CREATING SUPPLEMENTAL NETWORKS FOR LOW-INCOME WOMEN: SOCIAL TIES EMBEDDED WITHIN SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This study adds to the understanding of the role institutions play in intentionally shaping low-income women’s social networks as a way to reduce structural inequalities in social capital. The research is divided into two phases. In the first phase of the study, I analyze interviews with nine social service providers to explore the extent to which social service organizations engage in purposive brokerage. In the second phase of the study, a case study of a social service organization, I analyze interviews and focus groups conducted with 12 agency staff members, interviews with 10 low-income female students of a 12-week workforce development program, and field observations to document the ways in which the organization intentionally brokers ties for low-income women. In addition, using data from 15 pre- and post-name generator surveys administered to students after the program, I analyze the short-term changes that occur in students’ social networks. The findings indicate that to varying degrees, social service organizations seeking to advance low-income individuals’ socio-economic status engage in purposive brokering. After participating in a workforce development program, students experienced an overall increase in the number of people in their social network, a decrease in mean network tie strength and a decrease in the degree of network homophily. These results are attributable, in part, to purposive organizational brokerage. The findings indicate that organizations, through purposive brokering, can and do bridge dissimilar actors and broaden opportunities for social mobility. Further, there is emerging evidence that organizations can serve as a place to create new networks and new cultural norms that can work to counteract downward leveling norms that low-income individuals may experience.
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Chapter One
Introduction

This research adds to the understanding of the role institutions play in intentionally shaping low-income women’s social networks as a way to reduce structural inequalities in social capital. The research is divided into two phases. The first phase of the study explores the extent to which social service organizations engage in purposive brokering, that is, the intentional process of creating connections between individuals and other individuals and organizations (Small 2009). The second phase of the research documents the ways in which a social service organization intentionally brokers ties for low-income women and reveals short-term changes that occur in women’s social networks, defined as the social structure comprised of connections to other individuals, groups, and organizations (Wellman 1983). The findings illustrate the factors that contribute to and inhibit social tie formation, as well as highlight some of the unintended consequences of the purposive brokering process.

As the Director of Research and Evaluation at Crittenton Women’s Union (CWU), a Boston based social service organization serving low-income women, I have had the opportunity to witness how an organization can serve as a resource broker, that is, an organization with ties to other agencies (e.g. government, nonprofit, businesses, etc.) rich in resources that provides their clientele access to these resources (Chaskin et al. 2001; Small 2006). I have seen CWU serve as a resource broker by directing basic material resources, such as access to shelter and food, flowing into CWU from other agencies to the women and families CWU serves. However, I have also seen how CWU brokers ties to build social support, that is, resources to cope and get by day to day (Briggs 1998), and social leverage, that is, resources to help someone ‘get ahead’ (Briggs 1998), by purposively connecting women to other individuals and organizations within the agency’s network. Maria’s story detailed below is just one anecdotal example of this
phenomenon. It inspired me to want to better understand the intentional process of brokering ties in which organizations engage. Is the process unique to CWU? Does it result in short-term changes in the size and composition of women’s social network? What factors contribute to tie formation? What factors inhibit tie formation? Is there a downside to the intentional brokering process?

Over the past year, Maria, an unemployed low-income single mother, actively pursued a career in the medical billing field. However, despite her multiple professional certifications and trainings, Maria had difficulty finding a job. Not knowing where to turn, she enrolled in CWU’s Woman to Woman (WTW) program, a workforce development program. The program’s cohort model design gave Maria the opportunity to interact on a daily basis with peers who shared the same goals. Furthermore, the program design included a mentoring component which gave Maria access to a cadre of female volunteer mentors from a variety of professions and life experiences. After two months, a mentor affiliated with the WTW program contacted a staff member to offer an internship position to a student. Staff members quickly identified Maria as an ideal candidate to connect to this opportunity, noting their trust and confidence in her skills and abilities. Because of Maria’s involvement with CWU and the WTW program, she became embedded in an institutional network of staff members, volunteers, partner organizations and resources. The organization and staff members served as a node of connection for Maria, linking her to a volunteer mentor who offered an internship that eventually led to a full-time position in her desired field.

Maria’s story illustrates the familiar phrase, “It’s not what you know, but who you know”, referring to the power of social networks. A rich body of literature demonstrates that social networks influence various aspects of our life, including our health, mobility and status
attainment (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1983; Lin 1999; Putnam 2000; Briggs 2002). Studies likewise document substantial inequalities in social networks and social capital (Moore 1990; Lin 2000; Briggs 2002; Pinchler and Wallace 2009). More recently, research has focused on the role of organizations in influencing individuals’ social networks via organizational embedded ties. Specifically, this work explores how institutions can serve as resource brokers, acting as a node of connection for individuals to gain access and connect to others and to material goods and information flowing through neighborhood-based organizations (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Small 2006; Small 2009; Briggs, Popkin, and Goering 2010; Curley 2010). Mario Luis Small (2006), for example, argues that organizations may serve as the only ‘access point’ to critical resources for those who are socially isolated. Silvia Dominguez and Celeste Watkins (2003) have demonstrated how some factors, such as trust, confidentiality, and competence, influence how institutional ties form for individuals connected to social service providers, such as Maria. This has helped further understand the process of developing an institution-based network comprised of social ties to people within the institution such as staff members and volunteers (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Dominguez 2011). Further, research has documented how organizations, through policies, norms and institutional practices can, unintentionally shape and expand people’s networks and social capital within (Small 2009).

However, there has been little documented on the process of intentional social tie formation within organizations, that is, purposive organizational brokerage - the deliberate process of creating connections between individuals served by an organization and other individuals and agencies within that organization’s network (Small 2009). In this study, I draw on Small’s (2009) use of the term organizational brokerage to refer to, “the general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to
the resources they contain” (p.19). Building on this idea, I use Small’s term, purposive brokerage, to refer to the intentional process of connecting.

Given the vast amount of research demonstrating the benefits of large and diverse networks (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 1999), there is reason to suspect that theories and research on social capital and social network have begun to penetrate the social service field, resulting in some social service organizations serving low-income communities purposively attempting to expand and diversify the social networks of the individuals they serve. An examination of the processes by which organizations purposefully shape low-income individuals’ social networks is needed to better understand and address one aspect of network inequality – i.e. the availability of different forms of social capital\(^1\). The literature review in Chapter Two provides more discussion on this concept.

This research aims to add to our understanding of how and why organizations may intentionally attempt to shape the social networks of low-income women. In particular it addresses the following questions:

- To what extent are social service organizations implementing a strategy of purposive brokering?
- For those organizations that do engage in the process of purposive brokering, what are the mechanisms by which purposive organizational brokering occurs?
- What factors influence the purposive organizational brokering process?
- Do attempts at purposive brokering have a short-term impact on shaping the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks?
- What factors contribute to the formation of social ties?

\(^1\) While definitions and uses of the concept of social capital vary, this research will draw on Nan Lin’s operationalization of social capital as the resources inherent in an individual’s social network such as information, influence, etc (Lin, 2001a).
What are the unintended consequences of purposive organizational brokering efforts? Are there unexpected negative consequences that occur in the process?

This study addresses these questions to add to the understanding of social tie formation, particularly the process by which organizations intentionally attempt to shape the size and composition of social networks of low-income women for instrumental purposes, whether they are effective in their objective and whether there are unintended consequences are of this type of social engineering.

This study is divided into two phases. The first phase of the research aims to establish an initial framework and context. By interviewing social service providers in Boston, I explore the extent to which social service organizations engage in purposeful brokering as a strategy to advance the socio-economic status of low-income individuals. The second phase of the study draws upon my experiences and ‘lived reality’ as the director of research and evaluation at CWU to engage in a form of at-home ethnography² using CWU as a case study (Alvesson 2009). At CWU, I employed a mixed methods approach, using field observations and interviews, to document the process by which CWU attempts to purposively broker social ties to expand women’s social network and develop social capital. Further, using surveys and interviews, this research assesses whether purposive attempts to broker ties by WTW, a workforce development program offered at CWU, are effective at shaping the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks. I explore factors that influence tie formation and hope to uncover any unintended consequences that may result from the intentional brokering process. By exploring the challenges with, or unintended consequences that may result from, purposive brokering, this

² Alvesson describes ‘at home ethnography’ as a, “study and text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a ‘natural access’ and in which s/he is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants” (2009:159)
research illuminates potentially undesirable aspects of the process that may complicate the otherwise generally positive findings concerning the development of social capital as a strategy to advance one’s social position. For example, are there consequences to relying on organizational ties? Does it undermine existing social relations that occur organically? Does purposive organizational brokering create additional strains on individuals? In her research on differences in the mobilization of different job contacts, Smith (2000) notes that the inability to reciprocate may lead ‘low-status’ individuals to opt out of relationships with ‘high-status’ individuals. Thus, how might this impact the organizational brokering of cross-class ties?

This research contributes to the existing body of literature on tie formation, social networks and social capital by elucidating the mechanisms by which purposive brokering occurs within social service organizations and whether this is an effective strategy to shape the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks. This study compliments what has already been documented on the unintentional ways in which organizations shape social networks. At a programmatic level, the results from this research can influence anti-poverty strategies of social service organizations serving low-income women. If organizations can be effective strategic brokers of social ties, resulting in the expansion and diversification of low-income women’s social networks, thereby increasing their social capital, then social resource theory posits that opportunities for social mobility and leverage, ‘getting ahead’, will increase (Lin 1982). If so, organizations have the potential to create new opportunities and generate a flow of information and resources for the women they serve. The undesirable unintended consequences uncovered in the process will serve to inform organizations to the challenges of social engineering so they can be mindful of and buffer negative impacts that intentional brokering may have on low-income women’s lives.
The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter Two reviews the existing literature on social networks and social capital, with a focus on the factors influencing the composition of low-income women’s social networks. I emphasize in particular the focus on the influence of organizations on social networks and social capital. While this work has made important contributions to our understanding of social tie formation, I highlight the lack of attention to the mechanisms by which organizations intentionally broker ties, and the need to examine the effectiveness of such efforts. In Chapter Three I present the research design and methods. Chapter Four reviews the findings from the first phase of the study, a scan of the extent to which social service organizations engage in purposive brokering. Chapters Five and Six present the empirical findings culled from the second phase, using one social service organization - CWU - as a case study. In Chapter Five I draw on data from participant observation of the WTW program, focus groups, and interviews with staff members to depict in detail how CWU understands and engages in purposive brokering, with a particular focus on its twelve-week WTW workforce development program. Chapter Six presents the results of social network surveys and interviews with WTW students to examine the impact of the program on the size and composition of students’ networks, and consider the factors that facilitated or inhibited tie formation. Lastly, in Chapter Seven, I discuss the key findings, sociological and programmatic implications, study limitations and suggestions for future research.
Chapter Two
Review of the Literature

The research presented in this dissertation is guided by social resource theory (Lin 1982; Lin 1999) and social capital theory (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). This chapter reviews the relevant literature on social networks and social capital. I discuss why social networks matter, examine what we know about the composition and efficacy of low-income women’s social networks, and review the recent literature on the role of organizations in social tie formation. In doing so, I highlight an important void in the literature concerning the dynamics of organizational brokerage of instrumental relationships, and the intended and unintended consequences of this process.

I. Social Networks

A social network is a social structure comprised of relations (i.e., ties) linking nodes (e.g., people, groups, organizations, and nation states) within a social system (Wellman 1983). Theorists have explored various features of network ties such as density, frequency of contact between ties, and strength of relationship. Social ties have been characterized by their strength, in that weak ties are those relations that we are not close to, in terms of intensity of relationship, and strong ties are those relations we are close to (Granovetter 1973). Granovetter (1973) found that weaker ties tended to be bridging ties, linking individuals to socially dissimilar individuals and circles – thereby making available resources and information they otherwise would not have access to. Strong ties are thought to be valuable in that they promote group solidarity and social support such as emotional aid, services and companionship (Wellman and Wortley 1990). Dense networks, those that are close knit, increase the likelihood of sharing resources (Bourdieu 1980;
Coleman 1990), whereas sparse and open networks facilitate access to various resources (Lin 1999a; Burt 2001). Early theories of tie formation maintained that individuals, consciously or unconsciously, make strategic investments in social relations for future use, however the process by which these ‘investments’ occurred was not described (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 1999).

II. Why do social networks matter?

It is reasoned that social networks matter because of the resources inherent within them, termed social capital. Generally, social capital refers to the resources embedded within a social network. The origins of social capital can be traced back to Marx’s theory of capital where capital is the surplus value created in the production process (Marx 1849) and those in control of the means of production are positioned to capture the surplus value. From classical theories of capital which focused on economic interests, grew noneconomic theories of capital. Human capital theory, for example, posits that investments in skills and knowledge may generate economic returns (Becker 1964). Similarly, social capital posits that investments in social relations generate returns in the form of resources such as trust, reciprocity, reputation, etc. which can be accessed and mobilized through ties within one’s network.

However, there has been much controversy over the concept of social capital, ranging from its various definitions and influences (Portes 2000). First, researchers adopt two levels of analysis when employing the concept of social capital. Some theorists use a ‘community’ or ‘societal’ level of analysis, where social capital is an attribute of the community (Putnam 2000). For example, social capital theorists using the ‘community’ level of analysis focus on communal attributes such as civic engagement by analyzing rates of voter turnout and levels of participation in community social or political groups (Putnam 2000). In contrast, social capital theorists using
the ‘individual’ level of analysis identify social capital as an attribute of smaller units – primarily the individual, as in, “resources that accrue to the individual by virtue of their social ties” (Portes 2000:2). For example, social capital accrued at the individual level may include a person’s level of information and influence (Bourdieu 1985; Lin 2001b). Second, there has been criticism that much of the literature and research on social capital has focused predominately on it’s benefits without also exploring its negative aspects (Portes 1998). In a review of studies, Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt (2000) have identified at least four negative consequences of social capital that are not often highlighted: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms. Further, Portes (2000) states that the claims of social capital benefits may in fact be spurious or otherwise attributed to alternative explanations.

While, as previously stated, there are two levels of focus found within social capital literature, since I use the individual-level perspective of social capital in this study, the remainder of the literature review focuses on the individual-level perspective. Social capital theory posits that an investment in social relations results in returns. The resources found within one’s social network, social capital, have the potential to be accessed and mobilized for benefit (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 2001b). Research has shown that because of the social capital inherent within, social networks influence various aspects of our life such as our health, life chances, mobility and status attainment (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1983; Lin 1999; Putnam 2000; Briggs 2002). For example, mobilizing capital in the form of employment information such as job leads within networks has been shown to help job seekers find employment (Granovetter 1995; Putnam 2000; Lin 2001). Social resource theory (Lin 1999) posits that there is a relationship between embedded resources in social networks and one’s socioeconomic attainment. Research supports
the proposition that social capital, in terms of access and mobilization of embedded resources, enhances the chances of attaining better status in terms of occupation, authority, bonuses, etc. (Lin, 1999) For individuals who take action for instrumental purposes, status attainment, they will benefit from reaching up the social hierarchy to weak ties located in higher positions since they are the ones better positioned to exert influence. For example, Smith (2000) found that contacts with the authority to hire are found to affect job seekers’ wages “positively and profoundly” (p.530).

Briggs (1998) uses the typology of social support and social leverage to characterize the dimensions of social capital generated by the ties within our network. Our network is comprised of ties that offer leverage, resources that help one ‘get ahead’, and ties that offer support to cope with the day to day. For those whose networks contain people who serve as a bridge, that is, an individual who provides the sole connection between two distant social networks (Small 2009), there are opportunities to broaden one’s network or expand social capital when introductions or connections are made, or when the bridge facilitates the flow of resources and information occurs between the two networks. Research has shown that people who are well connected to a large heterogeneous interclass and dispersed network, have a greater opportunity to access and mobilize the resources within for positive gain (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 1999; Lin 2000; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). Such networks that offer resources to facilitate an individual’s advancement or ability to ‘get ahead’ in their career or education are referred to as leverage networks (Briggs 1998; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Curley 2009).

However, for those with a limited network size, an insular network comprised of others in

3 Using a societal-level perspective of social capital, Robert Putnam (2000) makes a similar distinction between two dimensions of social capital – bridging and bonding – in which bridging social capital is inclusive and “encompasses people across diverse social cleavage” (p. 22) and bonding social capital is exclusive and “tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups” (p. 22).
similar socio-economic positions, or who are unable to mobilize their social capital, their life chances may be subsequently restricted by the extent of their social capital (Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Elliott 1999; Smith 2005). For example, in a case study of employers in a Brooklyn neighborhood with a high concentration of poverty, Philip Kasinitz and Jan Rosenberg (1996) found that employers used social networks to fill jobs. Yet, because of racial and place-based discrimination, local residents were not connected to the employers’ networks, resulting in employers hiring from outside the neighborhood. In her research on low-income African-American job seekers, Sandra Smith (2005) has shown that there is another factor to consider in social capital deficiencies – the inability to activate or mobilize social capital. In her study, she found that low-income African-Americans have a social network which includes job contacts, however, were unable to activate or mobilize social capital due to interpersonal dynamics such as reputation, distrust, skepticism and perceived lack of motivation.

