁽⁶⁾ It is estimated that as many as 90% of all US firms use temporary employees (Caruth et al, 1988). Engaging the services of a temporary agency, especially during busy periods, has become increasingly common since the early 1980s. Temps are attractive to employers because they involve minimum recruiting costs, and the difficulty of firing unsuitable people that get employed in full-time positions is avoided (Appelbaum, 1987; Caruth et al, 1988). Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that insurance companies are becoming reluctant to employ large numbers of clerical workers permanently because of concerns that new technology would eradicate jobs. Hiring temps circumvented this problem (Collinson et al, 1990).

own 'internal' pool of temps. For example:

"We've sort of developed our own pool of people that work on our payroll and that want to work on a temporary basis. And that's just a cost saving measure so that we aren't paying the price of the agencies and, actually, it's better for the employee. They get more of the money than they would from the agency, because the agencies take such a big cut." (200 employees)

Of all temps in the United States 70% are in clerical employment, and 62% of all temps are women (Appelbaum, 1987). Not surprisingly, then, some of the women I interviewed had worked as a temp at some point in their employment history. At the time of my interviews, only one woman was working as a temp, and another (Fran), having temped for a number of years, had recently been hired permanently. Fran explained the advantages of temping.

"When I first started back and the boys were still small, I temped. It was great you could work in the winter, work when you wanted. Then when summer comes around and the kids were out of school you can say, 'I'll call you in September'. Temping is really a great way for a woman who hasn't worked in years to get her feet wet. You learn about them and they learn about you, and sometimes you get hired permanently, like I was." (Fran)

The other formal techniques for recruiting were less important. However, it is noteworthy that the larger employers, unlike the smaller establishments, had the resources to visit and/or participate in placement programs at local schools and secretarial colleges (one of the women interviewed got her present job through such a program at the college where she obtained her associates degree in secretarial science). Others spontaneously responded that they frequently approached community organizations, including the Columbus Urban League, to increase their pool of applicants.

Informal techniques were the means by which eleven of the women I interviewed obtained their current job. These findings provide empirical support for the notion of EILMs. They also confirm previous findings about the spatially embedded nature of personal contacts. The women who used personal contacts (including Petra quoted below) often heard about their current jobs through their friends, neighbors, and relatives (people with whom they have strong ties), who were, almost without exception, women. For example, Anne heard about her current job through her mother who worked for the head office of an insurance company. The manager of one of the suburban branch offices had asked Anne's mother if she knew "anybody who needs a job, and she said I might be interested and so I went in and I got the job".

Informal techniques were more commonly used by suburban establishments, especially those employing over 100 employees. This was mirrored in the interviews with the women: those employed by large suburban workplaces were much more likely to have used informal methods to find their job than those working for employers in the other categories. When the personnel managers could not hire from within, they often obtained new clerical workers by utilizing employee referrals. Once the jobs are posted or advertised in internal newsletters, current employees become aware that there are vacancies and, as one manager (employing 60) put it: "our people might say to their cousin or sister, or their mother or father, brother or neighbor, 'Say, we've got a job opening up, how about you applying?'" My interview with Petra (who works for a large, downtown establishment) illustrates this:

"A good friend of mine in personnel called and she asked if I wanted to work half-time. I think having had someone who knew me personally in personnel didn't hurt anything. She could recommend, you know, that I'm honest and trustworthy, punctual and all those things that people maybe don't know. So, I just proved myself and I guess I interviewed fairly well." (Petra)

Previous studies indicate that employee referrals often become long-term employees. A number of the personnel managers commented on this, and some said that they offer bonuses to referring employees when their referral gets hired, and sometimes another if the referral stayed on the job for a certain length of time. One manager elaborated on the attraction of EILMs:

“We lose probably 90% that are hired each year. The greatest turnover is in their first year of employment. Once they get past that, the stability increases with each year, but the first year is a tough one. It seems that we lose more people who come to us through the paper. They tend to be more of a random sample, and many of the applicants don’t even meet our minimum standards. But we seem to have a better retention rate with the referrals, those people who come to us through their relatives or friends who already work here. Those are the people for whom our positions are filling their needs, and they are certainly filling ours.” (120 employees)