Given that deficiencies in social capital may restrict opportunities and exacerbate social inequality (Lin 2000), studies of the composition and efficacy of the social networks of low-income single women – a group that experiences comparatively high rates of poverty – are particularly revealing.

III. The social network composition of urban low-income women

Scholars have explored the impact of gender and socio-economic status on network composition, illustrating notable differences in the size of networks, diversity of ties, efficacy, and social capital. This section reviews research on women’s social networks as well as research on the social network composition of low-income individuals to understand the multiple factors that impact low-income women’s social networks.
When compared to the social networks of their male counterparts, women’s networks have more kin (Marsden 1987; Moore 1990; Wellman 1990), less work-related contacts (Moore 1990) and are less diverse (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982). Additionally, research has shown that childrearing influences the size of women’s social networks differently than men’s social networks in that having a child, particularly a young child, negatively impacts the size of women’s social networks, but has no effect on men’s network size (Munch, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin 1997). Women’s social networks are found to be comprised of people and organizations that are less likely to provide access to quality professional opportunities (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982; Moore 1990; Hanson and Pratt 1991; Elliott and Sims 2001; Huffman and Torres 2002). McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982), for example, demonstrate that although men and women participate in a similar number of associations, the size and type of association differ, in that women belong to more peripheral organizations that are smaller and focused on community and domestic affairs, while their male counterparts typically belong to larger organizations focused on economic institutions. These differences result in social networks that are likely to provide disparate access to professional opportunities. Further, Ensel’s (1979) study found that men were more likely than women to use male contacts in their job search, whereas women where more likely to use female job contacts. Given women’s structural position in the labor market, this resulted in men’s increased ability to reach higher status contacts (i.e. those in positions with higher occupational prestige) for job leads. Consequently, women’s disadvantage in mobilizing higher positioned male contacts, accounted in part for their inferior status attainment (Ensel 1979).

Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt (1991) found that because of the gendered nature of social life, women tend to receive job information from their female contacts whereas men tend
to receive job information from other men. The authors also found that there were differences in job characteristics that men and women valued, where women privileged work hours and proximity to home over wages. Similar findings of gender differences in job leads were found by Matt Huffman and Lisa Torres (2002), whose study found that women received job leads that were lower quality in terms of salary, when compared to leads received by male job seekers. The authors attribute this to a combination of women’s lower structural position within the labor market and a speculation – similar to Hanson and Pratt’s (1991) findings - that women value job characteristics differently and therefore are more likely to share positions that offer better work/life balance opportunities – often positions that offer lower salaries - with other women.

Research has also shown gender differences in mobilization of social capital. For example, in her study investigating race, ethnic, and gender differences in job seekers’ mobilization of job contacts, and their influence, Susan Smith (2000) found that white male job seekers are more likely to mobilize job contact ties “deemed to affect positive employment outcomes” (p.529), which in part helps explain wage differentials when compared to women, black, and Latino job seekers.

In general, women’s networks, when compared to men’s are less likely to include ties that offer leverage – to help them ‘get ahead’. When the influence of gender on social network composition is blended with the influence of urban poverty, the limitations are compounded. Some researchers contend that the level of social isolation faced by residents of impoverished urban neighborhoods impacts network composition (Harrington 1962; Wilson 1987; Wacquant and Wilson 1989; Massey and Denton 1993). Isolation severs the urban poor from social ties and networks that could provide much needed social capital. Whether a result of the economic shifts of deindustrialization, out migration of the middle class or residential segregation, in the mid-
1960’s inner city neighborhoods became areas of high concentrations of poverty and social isolation, lacking contact with “individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society” (Wilson 1987:60). Such marginalization and relative absence of employed middle class residents to provide a social buffer, limits residents’ social network size and degree of heterogeneity. Residents are restricted in their chances to develop social capital as they are economically, politically and socially isolated.

Residents of high poverty areas tend to have fewer social ties than others as measured by having a partner or close friends (Wacquant and Wilson 1989). Similarly, belonging to a formal organization or social group is a “rare occurrence as a rule” (Wacquant and Wilson 1989:24). Geographic and social isolation from the broader community limits the ties and networks of the urban poor to others in similar social positions. While not isolated to the urban poor (Lazarfeld and Merton 1954; Marsden 1987; Marsden 1988), the principle that similar people have higher rates of contact than dissimilar people is termed homophily (McPherson et. al. 2001). This tendency results in a localized flow of information and resources. For the urban poor, a homophilous network results in a network characterized by high rates of joblessness, high rates of welfare dependency and limited social capital. Isolated from a network rich in social leverage, opportunities to connect to pathways of upward mobility are limited, making it increasingly difficult for the urban poor to link into a job network (Granovetter 1983; Wilson 1987; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; O’Regan and Quigley 1996). Research has found that even for networks that do link urban poor to the informal job market, the informal market provides only occasional or sporadic income and does not provide stability or a track to economic sufficiency (Venkatesh 2009).

A related body of literature challenges the notion, advanced most prominently by
Wacquant and Wilson (1989), that the poor are isolated and have limited social ties. These studies content that ties are prevalent and strong among the poor (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Stack 1974; Newman 1999; Menjivar 2000; Smith 2007; Venkatesh 2009; Dominguez 2011). Nevertheless, this work acknowledges the insularity of poor individuals’ social networks (i.e. that they are comprised of others with similar life experiences or backgrounds) and that individuals may not be able to leverage the resources within their networks due to interpersonal relations characterized by mistrust, ambivalence and suspicion (Liebow 1967; Rainwater 1970; Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2001; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Smith 2007).

In general, the networks of the poor tend to be smaller, more limited, strained, homogeneous, localized and insular than their higher income counterparts (Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert 1986; Briggs 1998). While limited in their ability to provide leverage, however, the social networks of poor individuals are often a critical source of financial and emotional support in times of need (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Venkatesh 2009). For example, Carol Stack (1974) found that low-income African-American families have a large kinship network based around exchange and support that provides necessary resources families need to survive the conditions of poverty. Similarly, Edin and Lein (1997) found that low-income single mothers relied on the material support and favors from their network to supplement their limited resources, effectively creating a patchwork of support to enable them to get by day to day.

However, these relationships are complex as research has also demonstrated that at times these contacts act as a drain on already limited resources (Stack 1974; Menijivar 2000; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Curley 2009). For example, in their research on the social networks of low-income mothers, Dominguez and Watkins (2003) found examples of women who avoided or limited friendships to avoid emotional and financial drains. Further, Menijivar
(2000) contends that because people need resources to exchange in order to activate social
capital, extremely impoverished households who lack resources experience a drain in social
capital as such exchanges are highly irregular (Menijivar 2000).

Lastly, literature has demonstrated some of the ways in which the social capital found
within a disadvantaged groups’ network can be limiting. For example, where social capital is
based on bounded solidarity it can serve to limit one’s ability to make economic advancements
through conventional means – such as pursuing advanced education or making career
advancements. When individuals from disadvantaged groups pursue a path of social mobility, it
can undermine the group’s common experience of adversity “grounded on the alleged
impossibility of such occurrences” (Portes 2010:17). When individuals of an oppressed group,
whose solidarity is based on “an adversarial view of the mainstream” (Portes and Sensenbrenner
1993:1343) try to advance through conventional means, they experience ‘downward leveling
norms’ from the larger group which work to keep them from advancing, keeping them trapped in
similar situations as their peers (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Bourgois 1995; Portes 2010).
These ‘downward leveling norms’ can take the form of discouragement, ridiculing, and
exercising social pressures (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

IV. The role formal organizations play in increasing social capital

While network theorists maintain that individuals, consciously or unconsciously, make
strategic investments in social relations for future use, the mechanisms by which these
‘investments’ occur have been largely unexamined. For example, Nan Lin (2001b) states that
individuals engage in ‘interactions and networking’ for the instrumental purpose of social return,
but offers little explanation as to how individuals engage in these interactions, or actually
“create” social ties. Recently, however, scholars have begun explore this process, focusing on the role of institutions in social network formation (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Small 2006; Small 2009; Briggs et al. 2010; Curley 2010). In doing so, attention has shifted from ‘investments’ individuals make in their social relations to considerations of how the connections people have to organizations and neighborhood institutions may influence the creation of social ties and the development of social capital (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Small 2006; Small 2009; Briggs et al 2010; Curley 2010).

Through the process of organizational brokering, “the general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to the resources they contain” (Small 2009:19), an organization can provide critical connections to resources and information. Research has begun to explore the role organizations play in brokering resources and expanding social networks for people who are connected to them. Specifically, organizations can act as a conduit of resources (Small 2006), brokering ties between the individuals they serve and the organizations’ own network of individuals and other organizations. Through his case studies of childcare centers, Mario Luis Small maps out the mechanisms by which neighborhood institutions broker resources (Small 2006). He finds that childcare centers, through factors such as their inter-organizational networks, professional norms and mandates, provide parents with access to external resources such as information (e.g. nutritional and safety information), direct services (e.g. counseling, health care and training) and material goods (e.g. meals, toys, and scholarships). His findings suggest that for those who are socially isolated, organizations may serve as the only ‘access point’ to critical resources such as information and benefits.

Beyond their role in connecting people to resources, organizations also serve as a node of
connection to other individuals and organizations. This is particularly important since inequalities of social capital can occur as a result of homophily, the tendency of individuals to associate with those of similar socioeconomic characteristics (Lin 2000; McPherson 2001). The greater the degree of homophily, the more localized social capital flowing through a social network is, meaning new flows of information and resources are less likely to penetrate a network comprised of similar people. Organizations, as a key ‘access point’ for those who are otherwise isolated, have an opportunity to expand and diversify social networks for low-income individuals who have limited insular networks.

Institution-based networks have been found to serve as a source of support and are a viable supplement to existing networks (Briggs et al. 2010). In an extensive study that followed low-income families who took part in the Moving to Opportunity housing relocation program, researchers found that rather than the neighborhood serving as their ‘community, some families found an institutional community, such as a church in their new neighborhood, that became the center of their social world and source of social contacts (Briggs et al. 2010). This supports findings from Dominguez and Watkins (2003), who found that although institutions, social service organizations in this study, are considered ‘weak ties’, meaning they are not intimate relations, as opposed to ‘strong ties’ which are associated with social closeness and provision of social support, they may serve as a source of social capital for low-income women. They found that institutions, “go beyond providing the basic services advertised and are becoming important links in the women’s social support networks. Some institution-based networks provide clear advantages such as reliable, high quality resources and relationships that are less stressful and burdensome in terms of reciprocity. In addition, in a context of segregation and disadvantage, service professionals can serve as social mobility bridges, connecting low-income mothers with
appropriate strategies and tools” (Dominguez and Watkins 2003:129). To facilitate institutional support, the authors found that women needed to feel that the institutional contacts were competent, maintained confidentiality, and offered opportunities to reciprocate as a way to rebalance the relationship. Additionally, James Rosenbaum in Beyond College for All found that organizational ties were more essential than individual ties in helping graduates find employment (Rosenbaum 2001). Rosenbaum’s research found the use of organizational ties when searching for a job was more prevalent among women and blacks, suggesting the potential power of organizational ties in reducing inequalities.

VI. Unanswered questions

To date, the literature on organizational brokerage – e.g. Small’s (2009) work on the policies, norms, and institutional practices of organizations that facilitate social ties – has largely demonstrated how organizations unintentionally shape and expand people’s networks and social capital. While this emphasis on non-purposive brokerage has been important and revealing, there is a lack of research uncovering the process and consequences of purposive brokerage, where organizations intentionally attempt to create social ties to expand access to social capital. What is the process by which social networks are shaped by organizations’ intentional attempts to broker ties? This research address this gap by analyzing interviews, participant observation, focus group, and survey data to uncover the extent to which social services are engaging in intentional brokerage, the ways in which one organization purposively brokers ties, and whether their efforts impact the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks in the short term.
Chapter Three
Research design and methods

This mixed methods study is segmented into two phases – both of which are intended to add to the understanding of the role institutions play in shaping low-income individuals’ social networks and ultimately the social capital embedded within those networks. For the purposes of this study, I define social networks as a social structure comprised of relations (i.e. ties) linking individuals, groups or organizations (Wellman 1983). Since this research explores the process by which social service organizations intentionally broker social tie to benefit individuals, rather than an entire community I use the individual level of analysis of social capital discussed in Chapter Two (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 1999). Guided primarily by Nan Lin’s work on social resource theory, I define social capital as, the resources inherent in social networks such as information, influence, social credentials and personal reinforcements/obligations which can be accessed and mobilized in purposive actions (Lin 1999; Lin 2001b).

The first phase of the study draws upon semi-structured interviews with social service providers to explore the extent to which social service organizations serving low-income populations engage in purposive brokering to expand individuals’ social networks. The second phase of the research uses a case study approach focused on the work of one organization – Crittenton Women’s Union (CWU) – where I am employed full time as the Director of Research and Evaluation. I draw on participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and surveys to document the ways in which CWU intentionally brokers ties and to examine the short-term impact these purposive brokering efforts have on the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide an overview of the two research phases, and detail the research questions, design and methods used in each.
I. Phase one: A scan of the extent to which social service organizations engage in intentional brokering

This first phase of the study addresses the following research question: To what extent do social service organizations engage in purposive brokering? If so, why and how do they attempt to broker social ties? To explore this question, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with nine social service providers in the Boston area that serve low-income families and individuals. By developing an understanding of whether and how a sample of local social service organizations intentionally engage in brokering, I hope to provide a useful framework for the focused case study featured in phase two.

The 2010 U.S. Census indicates that the city of Boston is home to over 617,000 people, with approximately 19% of residents living at or below the federal poverty line. Boston is considered a “majority-minority” city with 53% of the city’s population identifying as non-white or Hispanic. Boston, like other urban areas in the U.S., has experienced widening income inequality: the top 5% of Boston earners accounts for more than 25% of the total annual income, while the bottom 20% of Boston earners account for just 2.2% of the total income (Kahn and Martin, 2011). The result of this polarization of incomes, which includes stark racial and ethnic disparities, is evidenced by high concentrations of poverty and low educational attainment within the city’s Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan neighborhoods. “With 42% of its children in poverty, this area represents Massachusetts’ largest concentration of child poverty” (Kahn and Martin 2011:4).

Boston is not unique in this growing economic divide. In fact, recent research based on the 2010 U.S. Census data shows increasing residential segregation and isolation within urban
areas, “as overall income inequality grew in the last four decades, high and low-income families have become increasingly less likely to live near one another” (Reardon and Bischoff 2011).

Given the economic polarization and geographic concentration of poverty within the city, Boston’s socio-economic environment presents an ideal setting to examine whether social service organizations serving low-income households intentionally engage in practices to increase social capital and social mobility by expanding the social network of low-income individuals. Boston’s

According to a report by MassINC (2005), in 2004 there were 24,536 nonprofits registered in Massachusetts, of which 28.9% were human service providers. In Suffolk County alone, comprised of Boston, Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop, there were 4,940 nonprofit organizations – representing one of the highest concentrations of nonprofits in the state. To systematically generate a list of Boston-area social service organizations to interview for this study, I turned to Root Cause’s Social Innovation Forum. The Social Innovation Forum is the strategic philanthropy program of Root Cause, a nonprofit research and consulting firm that partners with nonprofits, philanthropy, government, and business to advance solutions to social issues. Each year, the Social Innovation Forum partners with leading local funders to select four to six outstanding nonprofit organizations working on pressing social issues in Greater Boston. Finalists, termed ‘social innovators’, receive a $10,000 grant and a year of consultation services. The following is Social Innovation Forum’s selection criteria for nonprofit organizations:

- Focused on meeting a specific social need described in one or more of Social Innovation’s social issue tracks (e.g. education and employment for young adults, financial capacity, healthy aging, early childhood development, youth academic
success)

- Working primarily in the greater Boston area
- Registered 501(c)(3) or use a fiscal agent
- Have been operating for at least one cycle (usually a year) and have a proven concept
- Have a minimum of 1.5 full-time employees (FTE’s)
- Have an annual programmatic or organizational operating budget of $100,000 - $2 million
- Have or are developing a diversified funding portfolio

Between the years of 2003 to 2011[^4], the Social Innovation Forum selected 39 nonprofit organizations as ‘social innovators’. From this list of 39 nonprofits, I filtered for organizations that primarily serve low-income households and whose programs have a focus on “education”, “economic empowerment” and/or “workforce development”. I used these as filters as these are reasonable indicators of programs focused on advancing the socio-economic status of individuals. This filter produced a list of twelve organizations. I contacted all twelve via email to attempt to schedule an interview. Of the twelve organizations contacted, ten responded with interest, and I was ultimately able to coordinate an in-person interview with someone (typically the executive director or a managerial staff member with direct programmatic knowledge) from nine of the organizations. I followed up via emails with the two unresponsive organizations, without success.