Interestingly, a number of the large and medium-sized establishments responding to the questionnaire specified employee referrals, whereas the small employers more frequently specified referrals through clients or business community networks (as I did not request this breakdown on the questionnaire, it is not included in table 1). My interviews with the personnel managers and the women provide additional support for this observation. Those women who used personal contacts tended to be employed by large establishments, and the few who used informal techniques to obtain jobs with smaller employers often got their job in the manner that Rebecca did.

“I was familiar with the company because I used to be a secretary to the president of [a large bank] and at the time [her present employer] was starting I was instrumental in starting all their checking accounts and all their loans and things. I was familiar with what they did because of my involvement with [the large bank]. ... They knew me, they had already done business with me. They knew I was qualified and they needed a dependable person. So they offered me the job.” (Rebecca)

Direct applications (both from the supply and from the demand sides) were not as important as previous literature indicated. Indeed, only one of the women interviewed obtained her current job through a direct application to her employer. Among the questionnaire respondents, only a few of the large establishments identified direct applications as an important source of clerical workers, whereas none of the small or medium-sized establishments did (see table 1). The interviews with the large employers revealed that direct applications were attractive to them because they involved the least investment of their time and money—prospective employees sought them out. As the personnel managers at two large establishments remarked (the first located downtown, the second located in the suburbs):

“Right now I’m getting a lot of resumes. I get a lot of those every day, five or ten or so, sometimes we get more. We keep them on file by job category, and we keep them for about six months. We look at them, date them as they come in, and then try to look at them about every six months. And if we haven’t utilized them, then we pitch them. And so we keep a fresh supply, so when a position opens up we’ll look there too (in addition to their internal labor market).” (984 employees)

“People drop by because they’re in the area, or a friend of a friend, that kind of thing. ... It’s amazing how quickly we’ll find what we’re looking for. If I put out the word that we’re looking for some people, I’d have a line-up by tomorrow. We’ve always been able to get good applicants without advertising.” (informal recruiting was also important to this employer) (460 employees)

The first quote represents the practice of 'stockpiling' (Bishop and Barron, 1984), whereby the pool of candidates for an opening is expanded by reviewing applications that had been received before there was a vacancy. Bishop and Barron found that stockpiling is more common for service-sector jobs and large firms. My questionnaires and the interviews also indicate that it was the very largest employers that used stockpiling as a recruitment technique. However, even among the largest employers this was a strategy used regularly only by the national or multinational corporations which dominate their respective markets and/or have high visibility in the immediate community. This was further confirmed by the interviews with the women who had used direct applications to obtain their present or previous jobs. When smaller establishments were targeted by the women using direct applications, it was usually because they had heard that the establishment had a 'reputation' for being a good place to work. Although employers play a relatively passive role in the direct applications approach, there could be potential 'supply' effects. Workers are more likely to employ a direct applications job-search method if their networks have informed them that the employer seriously considers direct applications when positions arise.

4.3 Localized knowledge, recruiting, and laborsheds

From the questionnaires and interviews I found that within intraurban labor markets, recruiting strategies and even job-search methods vary by workplace location. Hanson and Pratt (1992) have described employers as 'social geographers' who are aware of the intraurban geography of labor supplies and play an active role in shaping local labor markets. Recent management and business literature indicates that recruitment research is conducted in order to tap into particular local labor supplies. These practices are significant when dealing with clerical labor markets because most workers are recruited locally, and high turnover and relatively more clerical jobs mean that employers can accumulate extensive knowledge about the idiosyncrasies of local labor supplies. In short, employers are conversant in the local landscape of labor supplies, and generally are embedded in the localized sociospatial relations of the locality in which they are located.