The nine participating organizations present a range of service offerings, from creating educational and employment opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged youth to housing

[^4]: The Social Innovation Forum lists past innovators on their website beginning in 2003, the year the forum began.
and homeless services and civic engagement. This sample is not a representative one, and thus does not allow me to make broad, generalizable claims about the practices of social service organizations. Rather, it is intended to simply provide a preliminary look at whether respected and forward thinking organizations are engaging in intentional brokerage as a strategy to help low-income individuals get ahead. Table 1 below provides an overview of each of the twelve organizations contacted, including the nine that ultimately participated in the interviews:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Area of focus for program / organization</th>
<th>Staff member interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizations that were included in the research</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooks, Inc.</td>
<td>Urban youth</td>
<td>Career Development, economic self-sufficiency, personal fulfillment</td>
<td>Tina, executive director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowered Girls</td>
<td>At risk girls (ages 8-18)</td>
<td>Safety and self-awareness</td>
<td>Tricia, program director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going Home</td>
<td>Individual chronically homeless adults</td>
<td>Permanent Supportive Housing</td>
<td>Timothy, program coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females Together</td>
<td>College women, professional women, and girls from low-income communities</td>
<td>Mentoring, self-esteem, empowerment</td>
<td>Rebecca, program manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens United</td>
<td>Disconnected urban youth</td>
<td>Social and economic success</td>
<td>Zeneida, director of evaluation and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Step Ahead</td>
<td>Urban young adults</td>
<td>Closing the opportunity divide, access to educational experiences, professional development, economic self-sufficiency</td>
<td>Michael, site director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Now</td>
<td>Urban youth</td>
<td>Affordable path to post-secondary education</td>
<td>Brian, executive director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Health</td>
<td>Community members of urban neighborhood</td>
<td>Address health disparities and build social capital in urban community</td>
<td>Darlene, director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Networks</td>
<td>Community members</td>
<td>Strengthen communities, civic engagement, creating connections</td>
<td>Doug, president and founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizations that were contacted, but not included in the research</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers at Sea</td>
<td>High risk youth in Boston</td>
<td>Career development and work-readiness</td>
<td>n/a; unresponsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Path</td>
<td>Adolescent girls</td>
<td>Exploitation prevention, training, advocacy</td>
<td>n/a; unresponsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs and More</td>
<td>Low-income Boston residents</td>
<td>Career development, education</td>
<td>n/a; unable to coordinate schedules for interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Pseudonyms are provided for each organization.
6 Pseudonyms are provided for each staff contact.
Semi-structured interviews were coordinated via email and scheduled to be conducted either at the staff member’s office, a café, or at my office located at CWU’s administrative offices in downtown Boston. All locations provided some degree of privacy for candid discussion. No compensation was provided for the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded with permission of the respondent and lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. The interview guide can be found in Appendix II.

II. Phase two: Documenting the intentional brokering process and impact

This second phase of this research employs a mixed methods case study to (a) elucidate the mechanisms by which a social service organization intentionally attempts to broker social ties in an attempt to broaden low-income women’s social networks; and (b) analyze the impact and consequences of these efforts. The decision to use a mixed methods approach – in this case, a combination of field observation, survey data, focus groups, and interviews - was primarily driven by the types of data needed to address the research questions, as well as logistical considerations such as my ability to gain access to the research subjects. In the section below, I explain the rationale for using this approach, detail the various data collection methods used, and describe the recruitment efforts utilized for each. I also discuss the advantages and disadvantages associated with my role as an “insider” at the case study site.

As the director of research and evaluation at CWU, I had access to staff and program participants for interviews, focus groups, observations and survey administration. I reflect on the implications of being “embedded” within the organization during the study.

By detailing the different aspects of the process, from individual staff members’ actions to the characteristics of program design and organizational practices, I provide a landscape of
intentional strategies an organization employs in its efforts to broker social ties. This landscape serves to as a backdrop to the investigation of whether such activities and designs are in fact effective in expanding and diversifying low-income women’s social networks. Focusing in particular on CWU’s twelve-week workforce development program WTW, I explore the ways in which the organization purposively attempts to broker ties for low-income women by connecting them to other individuals and organizations. I use triangulation, the use of two or more research methods to verify and supplement data (Schutt 2001), to internally validate findings and create a richer picture of the nuances of the complex and multifaceted purposive brokerage process, from the initial program design to how the goals of purposive brokering are communicated by the organization and interpreted and implemented by individual staff members, and finally to how the brokering process is experienced by the WTW students. In addition, I use a name generator survey to measure the size and composition of WTW students’ social networks pre- and post-program participation. This multilayered approach is best positioned to uncover the dynamics involved in the purposive brokering process, as well as uncover its intended and unintended consequences.

This phase of this research addresses the following three sets of questions:

Q1) What is the process by which a social service organization intentionally tries to broker ties for low-income women? In other words, how do direct service staff members understand and operationalize the goal of social tie brokerage? Are program designs and organizational policies and practices structured in an effort to intentionally broker ties? What specific actions do staff members take in their efforts to broker ties for program participants? What are the underlying
mechanisms that influence how brokerage occurs?

Q2) Does intentional brokering have a noticeable impact on the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks? In other words, to what extent do women identify intentionally brokered ties as part of their social network in the final week of the program? Do intentionally brokered ties expand and diversify the composition of their social networks? Which factors contribute to or inhibit initial tie formation?

Q3) Are there unintended consequences associated with intentional brokering? How might intentional brokering negatively impact low-income women? Do women view ties created through intentional brokering differently than organically created social ties? Are there concerns associated with having institution-based networks as a primary source of ties for low-income women?

This research builds upon the recent literature that has focused on the role of organizations in influencing individuals’ social networks via organizational embedded ties. Specifically, this existing body of research has explored ways in which institutions serve as resource brokers, acting as a node of connection for individuals to gain access and connect to others and to material goods and information flowing through neighborhood-based organizations (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Small 2006; Small 2009; Briggs, Popkin, and Goering 2010; Curley 2010). Mario Luis Small (2006), for example, argues that organizations may serve as the only ‘access point’ to critical resources for those who are socially isolated. Silvia Dominguez and Celeste Watkins (2003) have demonstrated how factors, such as trust, confidentiality, and
competence, influence how institutional ties form for individuals connected to social service providers. These studies have helped further understand the process of developing an institution-based network comprised of social ties to people within the institution such as staff members and volunteers (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Dominguez 2011). Further, research has documented how organizations, through policies, norms and institutional practices can, unintentionally shape and expand people’s networks and social capital within (Small 2009). This study expands upon existing research to explore the ways in which organizations intentional broker, whether social networks size and composition change as a result, and which factors contribute to tie formation.

a. **Research setting: Crittenton Women’s Union**

CWU incorporated in July 2006, arising from the merger of two historic Boston organizations; Crittenton Inc. and The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, Inc. According to the organization’s website, CWU combines direct service programs, independent research and public advocacy in its mission to transform the course of low-income women's lives so that they can attain economic independence and create better futures for themselves and their families. They accomplish this by 1) providing safe housing, caring supports, education, and training programs; 2) innovating new programmatic designs based on research and client experience and 3) using this knowledge and experience to shape public policy (www.liveworkthrive.org).

CWU serves approximately 1,400 people a year through its programmatic offerings which at the time of this study included; 1) Career Family Opportunity, a five-year pilot program that helps single parents build the foundation essential to achieve economic independence through mobility mentoring™, peer group support, cash incentives, matched
savings, education and career counseling, and life skills training; 2) Economic Mobility Institute, a “cafeteria-style” curriculum of trainings that provide the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve family stability and economic independence (WTW is one of the Economic Mobility Institute offerings); 3) GED program, a secondary-level education program that includes life skills, work skills, and computer training for young men and women; 4) emergency, transitional and supportive housing for approximately 420 families – making CWU one of the largest providers of family shelter in Massachusetts; and 5) Boston Neighborhoods Healthy Families, a home-based program that provides first-time parents under 21 years old with education and parenting and life skills in order to prevent child abuse and promote economic independence.

CWU makes an ideal location for this case study since it engages in a variety of practices found in other social service organizations with similar programming, serving low-income households. For example, activities such as cohort development, alumni programming, mentoring and referrals can be found in comparable organizations as evidenced in the findings from the first phase of the study. As such, results from using CWU as a case study can be used to better understand how intentional organizational brokerage operates within social service organizations and which factors aid in or inhibit tie formation among low-income women.

Further, CWU’s long standing commitment to learn from best practices, evaluate program design and outcomes, and collaborate with other agencies, local scholars, and researchers to determine better, more effective ways for woman to achieve economic independence make it receptive to external research projects such as this.

CWU’s own literature reveals that the organization is mindful of the importance of social networks and the role they can play in supporting low-income women’s economic mobility.

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7  www.liveworkthrive.org
(Babcock 2012). *Mobility Mentoring*, a brief authored by CWU’s CEO, explains the organization’s theory of change, highlighting social networks as a critical area to help women develop (Babcock 2012). CWU understands the shift from poverty to economic independence as complex, requiring a variety of strategies. To address this, CWU developed its Bridge to Self-Sufficiency™ theory of change, an illustration (Figure 1 below) of anticipated long term impact based on the intervention. The Bridge to Self-Sufficiency views a person’s advancement from poverty to economic self-sufficiency as a journey across a bridge supported by five critical pillars. In order to successfully cross this bridge and arrive at the ultimate goal of economic self-sufficiency, the traveler must attain explicitly defined objectives in the five pillar areas: family stability, well-being, education and training, financial management, and employment and career management. One objective within the well-being pillar is to develop a strong social network, within which a person is positioned to serve as an advocate, networker, and support to others. The supposition is that individuals who are isolated or who have limited social support systems need to develop robust social networks from which they can draw support and gain leverage and provide the same to others. As CWU understands it, advancement along the other areas of the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency could be compromised if a social network is limited. For example, if a woman is facing eviction from her apartment and if she is socially isolated from family and friends, her diminished social network may mean that she has no one to turn to for an emergency loan to cover her housing costs or a place to stay if evicted from her home. Consequently, she is more likely to become homeless than if she had a social network in which to seek support and help.
As demonstrated by the explicit inclusion of social networks within the well-being pillar of the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency™ model (pictured above in Figure 1), CWU’s theory of change places a high value on social networks as a key component to achieving economic self-sufficiency.

**The Woman to Woman Program**

CWU’s Economic Mobility Institute (EMI) presents low-income women an opportunity to develop, in one setting, the skills, knowledge, and strategies necessary to achieve economic self-sufficiency. One of the programs offered through the EMI initiative is the Woman to Woman (WTW). According to agency records, the WTW program was established through the private funding of an individual donor to the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union (a Boston nonprofit providing workforce development programming) prior to the agency’s merger.

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8 As CWU continues to evolve its programming models, the Woman to Woman (WTW) program has also evolved and changed over the years. I will present the program as it existed during the time of data collection.
with Crittenton, Inc. (a Boston nonprofit providing education and family shelter programming). The program continues to operate through the charitable contribution of individual donors and corporate philanthropy.

The WTW program is a twelve-week job readiness and computer training program designed to develop low-income women’s networks and workplace skills to position them on a track to economic self-sufficiency through higher education or career advancement. At the start of each twelve-week session, students meet with a Case Manager, and an Academic and Career Specialist to identify an academic or career goal and prepare a personal strategic plan to achieve it. In daily classes with a Computer Instructor, students receive training in Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint and learn how to navigate the internet. They also attend workshops on personal communication and organizational skills, time and stress management, personal finances, advocacy, interviewing and resume-building, office culture, and dressing for success.

The WTW program serves low-income women from high poverty urban neighborhoods, the target population for this study. Further, the program, by design, intentionally tries to develop women’s social network through its cohort design and a mentoring component. A cohort model is representative of other similar workforce development program designs also found in the organizations interviewed for phase one, making it ideal for a case study. Further, the mentor component of the program, which is less common for unemployed adults, is a model found in organizations serving young adults\(^9\), youth\(^{10}\) and private employers offering employees professional development experiences. WTW provides a rich environment to better understand the processes of intentional organizational brokering and to determine whether the strategies it employs are effective in shaping women’s social networks short term.

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\(^9\) For example, Year Up and Strong Women Strong Girls
\(^{10}\) For example, Big Brother and Big Sisters, Strong Women Strong Girls, and Mass Mentoring
b. Sources of data

For this phase of the study, I collected and analyzed data from six sources: a) field observations of the WTW program; b) focus groups and interview with CWU staff members representing a variety of programs offered at the organization; c) interviews with CWU’s leadership; d) interviews with WTW direct service staff members, to describe the ways in which they understand and implement intentional brokering; e) pre- and post- participation social network surveys administered to two cohorts of WTW students to assess changes in the size and composition of their social networks; and f) interviews with two cohorts of WTW graduates to explore their experiences with purposive brokering by CWU and to examine any challenges or unintended consequences associated with this process.

Field observations of the Woman to Woman program

I was provided permission and access from the organization’s Chief Operating Officer, to conduct research as an independent researcher. I coordinated with the WTW program manager to observe a weekly two hour WTW staff meeting in June 2011 and coordinated with direct service staff members to shadow four one-hour advising sessions with students during July 2011. Since these observations were not part of my role as an employee, they were ‘off the clock’. During each observation, I carefully documented the conversations, highlighting in particular instances of intentional brokerage. I tried to discreetly document my observations in a journal that I carried with me to the meeting and advising sessions. Immediately after observing the meeting and sessions, I typed up my notes, built them out further based on my recollection, and added my reactions. In writing up field notes, I used initials so that staff members and
participants were de-identified in my handwritten journals. Notes were compiled and typed up during my lunch breaks or after work.

As a full-time CWU employee in the position of director of research and evaluation, I was tasked with managing the WTW mentoring component. The mentoring component of the program paired students with professional women who volunteered their time at least once a month to advise, coach and support students’ journey toward their career and educational goals. I was responsible for recruiting and screening volunteers, orienting students and volunteers to the mentoring experience, and organizing and facilitating monthly workshops. During the time of data collection, this role comprised approximately 15-20% of my full time position. This role provided me with direct access to WTW staff members, students, and volunteers and allowed me to dually serve as a participant observer for the purposes of this study. In addition to the role I played in organizing the mentoring component of WTW, my position at CWU allowed me access to witness the graduations of the two cohorts that were part of the study. I also regularly engaged in verbal and electronic programmatic conversations with my colleagues on a weekly basis. My role as an employee gives me an existing base of institutional knowledge and access to policies, communication, and program models. Over a two-month period (June and July 2011) I took time during lunch breaks or after work to reflect on my ‘lived reality’ and documented reflections and relevant data in a field notebook.

**Focus groups and interview with CWU staff members representing a variety of programs**

I first engaged in some preliminary, exploratory research with staff members representing CWU’s other programs, in order to identify broad themes that would guide my in-depth analysis of the WTW program. To do so, I conducted two focus groups, one at CWU’s main program site
in Brighton, and the other at a satellite program office space in South Boston. I solicited respondents via announcements at monthly staff meeting and emails sent to direct service staff members. A total of six staff members (all of whom are case managers) representing four different programs within CWU participated. Five of the respondents took part in the two focus groups. Focus groups were scheduled for approximately 45 minutes and occurred during staff members’ lunch hour so as not to conflict with their workday. In addition, I conducted an interview with one staff member who was unable to attend either focus group. The focus group and interview guide for CWU direct service staff members can be found in Appendix III. Table 2 below lists each staff member that took part in focus groups and interviews as part of this initial exploratory phase.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff member</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>Independent Housing</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>Economic Self-Sufficiency</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>South Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Economic Self-Sufficiency</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>South Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julita</td>
<td>Stablization</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews with CWU’s senior staff members

To get a broader, birds eye view, of how social networks are understood within CWU, I conducted interviews with two of the organization’s leadership: Elisabeth Babcock, Chief

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11 Pseudonyms are used for staff names and program title
Executive Officer and Charles Carter, Chief Operating Officer. I approached both in person to request an interview, they both agreed. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and took place at CWU’s Administrative offices. I reviewed the consent forms and explained to each that the interview was being conducted as an independent research project and not part of my role at CWU. Because of their unique and identifiable positions within the organization, I requested if I could use their names in the findings. Both agreed.

**Interviews with WTW direct service staff members**

I contacted WTW program staff members via email and through informal conversations to request in-depth interviews. In doing so, I was explicit about making a clear distinction between this research (an independent project for my doctoral dissertation), and any activities I might partake in as part of my role at CWU. I explained that participation was completely voluntary and at their discretion. I conducted interviews with four direct service staff members of the WTW program. Interviews were conducted at the program offices and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Staff members were not compensated for their time. Interviews were conducted during lunch hours so as not to interfere with their program work.