A study of the questionnaires showed that recruiting strategies varied by location of the workplace. Given the findings of previous research, it seemed probable that the geography of the laborsheds associated with recruiting strategies dominated by informal methods would vary from those more reliant on formal techniques. I speculated that the laborsheds of workplaces relying primarily on Columbus-wide newspapers and employment/temporary agencies (downtown establishments) would look quite different from those which are heavily dependent on informal methods and neighborhood newspapers (suburban establishments). This question was explored in the interviews with the personnel managers of medium-sized and large establishments. A number of the personnel managers provided a listing of the zip code of residence of their female clerical workers. This enabled me to examine the spatial pattern and extent of their laborsheds. I found that a number of the downtown workplaces often had fairly compact and circular-shaped laborsheds, whereas some suburban laborsheds were more scattered and somewhat elliptical in shape. This suburban-central-city difference is reminiscent of Brown and Holmes's (1971) research on the spatial form of housing search in the context of intraurban migration behavior. They found that the spatial pattern of the searches of suburban households, unlike those of central city households, were more spatially dispersed and ellipsoidal in shape.

Figures 1 and 2 provide examples that typify this suburban-city difference in laborsheds. Figure 1 shows the laborshed of a downtown bank that employs 330 women clerical workers. The laborshed is tightly focused around downtown Columbus. The majority of the clerical workers are commuting from within a ten-mile radius with a scattering from farther afield. Figure 2 shows the laborshed of a suburban-based insurance firm that employs 246 women clerical workers. Its laborshed has relatively fewer employers closely clustered around the workplace. The laborshed is also skewed towards the northeast: a relatively rural part of central Ohio, punctuated by small towns. The personnel manager explained that among those employees coming from the northeast:

“... there is a very high ratio of employee referrals as opposed to newspaper advertising and those people tend to car-pool. In fact, they sometimes ride down here with the referring employee, come in, fill out an application, spend all day walking around the complex and that, until they get a ride back.”