At the time of data collection, in 2011, the WTW team was comprised of a program supervisor, a case manager, a computer instructor and two career/academic specialists. Table 3, below, provides the demographics of the four WTW staff members I interviewed and observed in one-one-one case management meetings with students:
Using Mario Luis Small’s typology as a guiding framework, I structured the interview guide to elicit a discussion on the role of *actor-driven brokerage*, “the process by which a person in the organization connects people to other people, to other organizations, or to the resources of either” (2009:19) and *institution-driven brokerage*, “the process by which an institution, in the normative or cognitive sense, broker any of these connections” (2009:19). Furthermore, I included questions designed to uncover motivations or strategies employed by staff members when attempting to broker ties for students. In doing so, I aimed to provide a fuller description of brokering processes and develop a better understanding of the ways in which a program aimed at creating opportunities for mobility purposefully tries to expand the social networks of the women they serve. I used an ‘issue-focused’ approach (Weiss 1994) to the analysis and reporting of staff members’ interviews. In other words, I analyzed and reported on the process of intentional organizational brokering of social ties as I learned about it from direct service staff members.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4 Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>3 non-Hispanic / non-Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Hispanic / Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Race</td>
<td>1 African-American/Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education completed</td>
<td>2 PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Bachelor Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Associates Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I coded the interview data initially using three broad categories: 1) *Individual interactions (actor-driven brokerage)*: the ways in which staff members personally brokered ties for the clients they serve (e.g. through individual case management meetings, career and academic advising, mobility mentoring, referrals); 2) *program design and policies (institution-driven brokerage)*: the ways in which the program is formally structured to broker ties (e.g. use of a cohort model, alumni networks, workshops and class structures, etc.); and 3) *organization-wide practices (institution-driven brokerage)*: brokering processes found to permeate the broader organization, not limited to one particular program (e.g. organizational partnerships, initiatives, etc.). Then, I coded the data within each category using the following themes: actions/description of brokering process, reciprocity, ways in which the organization serves as a buffer, expected/intended outcomes of brokering, networks of staff/program/org, objective/strategy, unanticipated consequences, how staff members understood and operationalized brokerage, and influences on brokerage process.

**Profile of the Woman to Woman Students**

The remaining two data collection efforts focused on the students enrolled in the WTW Winter/Spring 2011 and Spring/Summer 2011 programs. WTW students are recruited by program staff members through direct outreach to CWU programs, local social service agencies serving low-income women and word-of-mouth from program alumni. To be eligible for the program, women must be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma or GED and be a United States Citizen or have legal status to work and/or attend school.

There were a total of 31 women enrolled in the Winter/Spring 2011 and Spring/Summer 2011 semesters: 17 women enrolled in the Spring 2011 class and 14 women enrolled in the
Summer 2011 class. Of the 31 women enrolled, 22 graduated the program. This graduation rate of 71% is comparable to the program graduation rate of 74% for the two cohorts from the prior previous fiscal year. The following Table 4 below provides a demographic overview of the 31 students enrolled during the two semesters in question.

Table 4

| WTW Students Enrolled in the Winter/Spring 2011 and Spring/Summer 2011 Semesters |
|---|---|
| N | 31 |
| Gender | 100% Female |
| Ethnicity | 16% Hispanic / Latino |
| Primary race | 68% Black or African-American; 16% White; 6% Other or multi-racial; 3% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 3% Asian; 3% Not answered |
| Immigrant | 23% Immigrants (countries of origin include: Dominican Republic, Haiti, Pakistan, Rwanda and Cape Verde) |
| Resident of disadvantaged neighborhood | 65% |
| Marital status | 77% Single, divorced, or widowed 23% Married or cohabitating |
| Mean age | 38 |
| Mean monthly income at program entry | $723 |
| Highest level of education completed | 58% High school diploma or GED 35% Some college 3% Associates degree 3% Bachelor degree |
| Employment status | 97% Unemployed 3% Employed |

Table 5 below lists the reasons and average number of days for students who left the

---

12 Neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and low educational attainment
WTW program prior to graduation. The data presented illustrates the short engagement (average of 9 days) for those who left the program voluntarily and for students who left the program for non-voluntary reasons, this data illustrates the various demands and life situations students encountered during their time in the program (i.e. physical health, substance abuse, altercations, etc.).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for leaving</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Average # of days in program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarily left program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>61 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(entered rehabilitation for substance use issues, hospitalization for physical health issue)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncompliance with program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(poor attendance, verbal altercation in class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily on Leave</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(needs to care for ill mother)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre- and post- participation social network surveys administered to two cohorts of WTW students

To capture any shift in the size and composition of students’ social network from the beginning of the WTW program to the end, I administered a social network survey to the WTW students enrolled in the Winter/Spring 2011 and Spring/Summer 2011 semesters. Respondents received $20 upon their completion of both the pre- and post- social network surveys. A total of 23 students (representing 74% of those enrolled) completed the pre-program survey, which was administered within the first two weeks of program entry to capture a baseline measure of students’ social networks. An identical post-program survey was administered approximately twelve weeks later, during the week of graduation. Seventeen students (representing 77% of
program graduates) completed the post-program survey. Not all graduating students were present during the last week of class when the survey was administered and did not schedule a time to complete the post-survey. Fifteen of the seventeen students who completed the post-program survey also completed a pre-program survey. Since some of the students left the program prior to completing the program, they were not included in the post-survey results. They were excluded since they did not complete the full program and therefore were not able to be fully engaged in the activities.

The social network survey was structured as a name generator\textsuperscript{13} designed to capture egocentric network data on the size, tie strength, and composition of each student’s social network. The name generator technique is a common methodology in the social network literature (Wellman 1981; Lin, Fu and Hsung 2001; Lin 2005) used to measure access to social capital, such as assessing social support networks (Barrera 1981; Norbeck et al. 1981; Flaherty et al. 1983)\textsuperscript{14}. The name generator is used to measure one’s cognitive network, that is, their perceived social relations, by generating a list of direct ties in certain social contexts or situations (Marsden 1990). The tool used for this research is similar to tools used in previous research (Granovetter 1973; Reingold, Van Ryzin, and Ronda 2001; McDonald, Lin, and Ao 2009). Specifically, I asked respondents to generate the names of five contacts for each of the following four areas: 1) career advice, 2) school and/or training advice, 3) small favor and 4) emotional support. The method is designed to capture cognitive networks, ie. the perceived capacity of resources, regardless of whether the respondent needed to mobilize and draw upon those

\textsuperscript{13} Only first names were asked to be identified for confidentiality purposes.

\textsuperscript{14} Alternative methods to capture social network include examining diaries, recording frequency of contact with ties, and administering position generator surveys. The first two were dismissed for logistical reasons. The position generator is structure focused in that it assesses access to structural positions within a hierarchy (Lin 2005). The position generator method for capturing social network size and composition was dismissed for this research since it doesn’t provide a listing of individual actors within a person’s network.
resources (Lin 2005; Harknett 2006). These four categories are used as determinants of two key dimensions of social capital as outlined by Briggs (1998): social support (small favors, emotional support) and social leverage (career advice, school and/or training advice).

While the upper limit of five placed on network size within each domain can distort actual network size by limiting range and scope, this practice is common among name generators (Lin 2005) and is done primarily for practicality (Laumann 1973; Wellman 1979; Campbell and Lee 1991). To try to address some of the limitations of this method, I captured additional data for each name generated to assess their structural positions, including basic demographics (e.g. gender, race and ethnicity) as well as employment status, occupation, educational attainment, strength of tie and relationship. These variables are captured to assess the diversity of the network and the intensity of tie strength (Granovetter 1973). I measured tie strength using the common method of assigning indicators of emotional intensity or “closeness” (Marsden and Campbell 1984) by asking the respondent to “rate how close you are to this person” for each tie listed using a four point Likert scale where 1=not close, 2=somewhat close, 3=close, and 4= very close. I coded values of 1 and 2 as “weak ties” and values of 3 and 4 as “strong ties”. With regards to tie strength, another limitation of the name generator is that the respondent is more likely to list stronger relationships, therefore resulting in a network that appears to be more homogeneous and homophilous and underestimating diverse and weak ties that exist within.

Nevertheless, to examine the degree of homophily, I accessed respondents’ demographic data from the program’s existing Entry Assessment survey, which captures information on program participants’ demographics, educational status, employment status and income and benefits. To determine the degree of achieved status homophily, each student’s highest level of education and employment status was compared to each of the ties listed. A value of zero was
assigned to variables where there was a difference and a value of one was assigned to variables that were the same. For example: If an unemployed student with a GED and no college attendance listed a tie who is employed and never attended college, the degree of homophily would be calculated at 50% since one out of the possible two variables is alike. A mean percentage was calculated to determine the overall degree of homophily for each student’s network. Where the educational attainment or employment status of an individual listed in the survey was unknown, it was excluded in calculations.

**Interviews with two cohorts of WTW graduates**

While useful for exploring the size and composition of students’ social networks, the social network survey data cannot illuminate which aspects of the intentional actor-driven or institution-driven brokerage were effective (or not) and why. To better understand the process, and to capture any unintended consequences that might be associated with intentional brokerage, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with a subset of the WTW survey respondents. The demographic information for the women I interviewed is presented below in Table 6. Although all enrolled participants were solicited for interviews, only a subset of those who graduated responded.
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Interviewed</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Parent?</th>
<th>Living in Stable Housing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic/Latino, did not identify with racial categories</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonya</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Asian, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>American-Indian/Alaskan-Native, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, homeless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within three weeks after program graduation, I reached out to all students enrolled in the program – whether they graduated or not, with the exception of two – both of whom left the program within the first three days. I reached out to students through various avenues, including by email, phone, and in person to schedule an interview. In four instances, when I called students to invite them in for an interview, I was unable to reach them or leave a message (due to wrong numbers or a missing or full voicemail box). In two instances, I spoke with students but was unable to schedule an interview. Two of the students who left the WTW program prior to graduation had been dealing with health issues, and were either hospitalized or in rehabilitation.

Ultimately, I conducted ten interviews with WTW graduates. All interviews were conducted at CWU’s administrative offices in a private conference room and lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviewees received $20 for their participation.

I utilized an in-depth, semi-structured approach to the interviews, using focused topics,
but also allowing for flexibility in the conversation to discover unanticipated findings outside the topic area (Weiss 1994). I structured the interview guide, which can be found in Appendix IV, to uncover the dynamics of the brokering process, qualities of brokered relationships (degree of closeness, dynamics, differences, challenges), and to assess to what extent intentional brokering by organizations is effective in creating social ties for low-income women. The guide includes questions designed to elucidate the intended and unintended consequences (e.g. resource drain) of intentional brokering by exploring respondents’ views of the process compared to a more “organic” approach to developing ties.

I employed techniques associated with feminist methodologies, with an awareness and consideration of women’s standpoint, power dynamics and language. Regarding language considerations, the structured conversation did not let the language of the discipline or research narrowly define or distort the interview topics or language used within. Instead, the discussion was freed from the standard labels used in the field by using language that encompasses broader categories/concepts that are meaningful to women and grounded in their everyday lives. In particular, I strived to use language that reflected back the language students used in our conversations. For example, terminology found in the literature such as ‘brokering’ or ‘social ties’ was replaced with ‘connecting’ or ‘relationship’. Interviews were conducted in such a way as to create space for participants to “provide accounts rooted in the realities of their lives” (Devault 1990:99), allowing them to use their own language to tell their stories. For example, I often asked students to provide concrete examples to illustrate how issues we discussed occurred in their lives, as they experienced it.

I coded the interview data using the following concepts/categories: 1) brokering process; 2) qualities/characteristics associated with social relations the organization brokered that were
included in the student’s social network; 3) qualities/characteristics associated with social relations that the organization tried to broker but were not identified in the student’s social network; 4) supportive ties; 5) leveraging ties; 6) drain of time or emotions; 7) advantages of brokered ties; 8) disadvantages of brokered ties; 9) how instrumental ties differ from organic ties; and 10) unintentional consequences of brokering. As new unanticipated themes emerged during the coding process, I added them in the final analysis.

III. The position of the researcher: Key considerations

Two aspects of my involvement in this research project are worth highlighting. First, I occupied a dual role throughout the course of this research – i.e. that of student researcher and a staff member at the organization in which the study is located. Second, given that I occupy a senior role within the organization, attention to power dynamics is warranted.

In February 2008, I joined Crittenton Women’s Union’s Research and Innovation Department. In 2011, during the time of this research, I served as the director of research and evaluation. The benefit of this dual role is that I have accumulated years of institutional knowledge and developed trusting relationships among colleagues, and I had a high level of direct access to research subjects which effectively removed logistical barriers to access which external researchers may otherwise encounter. However, as a senior staff member, I was challenged with doing research in my ‘lived reality’, where there was little to no physical or social distance from my research subjects. There are obvious complexities involved when researching a ‘lived reality’. On the one hand, my role as a CWU employee afforded me the opportunity to have working knowledge of the organization, the WTW program, the program’s design, ongoing programmatic developments and the organization’s survey tools and historical
data. The role also allowed me a unique level of access to staff and students. However, I also have a ‘closeness’ to the subject that may obscure my ability to ‘see’, and as such, my ability to be a ‘neutral observer’ will be limited. Furthermore, relationship dynamics, such as trust, confidentiality and power, needed to be considered while I was recruiting and conducting interviews with students and my colleagues. While I am situated in a separate department than the WTW program, I often interact with staff members as I oversee the agency’s outcomes initiative and managed the mentoring component of the WTW program.

To mitigate the first issue, I used the techniques of ‘at-home ethnography’ (Alvesson 2009), an approach that applies to a situation of researching in one’s lived reality. At-home ethnography encourages researchers to take a step back from their organizational role. A low to moderate degree of involvement is encouraged to allow for careful documentation and interpretation of events from the standpoint of a researcher, rather than from the standpoint of a senior employee. To do so, I intentionally carved out time away from my role as employee, by taking personal time off to conduct research within the organization. At the same time, I drew on and leveraged my role and relationships to gain access to the research subjects. Also, in presenting the findings I identify and state my assumptions, that is, what I expected to find in the research process and have been careful to note in the findings and discussion, instances where I come across the unexpected. Additionally, throughout the interviews, I asked for clarification and reflected back my interpretations and understanding of the conversation with the interview subjects. For example, asking “am I interpreting this correctly” or “as I understand what you’re saying …” to attempt to mitigate any unintentional impacts of my ‘closeness’ to the organization on my findings.

Alvesson describes ‘at home ethnography’ as a, “study and a text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a ‘natural access’ and in which s/he is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants” (2009:159).
In this dual role of student and employee, I had to consider the inherent power dynamics at issue when interviewing staff members and students. To address this concern I verbally stated to students and colleagues, before interviews and survey administration, the distinction between my role as employee and my role as student researcher. Although I am employed at the organization, I conducted the majority of this research outside my role on my own time and with my personal resources for compensation to lessen conflict of interest. I made it a point to distinguish my role as a student, rather than CWU employee, via ongoing verbal communication to study participants throughout the process; from the recruitment process and reiterated before administering surveys and conducting interviews. Although I made every attempt to clearly communicate that the research was not undertaken as part of my official duties as an employee of CWU, and that their contributions will be kept confidential, it is nevertheless possible that students and colleagues may have edited or adjusted their answers to surveys and/or during interviews to respond in such a way that they felt was socially desirable (Krumpal 2013). For the social network survey, this could mean over-reporting the number of social contacts if the respondent feels having a large social network is the norm and socially desirable. During interviews, respondents, aware of my role as CWU employee, may be more inclined to reflect positively on their experiences and/or omit negative experiences or criticisms of the program, staff members, organizations, and activities (Krumpal 2013).

While it is not possible for me, for the purposes of being neutral and unbiased throughout my investigation, to completely disengage from my own biases as an employee or to prevent staff members and colleagues from biasing their responses as a result of my position, I address this in the findings and discussions by reflecting on my role and the assumptions and bias I may bring to the study.
Chapter Four
“You’re taking about institutions that live and breathe the concepts of social capital”: Intentional brokerage by social service organizations

“I would say that everything we do is actually based on the idea of networking ... We want our kids to move out into the world to do something. And they have a social network that stays with them – that includes us and other kids in the program that they connect with regularly. After they leave high school, that network stays really strong” - Tina, Cooks Inc.

A rich body of research has demonstrated that social networks matter. They influence our health, economic mobility and status attainment (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1983; Lin 1999; Putnam 2000; Briggs 2002; Christakis and Fowler 2009). Xavier de Souza Briggs (1998) identifies two key dimensions of social capital, social leverage and social support, that can be accessed by individuals. Social leverage is characteristic of social capital that helps one ‘get ahead’ or advance in career or educational opportunities, and social support is characteristic of social capital that helps one cope with day to day needs, such as emotional and limited financial support (Briggs 1998). Connections to higher status contacts can increase one’s capacity to access leveraging social capital, such as job leads or career advice (Ensel 1979; Marsden and Hurlbert 1988; Barbieri 1996). Such connections provide a leverage network and can serve as a catalyst in making socio-economic advancements. Beyond providing resources to get ahead, individuals in our social network can also provide emotional support, encouragement, and small favors that ease daily life, such as providing care for our children, transportation to the grocery store, or a small loan to cover a utility bill (Stack 1974; Dominguez 2011). The ties that offer this type of social capital to help us cope day to day comprise our support network.