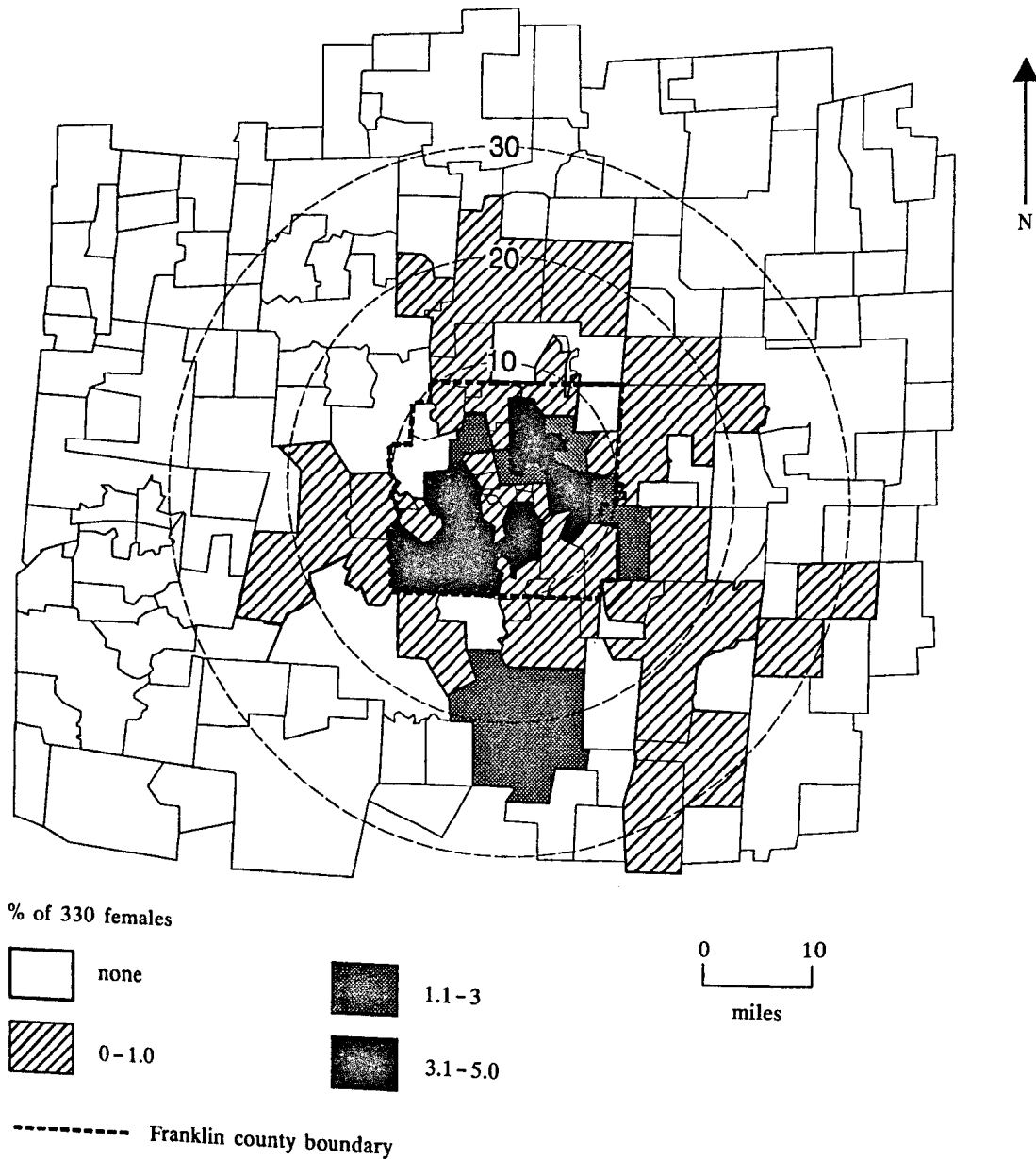


Figure 1. Clerical laborshed of a downtown establishment.

The laborsheds of, and interviews with, some of the other suburban employers revealed similar spatial patterns. When asked why they thought laborsheds were shaped as they were, many agreed that it reflected their informal hiring techniques. A few also commented on the limited paid employment opportunities for women in surrounding rural areas which meant that they had to travel further to reach areas with better opportunities. As the personnel manager of a medium-sized, suburban establishment remarked:

“Our clerical workers tend to either live right here or well away from the city, which basically means that this is one of the closest opportunities for them to work. In other words, they’re not bypassing the opportunity to be file clerks at other companies to come work for us. We end up being geographically closest to them. So, we do have clerical workers spending a half-hour commuting, but they’re coming from a place with no jobs, to the closest place where there are jobs.” (65 employees)