Being well connected to ties that offer both support and leverage is important for low-income women as they pursue higher education and career goals. During this journey, many low-income women rely on social service organizations for critical resources and guidance throughout the process. Mario Luis Small’s (2006) research has demonstrated that gaining access
to resources among the poor is an *organizationally embedded process*, in other words, institutions serve as a critical access point to resources for many low-income individuals. In addition to being resource brokers for material goods, social service organizations in high-poverty neighborhoods can also serve as a bridging tie between inter-class networks, thereby facilitating new tie formation and the development of social capital for low-income individuals. Researchers have identified social service organizations as an *unanticipated* node of connection for individuals (Small 2006). For example, Mario Luis Small (2009) found that the institutional practices of childcare centers – which often resulted from state policies and factors outside the centers – unintentionally shaped the networks and resources of the diverse group of mothers whose children were enrolled in the centers. Research suggests that social service organizations can be places for low-income women to develop social networks and social capital (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Hawkins 2010). However, what has not yet been explored is the extent to which social service organizations *intentionally* engage in brokering as a strategy to help low-income women develop their social capital. This chapter begins to build out knowledge in this area by drawing on analysis of interviews conducted with program managers and executive directors representing nine social service organizations serving low-income communities in greater Boston. As a way to situate the later case study in phase two of this research, I explore to what extent organizations I interviewed engaged in intentional brokerage, discuss their objectives for doing so, and provide examples of this activity.

I. Overview

I conducted semi-structured interviews with executive directors and program managers from nine social service organizations in greater Boston in which I asked them to: 1) describe
their target audience and the services provided by the organization or program, 2) discuss whether or not the organization or program intentionally tries to broker ties for their target population and if so, 3) explain how and why. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour and were conducted at the respondents’ office, my office, or a local café.

While none of the respondents explicitly used the term ‘brokerage’ (Small 2009) to describe their activities, all nine reported that their organization or program intentionally made efforts to connect individuals to other individuals, organizations, or resources. Instead, respondents used a variety of terms that were more familiar within their field to describe programmatic activities. The following are examples of terms used by respondents that I interpreted as indicators of organizational brokerage (Small 2009); ‘connecting’, ‘creating cohorts’, ‘social engineer’, ‘networking’, ‘building networks’, ‘introducing’, ‘creating positive peer group’, ‘mentoring’, ‘bringing together’, ‘building supports’, ‘creating a [job] pipeline’, ‘matching’, ‘building relationships / partnerships / bonds’, etc. While these terms represent a variety of different activities occurring within programs, in the context of the interviews, they were all depicting activities in which the organization or program was intentionally trying to create connections between participants and other people, resources, or organizations.

All of the nine social service providers I interviewed reported that their respective organization or program engaged in purposive organizational brokerage, meaning intentionally creating connections for individuals to others (Small 2009). Table 7 below provides an overview of each of the nine organizations’ target population, programmatic focus, and stated objective for implementing strategies aimed at brokering ties:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Area of focus for program / organization</th>
<th>Presence of purposive brokerage</th>
<th>To increase individuals’ social support</th>
<th>Social leverage</th>
<th>To increase the community’s social capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooks, Inc.</td>
<td>Urban youth</td>
<td>Career Development, economic self-sufficiency, personal fulfillment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowered Girls</td>
<td>At risk girls (ages 8-18)</td>
<td>Safety and self-awareness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going Home</td>
<td>Individual chronically homeless adults</td>
<td>Permanent Supportive Housing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females Together</td>
<td>College women, professional women, and girls from low-income communities</td>
<td>Mentoring, self-esteem, empowerment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens United</td>
<td>Disconnected urban youth</td>
<td>Social and economic success</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Step Ahead</td>
<td>Urban young adults</td>
<td>Closing the opportunity divide, access to educational experiences, professional development, economic self-sufficiency</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Now</td>
<td>Urban youth</td>
<td>Affordable path to post-secondary education</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Health</td>
<td>Community members of urban neighbor hood</td>
<td>Address health disparities and build social capital in urban community</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Networks</td>
<td>Community members</td>
<td>Strengthen communities, civic engagement, creating connections</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intentional brokering took on varying degrees of importance within the organizations represented in this study. The majority of respondents discussed brokering activities as fundamental to their services and mission. For example, when I asked Darlene, the director of programming at Community Health, a neighborhood based urban community health organization, whether Community Health was intentional in their efforts in bringing peers together, she explained that purposive brokering as primary to the organization’s overall programming, “It’s what we live and breathe. …consciously trying to develop opportunities for connections … constantly in all of our programming.” In fact, when I first arrived at Community Health and was setting up for the interview, Darlene began discussing her familiarity with Robert Putnam’s book, *Bowling Alone*, a book that explores the decline of social capital within communities. Once the interview began, Darlene continued to express an awareness of and interest in social capital concepts and theory. Putnam’s writings influenced Darlene and in turn, have shaped programming at Community Health. During the interview, Darlene reflected on how the organization was founded, highlighting the importance placed on social capital and network. She explained that Community Health was founded:

“…with the understanding that social connections matter. That people’s connections to themselves and their community impact health outcomes and impact the health of the community. So, … you’re talking about institutions that live and breathe the concepts of social capital.”

Darlene and her colleagues at Community Health are mindful about how social capital theories could shape programming. Community Health developed an appreciation of the role it plays in helping neighborhood residents develop relationships and connections to one another that will enhance health outcomes at the individual and community level.
Similarly, the executive director at Cooks, Inc., a nonprofit workforce development program for young adults entering culinary arts, expressed the importance of purposeful brokering activities take within the organization and its services. Cooks, Inc. is intentional about placing brokering at the forefront of their work. Tina, the executive director, explained:

“Everything about [Cooks, Inc.] is built around the idea that the young people that we serve lack the social capital and social networks they need to move into jobs that are career path jobs that are in the industry. We’re very heavy handed on networking as an absolute tool for career success. And it’s one of the things we start teaching kids right at the very beginning of the intervention that we have with them. We teach the concept of networking, we teach how they network, we teach them how to network amongst themselves but also we immediately begin to introduce them to successful people in the industry as their first network, as the network that they’re building.”

While the majority of respondents, like Darlene and Tina, discussed intentional organizational brokerage as fundamental to the services and mission of their organizations, respondents representing three other organizations discussed intentional organizational brokerage as ancillary. For these three organizations, although brokerage contributed to the agency’s mission - and often influenced by theories of social network and/or social capital – purposeful brokering was less central and not a core strategy in their overall programming model. For example, Brian from College Now explained how his organization is,

“…laser beam focused on the affordability issues related to college … Financial aid being the biggest thing we work on for helping young people understand, identify and secure financial aid.”

Yet, when I asked whether any of the students have an opportunity to connect with each other as a result of their participation with College Now programming, Brian responded:

“We are trying to do quite a bit of connecting kids to other young people. And due to a large part basing that off of a lot of the
In his interview, Brian made clear that the organization’s main mission and priority is to address college affordability. However, beyond this, College Now offers programming for students once they are in college to connect them with classmates to “lean on for assistance” with the intention of helping them maintain good grades and successfully continue along the path to graduation. In doing so, College Now is intentionally brokering ties for students with peers to offer social support, to help each other cope with the day to day tasks and pressures in order to be successful in college. While not a fundamental aspect of their services and mission, purposive brokering activities exist within this organization’s programming model.

While every social service provider indicated that their organization or program purposively tries to connect individuals to other people and organizations, their rationales for doing so, and the anticipated outcomes of their strategies varied. Further, some respondents cited multiple reasons for engaging in intentional brokering. Three key objectives emerged during the interviews: social service organizations broker ties to: 1) provide social support for individuals; 2) provide social leverage (i.e. through opportunities to advance) for individuals; and 3) to develop social capital within the broader community. Since the focus of this research is on social capital at the individual level, I explore only the first two objectives provided – brokering ties for social support and social leverage.

Stated objectives for purposive organizational brokerage expressed by the social service providers seemingly aligns with their respective programmatic goals and/or the organization’s overall mission. For example, Michael, the director at A Step Ahead, an organization with a goal to improve young adults’ labor market participation and economic outcomes, explained that the
program intentionally brokers leveraging ties for students by connecting students with potential employers, mentors, and other professionals. A Step Ahead’s attempt to create leveraging ties – particularly job contacts - is aligned with the agencies mission to advance youths’ career.

Similarly, Community Health’s brokering activity is aligned with the organization’s mission - to address health disparities and build social capital. Darlene, from Community Health, explained that the organization brokers supportive ties by fostering relationships among neighbors with similar health issues to encourage healthy living. By intentionally brokering supportive ties among community members so they can support each other in healthy living, Community Health expects to advance their larger mission of addressing health disparities and building social capital. Further, some organizations aim to broker both supportive and leveraging ties. For example, Zeneida, director of evaluation at Teens United, a nonprofit working with disconnected urban youth to improve social and economic outcomes, explained that their programming encourages youth to foster peer and professional relationships for social support while also serving as a bridging tie to connect youth to employers and mentors within the community, thereby nurturing the development of ties that can offer social leverage.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I go into more detail on the findings summarized above, provide an analysis and discussion of the objectives for and the extent to which social service organizations engage in purposive brokering along the two distinct motive categories: to provide social support for individuals and to create leverage for individuals.

II. Brokering supportive ties for individuals

“We do try to foster a community of support ...” - Tricia, Empowered Girls
Eight of the organizations interviewed described intentionally trying to connect program participants to individuals and organizations to build upon their network with ties that offer support – such as encouragement, assistance with homework, help with day to day issues, and emotional support. In this section, I explore the rationales provided by social service providers as to why organizations engage in purposive brokerage, and highlight some of the strategies used in their brokerage efforts.

a. Objectives

The majority of respondents stated that the main goal of purposive brokering is to help individuals develop a network of social ties that offer support, that is, connections to people within the organization’s network that can provide emotional and small material support to help the women “get by” each day (Briggs 1998). It is the people in our social network that offer social support who we might turn to for help coping with daily life – such as childcare needs, a ride to work, emotional support, encouragement, a small loan or a personal favor (Briggs 1998). Specifically, the eight respondents who discussed intentionally brokering supportive ties described doing so in order to improve outcomes such as health, well-being, educational aspirations or housing stability. For example, Brian from College Now, an organization aimed at creating pathways to affordable post-secondary education, shared that College Now programming was motivated to connect young people to others for educational success:

“...so that [students] are all hearing that they’re struggling with the same issues or that they can lean on other kids for help and assistance, etc.”

As shared earlier, College Now’s strategy of “connecting kids to other young people” grew out of their understanding of the positive impact such peer relationships have on
educational outcomes. This strategy reflects a deliberate attempt to broker ties among peers to create a network of support.

Some of the respondents identified limited or an existing network that was ineffective among their target population, and as a result intentionally create opportunities to broker and foster supportive ties for participants to help them develop a more robust social network. This echoes similar findings from prior research which found that low-income mothers with limited support from friends and family are more likely to turn to agencies for material support than those with high levels of network support (Offer 2010), and that an agency-based social network can serve as an alternative support network when personal social networks are unavailable or ineffective (Domínguez and Watkins 2003:121). Respondents shared their observations of program participants’ existing supportive ties, which fell into two general categories: individuals who are socially isolated and individuals who have a limited number of supportive ties.

For socially isolated individuals, organizations may serve as the only access point to resources (Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Small 2006). Timothy, the program coordinator at Going Home, an organization serving homeless and formerly adults, explained how Going Home is a critical access point for critical resources such as housing and health care. Further, Timothy identified social isolation, a lack of ‘supports’, as the one common denominator of the homeless individuals Going Home serves. Based on his observations, Timothy contends that when faced with the challenges of poverty, mental illness or substance abuse, the chances of becoming homeless increase without a support system available to assist with living basics such as housing, financial assistance, and health needs. Because of this, Going Home values helping homeless and previously homeless individuals connect to ties that offer social support. As a way to avoid social isolation, a social network comprised of supportive community members and organizational staff
members is developed as a strategy to help participants maintain stable housing and well-being. However, they are careful to not be the only means of support, but rather strive to help individuals access a broader network to prevent social isolation. As Timothy explained:

“One of the fears… is isolation. And so, one of the things that you’re going to do is to try to build other supports within the community. Whether it’s is faith-based, whether it’s other types of group pieces. … For somebody that goes in the scattered site and really isolates and has problems, really needs a little more of a community living … one of the things that we always used to hear on the shelter side of things is that it’s always hard for people to leave because that’s become their only community. And I think there is some truth to that in some cases. So, we need to find ways of replacing that.”

Timothy and his Going Home colleagues want to ensure the men and women they serve don’t feel disconnected from their community and become isolated as they transition from shelter to housing – particularly a “scattered site” housing model where individuals live independently in the community in their own housing units, unlike a congregate housing model where residents share common space which may allow for more interaction among residents. They realize that social isolation may result in individuals falling back into homelessness – the very thing they are trying to prevent. And so, they seek to help ‘replace’ their previous community by building new supports.

The second category identified by social service providers are individuals who have a limited number of supportive ties. For example, Michael, a director at A Step Ahead, a workforce development organization serving young adults, shared how many of the students served don’t have the support or encouragement within their networks and some students experience an emotional and financial drain from their ties. He shared examples from his observations of students’ experiences managing the physical and social movement between two social worlds, one that is unaware of or unsupportive of students’ pursuit of career and
educational goals and another social world (that within A Step Ahead) that actively promotes career and educational success:

“Everything from family members who don’t get it or friends who aren’t trying to head in a professional direction or college direction, so it’s like [students] almost feel like they have to cope and switch between the two worlds – sometimes to the point of dressing down to go back to the neighborhood ... We do see a lot of them come in here and change their shoes here, hats come off as soon as they set foot in the building. But, for some people to wear a tie back in some of the neighborhoods is just going to raise issues that they just don’t want to get into.”

As Michael’s observation of students having to dress “down” when they return to their neighborhood so as not to “raise issues” is illustrative of a “negative” group solidarity. Students’ neighborhood-based network is exhibiting pressures and generating downward leveling norms, created by group solidarity, “cemented by a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society” (Portes 2010:17). When individuals of disadvantaged groups pursue a path of social mobility – in this case, pursuing education and employment in financial services - it undermines a common experience of adversity “grounded on the alleged impossibility of such occurrences” (Portes 2010:17), resulting in downward leveling norms that work to keep individuals from advancing (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Bourgois 1995; Portes 2010). Michael and his colleagues actively broker ties for students to create new sources of support and leverage and develop a network that will include ties that support and encourage students in their pursuit of advancement goals.

While providers intend to broker ties for positive support, some providers observed negative characteristics of social capital, such as use of dense networks to pass along misinformation, unreliable resources, or be a negative/deviant influence. Darlene from Community Health explained:
“What you can’t control when you create these social networks is the information that flows through them. So, we try to feed the grapevine with the right information, but all it takes is one person who is using that same trusted network to pollute the whole community.”

While much attention is provided to the value and benefits of social capital, such as helpful information flowing through networks, networks can also be a source of unreliable information and work to the disadvantage of the individual. This occurrence is similar to incidents within the Salvadoran immigrant community documented by Cecilia Menjivar (2000) in which dense immigrant networks were found to be effective channels for disseminating useful information, as well as “conduits for misinformation” (p.143). Organizations, such as Community Health, are mindful of this double edged sword and actively “feed the grapevine” with useful information and resources. For example, Darlene shared how in the community served by the organization, there were instances of people within the churches, a trusted neighborhood institution, pitching predatory mortgage products to parishioners. Darlene explained how “the people purveying these poisons were insiders” – they were part of the trusted community and were using enforceable trust to create buy-in and sell faulty mortgage products to parishioners. Community Health recognized the need to step in:

“If you don’t have someone saying ‘whoa whoa whoa, alright, are you reading the fine print? What are they really saying?’ ... I think in general there is a real wisdom to letting people make mistakes, that’s how we all learn, but there has to be some intention about just how harmful are you going to let it be.”

As a result, Community Health decided to step in and intentionally work with the community to “feed the grapevine” with helpful reliable information to counter the predatory practices occurring within the trusted community institutions.
While social service providers expressed wanting to broker ties to foster a helpful support network for program participants, some found that the new relationships created within the organization, “for better or for worse”, as Zeneida from Teens United lamented, had some unintended consequences. The agency places a high level of importance on fostering positive relationships for youth as a substitute for the relationships they otherwise might develop with local gangs prevalent in the community. However, while the agency’s intention is to broker ‘pro-social’ supportive relations for participants, at times relationships develop that become negative influences. Zeneida explained:

“Some of our young people come with greater problems than others, and so we are actually examining how a young person who … may not smoke pot that much, they start to hang with somebody in the program who does smoke pot …how might young people at [the agency] hanging out with each other benefit a kid or may not benefit a kid.”

This theme of a network’s double edged sword – one that is at times positive and at times negative - arises again. In Zeneida’s case, Teens United actively tries to broker ties for youth with other youth and professionals who serve as positive role models. However, she realizes that not everyone in the program, among whom staff members are brokering ties will be a positive influence. As ties begin to form between at-risk youth, Zeneida and her colleagues may notice the relationships are not beneficial for a student’s success – such as relationships that encourage drug use or criminal activity. This echoes the criticism found in the literature that most discussions of social capital tend to emphasize its positive effects (Portes 1998). In fact, social capital is more complex and can have negative aspects as well, – as seen in Zeneida’s observation of how youth at Teens United may feel pressure to conform to the behaviors of their pot smoking peers.