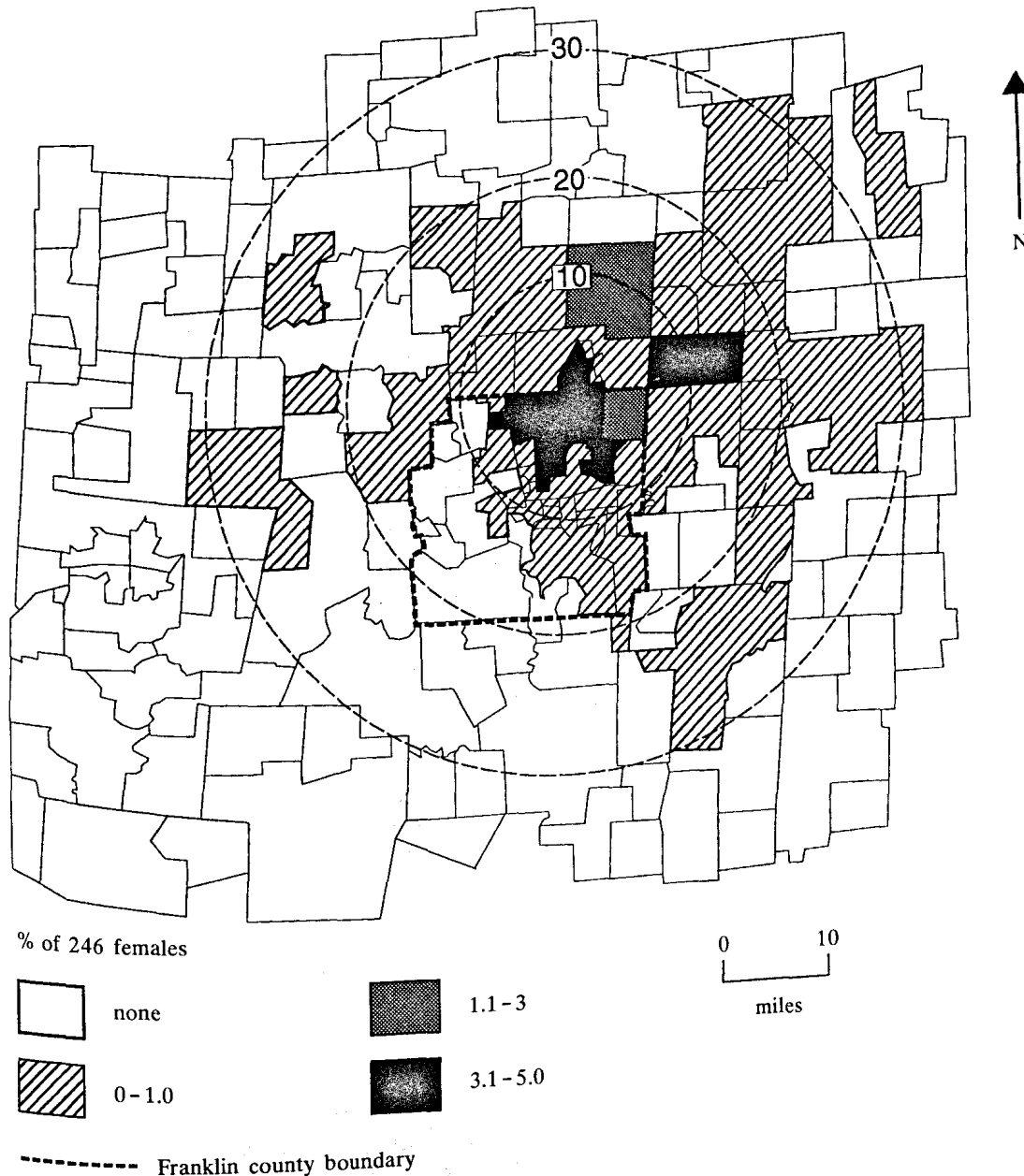


Figure 2. Clerical laborshed of a suburban establishment.

The favored hiring technique of an individual employer often influences the extent and shape of the laborshed of the workplace. The pattern revealed in figure 2 is consistent with accounts provided in the interviews: the employer's reliance on EILMs is often reflected by the shape and extent of the laborshed. The interviews indicated that the personnel managers were well aware of the preexisting spatial patterns of job opportunities for potential clerical workers. They illustrated a sense of the local nuances in spatially embedded social relations that shape local clerical labor-market processes. Indeed, a couple of the employers had conducted what can be described as recruitment research. For example, the personnel manager of a medium-sized, downtown establishment remarked that:

"We have developed a recruiting profile for each of the major categories; that includes the characteristics of the populations from which we've recruited good employees. Yes, we even look at where they live and how they get to work. We run zip-code listings that tell us where our people live, and not that many in [wealthy suburbs], more in Columbus, but increasing numbers from [rural areas and small towns around Columbus]." (87 employees)

Downtown employers, although less likely to employ informal hiring techniques, were well aware that their clerical workers had many other employment opportunities in the downtown core. Some also revealed that they appreciated that clerical workers might not be willing, or able, to remain with the establishment if it was relocated to another site, as the following quote from a medium-sized establishment shows:

"We did consider the possibility of moving to [a northern suburb]. And the decision at the time was don't do it because of the people. The clerical staff and even some of the professionals and managers are not as mobile to move and would have a longer commute. Managerial and professional probably would do that, but we probably would lose a lot of the clericals." (72 employees)

Many of the employers, whether located downtown or in the suburbs, wanted to employ "a particular type of person". Efforts to generate and make use of EILMs often indicated a keen awareness of apparent city-suburban-exurban variations in the qualities of labor supplies and the nature of their "work ethic". Consider the following comments from a large suburban insurance company:

"I've checked out the performance of the clericals coming in from out there [exurban and rural areas surrounding Columbus], their attendance, and they perform better than the group from Columbus. It's because, you know, they've got more of a rural work-ethic background, they are more stable, well adjusted, they want more of a career and they want to do well." (742 employees)

The use of employee referrals to establish EILMs enabled employers to tap into their preferred supplies of clerical workers. EILMs are attractive to employers because they increase the likelihood that the new employee will "fit in". This supports previous suggestions that employers attempt to selectively exploit and reproduce certain social relations in the locality in order to gain social control in the workplace. Some of this is conveyed by the following quotes; the first from a medium-sized downtown employer, the second from a large suburban employer.

"We feel like we have good people, good staff, and when you built that team, it's something that you just can't easily replace. When we hire, we go through a longer than average period of selecting someone. It allows the person to get to know different people in the company, but also allows us to decide too. We want people who fit in and are good technically, so [the extended selection process is] one way of finding out, and it's also good in terms of seeing if they're a hard worker." (93 employees)

“We believe in the full match and fit with the job. And that fit comes not only in terms of the skills that are required, but also how they fit into the culture of the company. ... And there’s the person-side, too. Some type of interpersonal skills where you can work with other people. We have some very explicit values on which we say we would like to operate our business. So we would be looking to see if someone has those same kind of values.” (110 employees)

For geographers, the reliance on informal recruiting techniques does have interesting spatial implications. However, for employers to use referrals as the main recruitment source might lead to problems that could become litigious, as this strategy might have a discriminatory impact, even if there was no intention to discriminate (this was a particularly sensitive issue for companies with government contracts, as they have to adhere to affirmative action guidelines). As EILMs are based on social networks, they not only close opportunities to people outside those networks, but also exclude particular groups of people. Given the nature of social networks, EILMs tend to perpetuate the current social composition of a workplace. If the present clerical labor force consists largely of white women, then most of their referrals will be white women. More generally, informal recruiting can perpetuate occupational segregation by gender and race, as women and people of color are less likely to hear about high-status, well paid jobs (Collinson, 1988; Corcoran et al, 1980; Hanson and Pratt, 1991; Jenkins, 1986; Wood, 1986). Thus EILMs may be discriminatory, especially if they are used in tandem with relocation decisions, as the following quote from a large, suburban establishment shows:

“Out of 738 people, 672 of them are white, 60 of them are black. Before we moved from downtown to this area, many of the people who worked for us were black. They were on the bus line on the east-side of Columbus, and when given the choice of getting another job downtown, as opposed to coming all the way up here, they chose not to make that move. We didn’t realize that was going to happen until we had it happen. We were hoping to retain a 100% of the people that we had working; it would have certainly been more of a benefit to do that.”⁽⁷⁾
(738 employees)

5 Conclusions

Underpinning this paper is the assertion that space and geography are necessary components of labor-market processes. Local labor markets need to be viewed as sociospatial constructs. I see recruiting and job searching as spatially imbued practices that are embedded in the everyday place-based experiences and interactions of employees and employers. Certainly, space is not only the context, but also the medium through which labor-market processes take place. These processes are played