Social service providers are motivated to engage in purposive organizational brokerage
because they have observed that the individuals they serve are socially isolated, or have limited supportive ties and/or ties that drain. In the next section, I explain some of the strategies used by organizations to intentionally broker ties for individuals to develop their social network.

b. Strategies

Social service providers identified the following four main strategies they employ to intentionally broker ties that offer support: 1) serve as a bridging tie; 2) design programming using a cohort model; 3) helping participants identify their existing ties and social capital; 4) establishing trust and unconditional support.

The first strategy is serving as a bridging tie by connecting participants directly to other people and organizations that will provide support. In Timothy’s example in the previous section, Going Home actively helps participants develop a broader social network to avoid social isolation. One strategy used to do so involves working closely with participants to identify their interests, hobbies, and employment capabilities. When I asked Timothy how Going Home finds ways to replace community for people, meaning how does the organization help people create new relationships and plug into new networks, he shared how he approaches the conversation with formally homeless men and women:

“Is there a way, if you’re on disability, you can work part time or volunteer in some capacity? Are those things we can help facilitate? Is there another support group you want to be a part of? ... It’s not uncommon for some people to volunteer in the shelter that they left because the want to give back and they want to hold on a little bit to that community, but now they are seeing it in a different light. So there are all of those pieces and it’s going to be different for the individual. Some people, once they get out of the shelter or the streets the last thing they want to do is deal with anybody they knew in that world. So it’s really needing to replace that and find what their desires are, what their hobbies are, what their interests are. There are some people that have developed real
Using the information gathered through these conversations, Going Home staff members then actively identify and facilitate connections between the individual and the resources and groups in their new residential community.

The second strategy is designing programming around cohort models. Service providers explained how they use a cohort design to bring people together and find ways to broker ties within the programming activities. Forming a cohort of students or program participants that move through a program together and meet regularly provides opportunities for frequent communication, sharing and reflecting. Darlene detailed how Community Health is very deliberate in their efforts at brokering ties among students participating in a college prep-program:

“At the beginning of every class ...we create cohorts amongst the students. We actually say ‘we’re going to social engineer’ so to speak, but we say ‘okay, we’re going to break this class down into four cohorts and this is your cohort’. And each cohort has a faculty advisor and each cohort is encouraged – that group is encouraged to communicate with each other, not that they can’t communicate with us and the class, but hold each other accountable, you have homework issues - call each other, you need a ride to class – call each other, you need – you know, really saying ‘you’re in this together and this is how you’re going to be connected’.”

Darlene described how her Community Health colleagues are intentional in being “social engineers” as they organize students into cohorts and encourage them to communicate, call each other, provide rides to class, etc. – they are actively intervening to help students form helpful relationships with each other. This program fosters the idea that the group of students is “in this together” – they have a shared mission, a shared goal, a shared journey. In doing so, they anticipate students will form ties through their shared aspirations. This helps to crystallize their
connections with each other. In fact, Darlene continued on to share how not only has brokering helped to crystallize connections among students, but that students return to the community and serve as brokers themselves by sharing the program resource with their networks to help encourage their advancement. Darlene explained:

“The last two years our cohorts – the students walking in the door – all of them, people say ‘I’m here because of my cousin, my mother, they said ‘you have to do this course’. They said they’re gonna support me in this’. A major shift ... they are coming as a result of other people who have taken it in the community whose shoulder they are standing on ... you may be doing a direct touch with this person, but ... if you’re having a deep and significant impact, you’re effecting the immediate family, then their siblings and cousins, then their church network, neighbors, ...”

Community Health is intentionally brokering ties amongst students with a shared goal of continuing on to college, and in turn, students go back into the community and share this educational resource with the people in their networks who also want to pursue higher education – encouraging family and friends to enroll in the course and offering support in their journey. Students are offering support as well as leverage to help ties in their network get ahead through education. This concept – of whether low-income individuals can be a dual source of support and leverage - will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Similarly, Tricia, the program director at Empowered Girls shared how the youth organization’s program cohort model incorporates ritualized reflection activities into the daily activities to allow students the time to ‘check in’ with one another, share experiences, reflect on the day, and provide feedback to one another:

“We do a check in circle – which is another similar ‘how did that feel?’ Every girl checks in and every voice is heard. We have a snack, which is very important. And then they go onto the reflective skills, so again we have some sort of concept for the day and then they share their experience about the concept. The teacher teaches
about the concept for a moment, and then we have a break out group where they do either a chart, or a chart and a role play or something like that and then they come back to the large group and share that. And they do a closing circle. So, there is lots to the ritual that enforces that.”

This activity and similar others, incorporate opportunities for the cohort of girls to connect, get to know each other, and begin to develop relationships. When I inquired whether Tricia felt these activities influence how girls feel about each other and whether she felt it influenced the level of trust they had toward each other afterwards, she responded, “Absolutely … we do try to foster a community of support and respect”.

Similarly, Michael from A Step Ahead shared how a component of their workforce development program was intentionally designed to encourage students to seek support among staff and the cohort group through a recurring weekly ‘public’ meeting. The meetings, attended by staff members and students share openly how each student is faring in the program as a way of seeking support from others in the group. Michael explained how this forum calls out which students need help so that peers can know where to best support each other:

“Who needs support? Who has trouble getting here on time? Students might decide to call them … there is a lot of student to student support which is pretty huge.”

Michael explained how this strategy provides a very transparent account of how each student is doing each week to allow their agency-based network of staff members and students to celebrate successes together as well as find opportunities to rally support and encouragement when needed. The connections formed within these peer cohort groups often continue beyond the life of the A Step Ahead program – after students participation in the program ends - and extend beyond the walls of the organization – into the neighborhoods and workplace. As Michael continued to explain:
“[Students will] try to get together using email and other ways to stay in touch with each other. There are definitely some good bonds that are built there and a number of those carry on long term.”

Michael suggested that the relationships that form as a result of activities within the A Step Ahead program move beyond the organization. Students created “good bonds” and continue to serve as support to each other after the program ends. Similarly, Darlene from Community Health shared how ten community residents who met during the organization’s health-focused support group still come together almost two years after the program ended. They continue to support each other around managing their disease, buying healthy food and budgeting. The ties brokered by the organizations in these two examples effectively extended beyond the organization, creating a longer term network of supportive ties for participants even after programming ends.

The third strategy providers shared was the process of helping participants identify existing ties and social capital. Helping individuals recognize and identify the social ties that already exist within their social network is one strategy employed by Empowered Girls, as the program director, Tricia explained:

“We definitely talk about who are the advocates in their lives … you should really have a variety of advocates, depending on the situation it depends on who you go to for help.”

Teens United, another youth organization, uses a similar strategy of social mapping to help participants identify and create a list of the positive people in their life, many of which are relationships and connections the organization brokered, such as ties to health professionals and peers. As the Zeneida, the director of evaluation and learning explained:

“When they leave, it’s like – ‘here you go, here are all your resources and here are all the connections you built at [the organization]’ … Our point is to get kids to a place where they can
take advantage of the multiple resources out in the world ... and we know in many cases, our young people don’t have the supports currently to pursue that. So we know that when a kid leaves our building, they need all that information. They need a conscious recognition of the positive pro-social forces in their lives.”

The activities implemented by Empowered Girls and Teens United not only helps students identify and catalogue the people, organizations and resources within their network, but also provides them with the physical list (as in Teens United). In doing so, the organization provides students with a visual reflection of the web of support within which they are embedded – a support network that can be accessed for resources as needed, especially as they transition from the services provided by the organization. While Small’s (2009) definition of purposive organizational brokerage doesn’t encompass this type of identifying and mapping activity, I contend that the definition should expand to be inclusive of this process as it is often a critical step in being able to activate ties and mobilize social capital.

The fourth and last strategy identified by social service providers during interviews as to establish trust and convey unconditional support. Establishing a trusting relationship with and among program participants was seen by providers as an essential foundation for organizations to build in order to develop supportive ties. Once trust is established, participants feel supported and willing to share and connect with others. As Michael from A Step Ahead stated, “I think its trusting people enough that they have their best interests at heart and we’re here for common reasons … they open up.” This supports previous research (Domínguez and Watkins 2003) which found that organizations that achieved trust among their community were effective whereas institutions that were unable to gain trust - particularly among immigrant communities - were not seen as a resource by community members.

As Zeneida from Teens United shared of the youth participants in the program, “It’s time
that they get to spend in the company of someone they trust – it’s safe.” Throughout the interviews I conducted, respondents, like Zeneida, shared various ways in which trust manifests itself: trust that people ‘have their best interests at heart’, trust that confidentiality will be maintained, and trust that the organization will unconditionally support them.

Some of the providers shared in their interviews that the organization was often seen as the “last stop” for many program participants. Armed with this knowledge, Teens United makes a point to communicate to participants that the door is always open; participants can trust that they can rely on the organization for unconditional support, something that they may not have experienced elsewhere:

“When you’re the last stop, sometimes you’re the last stop many many times ... A kid can totally explode, tell everyone around them to ‘go f-themselves’, leave, and we’ll take him in the next day and say ‘you know what, there are consequences for that behavior, but we’re not letting you go’.”

In communicating to participants that unconditional support is provided, they begin to see the organization as a supportive tie that will be there when they need it, the “last stop” for those who don’t have ties that can offer support, or perhaps are no longer willing to offer support. Similarly, Timothy from Going Home shared how direct service staff members are instructed to provide this type of unconditional support to the formerly homeless men and women they serve:

“What I teach case managers is you can be fired every day [by the client], it doesn’t mean you’re not there the next day saying ‘is there anything you need’... it’s all about trust and building that trust and understanding that they are there for you.”

Similar to Timothy’s description of the unconditional support offered to participants by Going Home, Tina from Cooks, Inc. shared that she is with students “through thick and thin”. However, while this trusting relationship is important to the work of Cooks, Inc., Tina is also
mindful to not create a dependency on the organization as students only support network:

“…[B]eing engaged with young people through thick and thin is really important part of the, of what we do, but it’s not about – it’s about being engaged, but with some detachment. It’s like taking your role as a coach and a mentor seriously, but not creating dependency of the people in the program on the program."

Tina’s concern is valid, and is shared by other providers. A more detailed discussion of this fear of creating ‘dependency’ on organizations for support will be discussed in the next section. This ‘unconditional support’ goes a long way in building the trusting relationship – a relationship in which individuals know the organizational staff supports them in their goals. These experiences reflect previous findings (Dominguez and Watkins 2003) which demonstrate the importance for agencies to establish trust with clients before clients include them in their support networks.

c. Discussion

Some respondents expressed a shared concern regarding a “vacuum” of support post-program or a dependency upon an agency-based network for social support. It is an unintended consequence that may occur as a result of fostering strong supportive ties within an organizational setting - whether amongst program staff members or with peers. Similarly, Michael from A Step Ahead explained how students often experience a period of adjustment after leaving the program and its “intense” level of daily interaction among peers and program staff members, “[Students] get quite close … they build some good bonds. …when they go on the internship … they really feel a big vacuum.” The concern of having participants’ supportive network disappear after they leave the program and establishing a way to mitigate the effect was also shared by Tricia, the program director at Empowered Girls whose program model is unique
in that the programming physically operates within the school system - when the program is finished, the programming ceases and Empowered Girls staff members leave the school site. She questioned, “How do you create that supportive network beyond [Empowered Girls]? It’s the challenge of us coming in and leaving.” The challenge of helping individuals develop a supportive network that extends beyond the organization was one Tricia and her colleagues still grappled with at the time of the interview.

These reflections reveal a shared concern of an over-reliance on an institution-based social network for support and leverage. As the concept of social capital has become popularized in international development, critique has emerged in the field over its benefits and use (Harriss 2001; Elyachar 2007). While the majority of the critique has focused on the concept’s community level of analysis, popularized by Robert Putnam (2000), it entails a consideration of the unintended consequences of social engineering, of trying to shape the networks of individuals in the attempt to develop social capital at the individual level as well. For example, Dominguez and Watkins found examples of women, “abandoning the dense, insular, and localized neighbor and familial-based networks” (2003:129) for an institution-based network that provided support and resources. While individuals are able to find a source of support and resources within social service organizations, future research should explore whether and how their network and access to and mobilization of resources change once services cease.

Perhaps one strategy to mitigate the potential vacuum of support post-program, can be found in the activity – as described by Tricia of Empowered Girls and Zeneida of Teens United - of identifying and/or mapping out participants’ social networks and social capital. Activities such as this engage participants in the conversation about the value of social networks, and provide the tools to highlight strengths in their network as well as areas to develop further. These
activities and conversations can support participants in continuing to build out and access ties to sustain support beyond the end of programming.

While social service organizations shared their desired outcome for brokering ties that offer support and the strategies they employed, others shared a different objective for brokerage – to help participants develop ties that offer leverage, meaning ties that help participants ‘get ahead’ and advance. The next section details why providers feel this is important and shares some of the strategies they use to broker such ties.

III. Brokering Leveraging Ties for Individuals

“We know that our students would not be working or going to school where they are without the networks that we created for them.” Tina, Cooks, Inc.

While ties that offer social support help people cope with their day-to-day challenges, and help them get by, many of the respondents interviewed wanted to broker ties that would offer individuals leverage – such as employment opportunities, internships, or educational advancement. Six of the social service providers I interviewed shared that their organization or program deliberately attempts to connect individuals to other people or agencies who will help them get ahead – advance in education or career, often by making introductions to high SES people within the organizational network or by teaching networking skills and concepts. In this section, I detail why service providers engage in brokering that offers leverage and outline the specific strategies they employ.

a. Objectives

Many organizations expressed concern that program participants’ existing networks were limited in that they didn’t offer the resources or connections needed to ‘get ahead’. This was
particularly found with regards to education and employment opportunities. As Tina from Cooks, Inc. shared:

“Everything about [Cooks, Inc.] is built around the idea that the young people we serve lack the social capital and social networks they need to move into jobs that are career path jobs.”

Tina’s observations support existing research on the social networks and social capital of low-income individuals, which finds that they either lack contacts that can provide leverage (Campbell et al. 1986) or are unable to mobilize it (Smith 2007). Research has found evidence that urban poor individuals are isolated from a network rich in social leverage, resulting in limited opportunities to connect to pathways of upward mobility (Granovetter 1983; Wilson 1987; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; O’Regan and Quigley 1996). Social networks are complex, as some social service providers reflected on how individuals have a strong network of family and friends that offer social support, but their existing network may be limited in resources and information to help students make advancements in their education. When I asked Brian from College Now about the support and resources students have as they make decisions around going to college, he responded how there is a continuum of families:

“There are families and circumstances where they have thoughtfully decided that it is not for their kid – it is not part of their family’s culture. There are a group of folks who would like to experience [college] but think that it is just not possible, for whatever the many reasons be, that it’s not possible, and then there is the group on the other end that desperately want it but can’t figure out how to navigate to get there ... and struggle as a result and make bad choices.”

Brian’s response indicates that some of the students’ who move through College Now’s services have a network of family members who are encouraging students to attend college, but lack the resources or experience to know “how to navigate to get there” – their networks lack ties
that can offer leverage in terms of the resources and knowledge of how to advance through higher education. Fortunately for the students engaged in College Now services, they now have an institution-based network of leveraging ties through their counselors.

These organizations are trying to close the gap in the social leverage dimension of social capital. They attempt to fill this gap primarily using three strategies: 1) by serving as a bridge between social networks by directly creating connections between program participants and people who can offer leverage, by 2) intentionally developing the organization’s network, and by 3) teaching participants networking skills and concepts.

b. Strategies

“Our work is successful in connecting young people with successful adults in the field. And, it is really the cornerstone of what we do…we’re very heavy handed on networking as an absolute tool for career success.” Tina, Cooks, Inc.

The first strategy discussed is serving as a bridging tie by directly creating connections between individuals and others in positions of higher SES who can offer job opportunities, references, and educational advice and resources. Many of the social service providers shared how their respective organizations served as a critical social mobility bridge between low-income individuals and the organization’s network of higher positioned professionals, mentors, educators, and employers. During the interviews, when I asked what the objective of their brokering efforts was, they responded that they wanted to help individuals expand their networks primarily to create opportunities for career and educational advancements. The following is one example of how staff members of Teens United used the organization’s network of ties to directly connect a participant to an employer/mentor to help create opportunities for him academically and financially. As Zeneida of Teens United explained:
“We have a young person placed at a business ... And [the business owner] has said that he will work with our graduate if he wants to go to college that he will support him with that... with the scheduling and the application process ... he will be a mentor to this person... he knows that this young man would not be able to go to college without some income, so he has also committed to that. We’re also really mindful of finding people who will help our young people get to the next step.”