⁽⁷⁾ This particular quote highlights some of the practical and ethical issues associated with in-depth, open-ended interviews. Recently, a number of people have reflected on open-ended interviews as a research strategy in economic geography (Herod, 1993; McDowell, 1992; Schoenberger, 1991). A recurring theme—and one that I have dealt with elsewhere (England, 1994)—is that the researcher’s positionality influences the research. Particular attention has been paid to gender relations. All but four of the managers whom I interviewed are men. Perhaps, as I am a woman, the male managers did not take me seriously and/or did not feel threatened by me. Perhaps, in turn, this led them to reveal more sensitive and even confidential information (at particular points during some interviews I was asked to turn off the tape-recorder). The second issue that this quote underscores is that of the analysis and interpretation of interviews. This manager was insistent (as were others) that the relocation decision was not racially motivated. Of course, it is possible that he was not being entirely truthful, that he was telling me what he thought I wanted to hear and/or that he was anxious to project ‘the right sort of image’ (of himself as a personnel manager and the firm as an employer).

out in space, articulated through current spatial patterns, reinforcing and (re)creating the local context. In other words labor-market processes are locally articulated and so shape, and are shaped by, localities, even *within* the same urban areas.

Local labor-market processes have been poorly understood and have not received much attention from geographers until recently. A thorough understanding of the richness and complexity of local labor markets cannot be grasped by examining the demand for labor separately from the supply of labor. The relations between supply-side factors and employer demand need to be considered in tandem. In this paper I have attempted to achieve this by using a case study of clerical employment in a sample of FIRE and business services establishments in Columbus, Ohio. I examined the manner in which individual workplaces recruit clerical workers and how women go about finding clerical work. I drew upon interpretations of a questionnaire survey, of a sample of workplaces, and of interactive interviews with personnel managers and women employed as clerical workers.

My results confirm previous findings that formal recruiting and job searching methods are particularly important in clerical labor markets, but run counter to results which conclude that direct applications are also popular. They also substantiate recent suggestions that informal methods are important. More generally, my research highlights a number of significant issues about the role of employees and, especially, employers in *actively* shaping the geography of local labor markets. First, the practice of ILMs does apply to clerical workers. Obviously larger firms are able to use this strategy more effectively than smaller establishments, and are able to offer employees lateral as well as promotional opportunities. The interviews showed that ILMs were attractive both to employers and to employees. Fully fledged ILMs were not feasible in firms with a small number of employees. Instead these firms emphasized the advantages of an intimate supportive working environment over the anonymity of working for a large firm.

Second, popular job-search and recruiting strategies varied in accordance with workplace location within the city, which underscores the importance of the analysis of labor markets at a fine spatial scale. Formal channels were the favored method of recruiting clerical workers and finding clerical work. Newspapers were the primary avenue for filling vacancies and finding jobs. However, although Columbus-wide newspapers were the most popular, many suburban-based employers advertised in neighborhood newspapers in addition to, or instead of, the larger *Columbus Dispatch*. Downtown establishments exhibited greater reliance on more spatially ubiquitous newspaper advertisements in Columbus-wide newspapers and on greater use of employment/temporary agencies (the latter being particularly attractive to small and medium-sized establishments). On the other hand, suburban workplaces reported recruiting strategies that prioritized neighborhood newspapers and informal strategies.

Third, the interviews with personnel managers indicated that they keep themselves well informed about the character of the local clerical labor market. Some engage in recruitment research, or collect information on other employment opportunities available to clerical workers, which indicates their sensitivity to local conditions. Most employers put their localized knowledge to use when making decisions about recruiting and hiring. The favored hiring technique was often reflected in the extent and shape of the laborshed of the workplace: downtown workplaces (which were more heavily reliant on formal hiring) often had circular laborsheds, whereas the suburban ones were often more elliptical, which reflects the use of EILMs.

That sociospatial structures are unevenly developed at the intraurban scale lies at the very heart of the job searches of women and the recruiting strategies of employers who took part in my research. In short, employers and prospective women employees

are enmeshed in a complex web of localized social relations and networks, in their efforts to fill positions and find jobs. Local labor markets are socially constructed, and as such it is important to understand the manner in which they are produced, reproduced, and transformed. In order to comprehend fully local labor-market processes, geographers need to explore the interaction between social and economic processes.

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