By intentionally making introductions between youth and well-positioned people within the organization’s network who can help youth “get to the next step”, Teens United is actively expanding youths’ job contacts and opportunities for the purpose of mobility opportunities. Similarly, staff members at A Step Ahead broker leveraging ties for students through internship placements, in an effort to produce job references and job offers for students. Michael explained how A Step Ahead advises students to position themselves to receive references:

“...[T]ry to set yourself up so you can get a good job reference ... I think the supervisors, when they have an intern that performs well but they don’t have a job opening for them they want to work hard within their own network – which would be related companies or just other places to work – so that’s definitely been a source of jobs (for students).”

A Step Ahead not only purposefully brokers ties for leverage, but also coaches students on how to activate those ties for a job reference for their career advancement. Michael continues on to share how A Step Ahead intentionally tries to connect students to mentors in the financial field who can offer career advice and job contacts for disadvantaged youth:

“They meet their mentors from the outside of [A Step Ahead], a relationship that can build with someone from an outside perspective to maybe help with career decisions, sometimes life decisions that come up as a different voice that they hear, and also as even a networking contact as well ... [W]e are trying to build a different sort of relationship with someone not just from the outside but someone who is going to see them pretty infrequently ... really just trying to get comfortable building a relationship with someone
they are not going to see that often, really much in a professional context where they would not share as much detail as they would with their [program] advisor ... someone who has external experiences they can share.”

The “different sort of relationship” A Step Ahead is trying to broker for students is a relationship characteristic of a weak tie that can offer leverage. Research has found that weak ties which bridge networks and informal networks are effective for job contacts (Granovetter 1983). The intent is to help students develop this new type of relationship with a weak tie and understand how to mobilize resources such as information, skills, and mentoring, for their own career advancements.

As organizations purposefully create connections between participants and people who can offer resources and opportunities to make economic advancements, particularly if they are bridging cross-class ties, providers shared that in some instances it comes with challenges. As Tricia from Empowered Girls explained:

“I think part of the challenge ... especially [with] college women who are coming from very different backgrounds and their ... life innocence or naivety about certain things - how do we educate them without setting up pre-scripted roles that just because you are going to this [disadvantaged] community you are going to see these things. ... it’s been interesting to coach women on how to respond if someone says something and inside you’re kind of shocked, but you don’t want to express that on your face.”

While there is value in creating connections between low-income individuals and people in higher status positions – such as professionals, social service providers candidly share concerns of the challenge in finding common ground to ensure a connection can result in activation and mobilization of resources when needed. Similarly, another organization serving young women, Females Together, shared their challenge of bridging between different social worlds as they pair up young low-income urban girls with mostly middle-class college women
from a different socio-economic background and life experience. Rebecca from Females Together explained:

“You can argue that there is a disconnect between the mentors that are serving the girls and the girls themselves. And so frequently I think mentors get caught up in that, like ‘I don’t have anything in common with this girl … or I’m nervous to share who I am or that I went on vacation or whatever it is, the resources I have.’”

Each organization shared how they made an effort to address the concerns that arose – such as Empowered Girls which provides “social justice reflection… especially for our college age mentors just to think about why it is we do the work we do, what’s a part of diversity, what is diversity.” In doing so, they are able to more effectively bridge participants with cross-class ties – which hopefully will open up opportunities for the girls and the women they serve. Because of this, it is critical for organizations who want to serve as a bridging tie to help participants and cross-class ties recognize the commonalities that do exist between them.

One way organizations maximize their ability to serve as a bridging tie is to create and foster a strong internal network of staff members, alumni, and participants to generate and mobilize resources and opportunities. Rebecca from Females Together shared how their alumni program is designed to create career opportunities for alumni and active participants:

“Creating that pipeline for getting an internship or getting a job or developing a specific ‘We have this need; you have this skill; because you’re [connected to the organization] … now I know you and you’re in my network’”

Females Together created the space and the system/process for alumni and participants to create a network out of their shared experience of being part of the same program. In this way, group membership allows access to social capital in terms of enforceable trust, “the trustworthiness of social structures that allows for the proliferation of obligations and
expectations” (Coleman 1998:107-108). Participants and alumni of the Females Together program feel they can trust each other, creating a pipeline for hiring participants as interns or employees because through their shared affiliation with Females Together, they feel that “now I know you”.

Similar to the “pipeline” created in the previous example, Tricia from Empowered Girls explained how having a structure for an internal network fosters effective professional mentoring relationships between staff members and the women engaged in the program:

“There is a really powerful mentoring chain that happens … often times what we see is that a … woman ends up on our staff or one of our … women end up on our Board.”

In both examples, the organizations created a structure - whether a formal network or mentoring component - which allows social capital to flow to those within the organizationally embedded network.

The second strategy used to build social leverage is intentionally developing the organization’s network. In order to successfully connect program participants to ties that offer leverage, providers shared that they strive to cultivate and manage the organization’s own network. Organizational staff members sought out relationships with colleagues and other organizations within the community in order to create opportunities for their participants. Zeneida from Teens United explained:

“[The] director of workforce development is really conscious of building partnerships with businesses that will nurture our young people after they leave [Teens United] … And our staff is very very connected to [the community]”

Strategically developing and expanding organizational networks broadens the number of social ties to which the organization can broker connections for program participants by serving
as a bridge. Like Teens United, others also have a very deliberate strategy, as Tina, the executive
director at Cooks Inc. explained:

“We want to prepare young people for jobs in the industry and actually place them, and in order to do that we ourselves had to develop our own network... We’re going to build our social network for our organization and young people are going to make connections with [professionals ... For us, we as an organization were living the reality of what it meant to be ‘networked’ and connected. And so, it was really easy for us to see that that was also true for the young people. That, just like them, we were in a world where we didn’t know anybody or didn’t have any connections and we’re trying to do something and it’s all about connecting to people who could help us and that is exactly the service we provide for young people.”

Without a developed organizational network, Tina recognizes that participants’ leverage
ties would be limited. Cooks Inc. needs to cultivate their own extensive network of professionals
in order to have well-positioned people to bridge their students to for employment opportunities.

In addition to strategically building and maintaining a social network, organizations also
actively protect their network from feeling strained so that they can continue to draw upon their
resources. Tina of Cooks Inc. shared their strategy to ensure their own network of agencies did
not feel burdened and continued to be willing to offer internships to students:

“We apply [the idea of fit and alignment] very carefully to the way we recommend students ... We have had students who have not succeeded in a job placement, but we’re very attentive to the relationship that we have with whoever the sponsor is”

Being “attentive” to the organizational tie and nurturing this relationship with the
sponsoring agency will keep that door open for future students to intern. Tina continues on to
share how they work with sponsor agencies to understand that while every student placement
may not be a success, it is still a learning opportunity for both the student and the sponsor agency
in this way, both parties can take away something from the process, it is reciprocal in nature.

A similar strategy to maintain organizational ties is shared by Zeneida from Teens United:

“[W]e’re not going to place a young person in an internship if they are freaking out every day or flipping out every day. So, the thing is, how do we set up our kids for success? That’s what it’s really about. ...Don’t make the referral if the participant isn’t ready for it.”

If the young person doesn’t yet have the soft skills or emotional readiness to be successful at the placement, Teens United realizes a referral not only would undermine the youth’s success, but it could also jeopardize the organization’s relationship with a willing employer in their network.

Lastly, the third strategy identified by organizations to purposefully develop the social network of program participants is teaching networking skills and concepts. As Doug, the president and founder of Community Network shared:

“There is a unit in the curriculum that is talking about social capital and that does talk about bridging and bonding ... staff keep pushing those ideas of bridging social capital and networks.”

Community Networks has intentionally incorporated into their curriculum a piece on bridging and bonding social capital. Staff members teach these concepts in workshops and students practice the application of these concepts through activities. For example, Doug explained how after students are taught some concepts of social capital – such as ‘bridging social capital’ and ‘bonding social capital’, they are then instructed to plan a community service project – putting their new knowledge base to work:

“Another big thing is a four page check list for planning a community service project and so the idea is that they use that as
they are actually doing something. So, that’s kind of – its pretty hands on. It’s not just training and then okay, that’s nice, we had a training on this. But it’s giving them – trying to get at the right time – giving them that information and skills that they can actually go and use for something they’re working on.”

Doug, and others recognize that simply having ties that offer leverage within one’s social network is not enough to propel an individual into a new career or into college. The social capital within that network needs to be accessed and mobilized – those ties need to be activated. To help participants identify and mobilize that social capital, organizations, similar to Community Networks, incorporate teaching networking concepts and skill development into the program curriculum. Tina of Cooks, Inc. shared:

“[W]e’re very heavy handed on networking as an absolute tool for career success … it’s one of the things we start teaching kids right at the very beginning of the intervention that we have with them. We teach the concept of networking, we teach how they network, we teach them how to network amongst themselves.”

This strategy of engaging participants in conversation of the value of social networks and the skills of developing a network is also seen in A Step Ahead. After teaching the skills of networking during a class, the A Step Ahead programming model provides students the opportunity to practice, with invited guest speakers, their newly acquired skills:

“We talk about networking as a class … Every week a guest speaker comes … to talk about a topic…then there is a networking period afterwards where they (students) can ask for a business card.”

Teaching the skills to cultivate a network of leverage ties and providing the opportunity to practice these skills equips students with the social tools needed to mobilize the resources within their newly developed networks. Further, once a network is developed and engaged, Tina of Cooks Inc. shared how the organization ensures students understand and gain the skills needed
to maintain these relationships for the long term:

“[I]t’s about engaging with your network in a very reciprocal way and in tending to the network. The network needs to be tended and nourished all the time ... we’re like, ‘did you send the email to thank him – you have to do that’. That contact is only as good as if you keep it warm.”

By teaching these skills, Cooks Inc. are providing students with the ‘soft skill’ tools necessary to cultivate and tend to their network so that it grows over time, as they grow and pursue their goals. The effectiveness of their ability to teach networking skills is illustrated in the following example. Tina explained how a Cooks Inc. program alumnus/a identified the organization as a resource for career advice and support and as a result, reconnected with staff members for guidance:

“One of [the graduates] was hired as a general manager at a restaurant recently after graduating from [college] and she had trouble with the employment and she came to me and my staff for serious coaching through the process of leaving that job and doing the next thing. She’s still using her network which is us. ...We’ve kept that contact [with the graduate] warm too – we were very intentional with it. Our goal was to make sure that she had opportunities”

Tina and her Cooks, Inc. colleagues also reinforce to students to stay focused on their careers so that once they achieve success, they have an obligation to reach back into their networks to help others move ahead in their careers – a concept of “paying it forward”. Tina shared:

“...it’s also about ‘paying it forward’ you had this opportunity, you want to be sure it exists for other young people ... we say ‘yeah, you’re setting an example, we set an example’, but we try to stay focused on you’ve got your goals and you need to meet your goals and in order for the people around you to be successful - you know you have pressures on you from family, this happens with our kids a lot ‘oh, don’t go to school, don’t go to classes at Bunker Hill I need you to babysit for your younger brother’,
whatever – we say all the time ‘Only your success can help other people. If you help other people before you manage your own success you won’t be helpful to other people, you’ll be a drain on them.’ So, we make it really clear there is nothing to be guilty about taking care of yourself first.’

In this way, Tina and Cooks Inc., are not only helping to build students’ leverage networks, but in doing so and in communicating the value of “paying it forward” to students once they are successful, they will effectively help build the leverage networks for ties within students’ networks. While it remains to be seen if this occurs, another provider, Darlene of Community Health, shared a similar ripple effect that suggests it is a hopeful outcome: Darlene at Community Health observed as successful students in the college prep program encouraged and supported their social ties to also enroll and further their education, which they did.

Some of the ‘soft skills’ organizations teach participants extend beyond traditional ‘networking skills’ is to learn how to maintain a balance of obligations so that ties don’t become a draining force in their lives or an obstacle toward their goals. Michael from A Step Ahead shared how his colleagues tried to help a student think about a strategy for managing his family obligations while not placing his education and career goals in jeopardy:

“His mother needs to be taken to the doctor regularly, so she leans on him ... if she can work things around his [class] schedule he wants to be there to help – he’s still living at home so he wants to be a support, but ...once he’s [starts] the internship ...it’s going to be more of a demanding schedule.”

This student and his mother are critical sources of support for each other. At the very least, she relies on him for transportation to her medical appointments and he relies on her for stable housing. However, this reciprocal relationship is placing a strain on the student’s schedule and could eventually jeopardize his internship and potentially any resulting job offers,
references, or employment leads. The program staff member advised the student on how to manage and balance obligations and reciprocity in a way that doesn’t jeopardize opportunities to ‘get ahead’. This situation shared by Michael reflects findings (Dominguez and Watkins 2003) that the capacity to balance the influence of social support networks with social leverage networks shapes individuals’ abilities to secure and take advantage of mobility opportunities. Social ties that are draining present a negative pull on emotional resources, such as motivation and focus, as well as a drain on material resources. Draining ties can prevent women from pursuing their social mobility goals (Stack 1974; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that low-income women are often suspicious or hesitant to rely on their existing network of friends and family for fear of inconsistent support, manipulation, or disruption of routines (Dominguez and Watkins 2003). Organizations can help coach participants and provide skills on how to navigate these challenges in a way that helps them stay the course toward their goals.

While the above examples illustrate how organizations teach participants networking, concepts of social capital – such as ‘bridging social capital’ and ‘bonding social capital’, and how to cultivate and balance the ties within a network, another respondent shared how her organization helps prepare and prime a group of volunteer mentors for a relationship with their students. Female Together teaches mentoring and coaching techniques and shares expectations with their cadre of volunteer mentors prior to connecting them with students. Rebecca from Females Together explained:

“[Mentors] are invited to our trainings where they are lead on what the difference is between a coach and a mentor, what’s the difference between being somebody who is being a support and somebody who is leveraging you. So, sort of trying to push their (college) students to the next level … we’re training them on how they ask appropriate questions to push their mentee, whoever
they’re matched with on campus."

Relationships need the effort of both parties. By teaching skills and preparing mentors, this organization helps to increase the chances that a connection will be formed with program participants.

IV. Discussion

This scan of local nonprofits serving low-income communities illustrates that, to varying degrees, organizational brokerage is an intentional part of the programming and services provided to the communities they serve. Their brokering efforts grew out of observations that participants’ existing networks were limited in size or limited in the resources they could provide. The majority of organizations engage in intentional brokering to increase social support for individuals. Some of the strategies used to broker supportive ties include creating many opportunities for participants to come together to share, interact, and develop trust.

Additionally, many of the organizations purposively engaged in brokering ties that offer leverage for program participants to create opportunities for social mobility, helping participants advance toward their career and educational goals. Strategies to broker leverage ties include developing the organization’s own network, serving as a bridge by connecting participants to internship opportunities or pairing with mentors, and creating alumni networks. Serving as a bridging tie to social networks was not without its challenges, as some providers shared how bridging cross-class networks required individuals from both networks to learn how to navigate the new terrain with dissimilar others.

While organizations envisioned positive outcomes when brokering supportive ties, some recognized the negative aspect of social capital such as pressure to conform to deviant behavior.
and serving as a pipeline for misinformation to travel through. Recognizing the negative aspects, respondents shared how they actively try to mitigate these effects. Additionally, respondents expressed concern over the consequence of having social ties embedded within an organizational network which could result in a vacuum of support if that connection to the organization ends.

In reflecting upon my dual role as an independent researcher and as an employee of CWU, I found that while I was in the process of interviewing the nine social service providers in this phase of the study, I was simultaneously unintentionally also cultivating CWU’s network (and my professional network) by initiating and developing relationships with external colleagues. By conducting this research, I had the opportunity to learn more about each of the social service providers and their programs - which led to the formation of new ties. For example, after I learned about the innovative work Teens United was undertaking with youth, CWU invited Zeneida and her colleagues to present at the organization’s biennial conference. Also, after learning more about each others roles and professional interests, Tina and I have maintained regular contact around helping Cooks Inc build their internal capacity for program evaluation. Resulting in colleagues at Cooks, Inc. to became members of CWU’s quarterly Outcomes Workgroup – a collaborative learning initiative I manage in my role at CWU. Also, through connections made from this research, I learned more about Females Together’s work and invited colleagues to present on a panel to discuss their work at an Outcomes Workgroup meeting. Although I clearly explained to study participants that I was conducting my research outside of my role at CWU, I was unable to completely detach from my CWU role, which resulted in forming new ties with colleagues and expanding my network and CWU’s network.

In this chapter, I documented how purposive brokering practices are found among non-profit organizations. Given this broad perspective, I will closely examine the practices and issues
by using a case study of one organization. In the following two chapters, I discuss case study findings which uncover the process of intentional organizational brokerage and demonstrate the impact on social network size and composition.
Chapter Five
“We are connectors, our work is to connect”:
Organization-based strategies of purposive brokerage

I. Introduction

“I just got off the phone with [Maria]. She is really excited because [an insurance company] offered her a full-time permanent position and her interview is today! Since May, she has progressed from an internship to a temporary part-time position and now they have offered her a full time position as a claims reviewer. She attributes her success at [the insurance company] to being with ... [Pamela] her mentor from WTW. [Pamela] is now [Maria’s] supervisor and she is the one that recommended [Maria] for the full time position.”

– Brenda, WTW Program Supervisor

The opening passage shares the outcome of a situation in which Pamela, volunteer mentor for the WTW program, who is employed in Human Resources at a local insurance company, contacted WTW program supervisor Brenda to offer an internship opportunity for a student. Brenda identified Maria, a student who had received certification and training in medical billing and coding, as someone who had the skill set, was ready for the opportunity, and would make a good impression. Maria was successful in the internship and progressed from the internship to a paid temporary part-time position and then to a paid full-time position. In my conversations with Brenda, I learned that Pamela was so pleased with Maria’s work and their experience with her placement that she reconnected with Brenda to offer an internship to another CWU program participant. Brenda and her colleagues identified Joanne, a resident at one of CWU’s transitional housing programs, as being “engaged” and “qualified” for the position, so she brokered the connection. Joanne was also successful in the internship, was offered a part-time position which eventually led to a full time job. A staff member working with Joanne in the transitional housing program shared that, “[Joanne] says that the CWU has had a huge impact on her life.” The success of this connection was emailed to program staff members, Directors, COO and the CEO. The response in follow up emails was overwhelmingly encouraging from all
levels, particularly from the COO and CEO who both reinforced and congratulated colleagues on their “team effort” and noted that other CWU programs hope to model this approach. By reinforcing and encouraging intentional brokering, the COO and CEO are creating a culture within the organization that supports staff members’ use of these strategies to unlock resources and opportunities for participants. Fostering intentional brokerage as part of the organizational culture is an example of institution-driven brokerage occurring throughout the broader organization. I am starting from the premise that CWU engages in intentional brokerage and in this chapter I seek to understand how they go about this process, expanding upon research on the role institutions play in unintentionally shaping social networks (Small 2009) and findings on the factors that influence whether women create institution based networks (Dominguez and Watkins 2003).

The findings I outline and discuss in this chapter add to the literature on social network and social capital by addressing the following set of research questions: What are the mechanisms by which a social service organization intentionally tries to broker ties for low-income women? In other words, how do direct service staff members understand and operationalize the goal of purposive brokerage? How are program designs and organizational policies and practices structured in an effort to intentionally broker ties? What specific actions do staff members take in their efforts to broker ties for program participants? What are the underlying mechanisms that influence how brokerage occurs?

In this chapter, I present data from focus groups, interviews, and observations and highlight four key findings that emerged during the analysis. The first finding is that purposeful brokerage activities occurring within two different institutional settings, within the program setting and within the broader culture of the organizational environment, necessitated a new
typology within institution-driven brokerage: programmatic brokerage and cultural brokerage. My research was guided by Mario Luis Small’s typology of actor-driven brokerage and institution-driven brokerage. In his research uncovering how network inequalities occur within organizational settings, Mario Luis Small distinguishes between actor-driven brokerage and institution-driven brokerage within organizations whereas, “actor-driven brokerage is the process by which a person in the organization connects people to other people, to other organizations, or to the resources of either; institution-driven brokerage is the process by which an institution, in the normative or cognitive sense, brokers any of these connections” (Small 2009:19). I contend that a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics within an organizational environment necessitates a further distinction to be made in Small’s typology to include the programmatic and broader organizational cultural process occurring within institution-driven brokerage. Specifically, programmatic brokerage refers to the processes occurring within a program design, program policies, and activities, while cultural brokerage refers to the processes occurring throughout the broader organization, as a result of the organization-wide policies, procedures, and/or environment.

The second finding is that some brokered relationships benefit from developing more organically, with less overt intentional brokering efforts by the organization or staff members’ actions. This discovery grew out of insights shared by both CWU staff members and WTW students during interviews exploring which aspects of intentional brokering were effective and why. Staff members shared how they sought the right balance between actively engineering low-income women’s social network and letting relationships develop more organically with decreased staff involvement. Interviews with students presented in Chapter Six support this finding of the importance for staff members to recognize when to lessen their degree of
The third finding is the discovery of program strategies and activities - also discussed in Chapter Four – designed to help low-income women identify and mobilize their existing social ties. Therefore, I expand upon the original conceptualization of purposive organizational brokerage to include the processes – e.g. social network mapping, coaching, etc. - by which organizations not only help individuals develop new social ties, but also aim to enable participants to recognize and activate the social capital that already resides within their networks.

The final key finding is the influence of ‘key connectors’ – i.e. individuals who are skilled at cultivating ties within their own network and serve as a bridge by intentionally brokering a higher number of connections for others. While structures, systems, policies, and activities can be intentionally created by organizations and programs to institutionalize the brokering process for low-income women, the presence, influence, and impact of individual ‘key connectors’ may be just as valuable and critical to explore.

In this chapter, I depict how the institution-driven brokering process unfolds within the program design and structure, and within the broader organization through policies and practices in such a way that reinforces a ‘culture of connection’. Further, in detailing the process of actor-driven brokerage, I address some of the underlying mechanisms uncovered through participant observations, focus groups, and interviews that influence how the brokering process occurs. In particular, I detail strategies employed by staff members and volunteers to protect and maintain their own or the organization’s social ties. This reinforces findings in the social network literature on barriers to resource mobilization (Smith 2005; Smith 2007).

II. Institution-driven brokerage

As individuals with unstable or unreliable social networks seek out an institution-based
network (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Hawkins 2010), it becomes important to understand the process of how ties are brokered and how they form within organizations. Within institution-driven brokerage I identify a distinction between the processes that occurs within programs and the processes found occurring throughout the broader organizational culture. In the section below, I begin by presenting and discussing the findings of institution-driven brokerage found occurring throughout the organizational culture.

a. Cultural Brokerage

“...You can’t be a One Family Scholar unless you’re part of a [CWU] program, so [program participants] wouldn’t have that connection unless they came in.” - Karen, case manager

Institution-driven cultural brokerage refers to the process by which connections to people, organizations, and resources occur either using the organizational network or as a result of organizational partnerships, collaborations, actions, practices, or policies. These include activities or actions that permeate across the institution, essentially stretching across multiple programs and departments. The opening passage illustrates one example of institution-driven cultural brokerage, where organizations serve as a resource broker (Small 2009), acting as a conduit of resources for individuals. Karen, a case manager working with women on their educational and career goals, recognizes that CWU program participants are only able to connect to One Family Scholars, a local scholarship program for low-income women, via CWU because the organization has a formal agreement with One Family, Inc., a nonprofit that helps low-income women afford and pursue higher education. Without a relationship with a participating organization, the student would otherwise not be eligible for the scholarship program.

In the following section, I explore three processes found throughout the broader organization by which CWU engages in purposive institution-driven brokering: first, by
discussing and assessing program participants’ social networks and creating specific goals to strengthen and / or expand networks; second, by drawing on organizational ties to benefit individuals; and third, by creating a ‘culture of connection’ that is fostered throughout the institution through modeling networking skills and encouragement of successfully brokered ties.

**Discussing, assessing, and goal planning around social networks**

Throughout the organization, CWU staff members engage program participants in conversations about their social networks. CWU developed a tool (found in Appendix VI) to help direct service staff members initiate conversations with participants about various life components, including their social network. Staff members’ utilization of this tool is designed to open up conversations around strengths and identify areas to establish goals designed to support mobility outcomes and advance participants’ degree of economic self-sufficiency. CWU’s Chief Operating Officer (COO), Charles Carter, explained the value of engaging in conversations around social networks and social network development:

“... [J]ust even acknowledging that [developing one’s social network] is an important aspect of the work. Acknowledging it to the participant and to the organization, that we are not the end-all be-all of what happens. I know people know that, but to think that if we are not the end, then what’s next? How do they keep going forward? ... What it does teach participants is that there is value in having a community, not just trying to manage on their own. And maybe even be able to say out loud, ‘This is what I need from the community’ – having that heard and responded to.”

As Charles explained, engaging in conversations about the importance of developing one’s social network is important – simply “acknowledging” that they matter. These conversations are intended to lay the groundwork for participants to be receptive and active in forming new ties for support and leverage.
The assessment tool used to initiate these conversations with participants was developed by the agency’s leadership team and is based on CWU’s theory of change, the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency™. According to a CWU published brief, *Mobility Mentoring* (Babcock 2012), the assessment tool is administered to program participants as a way to jointly assess their placement along each of the five pillars of the bridge (as illustrated in Figure 2 below), including assessing their social network within the Well-Being pillar.

![Figure 2](image)

When I asked COO Charles Carter, to describe the desired outcome for participants in terms of their progression along the social network component of the bridge, he explained:

“*My hope is, is that those networks will be the places that they go to be recharged, to get new ideas, to be able to stay the course when the crisis come and the staff that they’ve been working with aren’t around and have moved on – they need places that will keep them connected, grounded, and keeping our eye on trying to get down to those dreams that they talked about earlier on.*”

Then, through the practice of Mobility Mentoring™, staff members work with participants to set goals in all areas that support economic self-sufficiency, including developing a social network that provides both leverage and support. Examples of goals program participants have established to develop their social network include, “join meetup.com groups”,

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16 This practice is described as “a long-term developmental partnership between trained staff and program participants through which participants acquire the resources, knowledge, and skills necessary to attain and preserve economic independence” www.liveworkthrive.org
“attend meeting in community”, “establish a stronger support system”, and “take leadership role in support group”. Staff members throughout the organization help participants create well-defined action steps toward these identified goals, provide incentives, and support participants in goal completion.

The organization is intentional in its brokerage efforts through the agency-wide practice of engaging participants in conversation around the value of social networks and further, supporting participants in creating goals to develop their social network. However, will these skills and knowledge continue to influence and shape participants after they leave CWU? In speaking with COO Chuck Carter further about the process of helping program participants develop their social networks, he shared his concerns about whether the work being done within the program will translate beyond the walls of CWU:

“I don’t know if that translates to ‘now I go out and find that for myself’ because this community was created by the program. And I worry that we aren’t as intentional about how do you go out and do this on your own. Or how to you go out and practice while you have this other (institution) support going on. ... The fear is that it won’t be in place and the gains that they’ve worked so hard to make may be at risk if they don’t have the same kinds of support in place.”

While these cultural brokerage efforts (engaging participants in conversations about social networks, deploying an assessment tool across the organization, and goal setting) are intended to facilitate tie formation to generate support and leverage for participants, it is not yet known whether the skills, knowledge, and newly formed ties can be sustained beyond the program.

**Drawing on organizational ties to benefit participants**

A second way in which the broader cultural brokerage process occurs is by drawing on
the organization’s ties to benefit individuals. Just as individuals are connected to a social
network comprised of individuals and organizations, so are organizations. During an interview
with COO Chuck Carter, I asked whether and how the organization cultivates its own network of
ties. In response, Chuck explained how CWU is very mindful in developing its own network:

“I think we are very intentional about that. Almost at every level of the leadership team, we all have relationships outside of CWU where we are sharing our work and sometimes on a one on one basis and sometimes it’s on committees – where we will also leverage those relationships to have our voice amplified because we are doing it collectively ... The board’s role is the same thing. To leverage their relationships to further our mission. Whether that’s time spent or funds or in kind donations. Advocacy of course is another place where we go out externally and connect with folks and talk about what we do.”

The organization’s strategic development of their own network was echoed in my interview with CWU’s CEO, Elisabeth Babcock, as well. She shared:

“I think that the work that we are doing, and especially over the last two or three years, has been strategically intentional in reaching out to other organizations, and funders, and policy makers to try to magnify our families voices, their needs, what we’re learning from them.”

In being mindful about the organization’s own development and cultivation of their
network, CWU has developed relationships in the community to draw on and exchange
information and resources to more effectively support women’s increased economic mobility.
By forming and cultivating their own ties, organizations can build up a vital network of people
and organizations to access resources on behalf of their mission and community served – serving as a resource broker. Organizations can serve as a bridge by connecting individuals to network ties and resources to which they otherwise wouldn’t have access. Two examples that illustrate the process of drawing on organizational ties to benefit participants are 1) connecting high status
individuals to program participants through coordinating corporate volunteer events and
activities; and 2) inviting influential people in high status positions from the organization’s
network to attend program activities.

CWU’s Institutional Advancement (IA) department is positioned to serve as a pipeline of
connections between the organization’s program participants and volunteers from the corporate
sector. The IA department is charged with fundraising, marketing, and communications for the
agency. As a result, they routinely develop and cultivate relationships through ongoing
conversations, meetings and events with external corporate partners, volunteers, and
philanthropic individuals and foundations. Not unlike the activities of fundraising departments of
other nonprofit organizations, relationships are often developed with the intention of bringing in
new resources and opportunities to the organization and the individuals it serves. In doing so,
some of the external relationships cultivated by the IA department have resulted in opportunities
for CWU to serve as a bridging tie by creating a link between two dissimilar groups that
otherwise would not have connected: corporate volunteers and program participants. This is
significant as bridging ties link two distant networks, carrying information and resources from
one to another (Granovetter 1973).

The first example of drawing on organizational ties to benefit participants is the process
by which the organization connects high status individuals to program participants through the
coordination of corporate volunteer events and activities. During the time of this research, as
documented in the organization’s newsletter, *Thrive!*, and observed in participant observations of
discussions held in weekly WTW program team meetings, volunteers from the Boston area
offices of two international financial and consulting firms, coordinated with the organization’s
IA department to donate their time and expertise during two scheduled corporate volunteer days.
While the one team of volunteers focused their corporate volunteer day on improving the physical space of the organization’s largest congregate family shelter facility, the second team of volunteers, comprised of six staff members, dedicated their Community Impact Day to working with the WTW students. The second team coordinated with their colleagues in the WTW program to conduct individual mock interview exercises with each student and a resume and cover letter writing workshop for the larger group. During mock interviews, students practiced their interviewing skills in a simulated interview environment at CWU’s administrative offices as the corporate volunteers asked interview questions and afterwards provided constructive feedback. The resume writing workshop, also held at CWU’s administrative offices, was facilitated by the volunteer group and provided students with helpful tips and advice for developing their own resume.

The exercises and workshop were followed by a networking luncheon, catered at the WTW workshop space and hosted by the corporate volunteers for the WTW students and staff members. This provided students a more social environment to practice their networking skills and connect further with a dissimilar group of professionals, individuals they may otherwise not have had the opportunity to interact with, thereby potentially expanding their network of weak ties that could offer leverage. Over lunch, a less formal atmosphere and one more conducive to socializing, volunteers and students got to know each other better. This type of activity, a result of relationships cultivated and organized by the agency's IA department, are purposively sought after by the organization to strengthen their own relationship with corporate partners and designed to expose students to professionals who can lend their advice and share their professional experiences with low-income women seeking to enter, or re-enter, the labor market. These activities have the potential for formation of weak ties that can offer leverage for WTW
students as they pursue their career aspirations. Future studies designed over a greater period of time should consider exploring to what extent and with what degree of success such weak cross-class ties are actually activated. Also, studies should explore which factors contribute to or inhibit cross-class weak tie activation and mobilization of social capital.

A second example of drawing on organizational ties to benefit participants is similar to the first. It is the organizational practice of inviting influential people in high status positions from the organization’s network to attend program activities. For example, the organization’s board members and others are invited to attend and participate in program events, such as opening ceremonies or graduations. This practice provides rare opportunities for well-connected and resource rich board members and other well-positioned individuals to attend program activities and interact with students. During an interview with Rosie, a WTW graduate who recently shared her inspirational personal journey through the WTW program in a speech at her graduation ceremony, she shared how after the ceremony she was approached by one of the invited CWU board members. The brief interaction between Rosie and the board member had the potential to open up a job opportunity for her. Rosie explained:

“...After [the graduation] when [the board member] came up to me and said ‘Oh, excuse me, I’d like to introduce myself to you’ and I’m like, okay, who’s this? And she [introduced herself] and said ‘I just wanted to tell you I really appreciated your speech, it really touched me and I ...’ and that’s when she shared about [her connection to a local employer] ... and she said ‘I’m still connected to [a large local employer] ... I’m going to see about getting you a job.’”

Rosie shared how they exchanged contact information. She was excited about the opportunity and planned to follow up with the board member to pursue it further. While the organization’s action of extending an invitation to board members and other influential
stakeholders is primarily a way for the organization to cultivate and strengthen ties within its own network, this practice also – perhaps unintentionally – exposes board members and well-positioned and resourced others to students, bridging two dissimilar groups and opening up an opportunity for connections to be made such as an introduction that could open the door to a job for a participant, as in Rosie’s case. These two examples, coordinating corporate volunteer days and inviting influential well-positioned individuals to attend program events, illustrate how an organization can actively reach out and engage their own cultivated network of ties and serve as a bridging tie, one that creates opportunities for low-income women and potentially leveraging ties to be formed.

Creating a culture of connection

The third example of institution-driven brokerage occurring throughout the organization is found through the creation of a ‘culture of connection’ infused throughout the institution. Creating connections is seen as an integral component to the social mobility work the organization is engaged in. As CEO Elisabeth Babcock explained,

“We are connectors, our work is to connect. To connect low-income families to information, tools, and resources. It’s to provide them the decision making frameworks in which they can optimize those tools and resources. It’s to connect them to all the service delivery systems at the optimal time for them to most take advantage of it and to help them build out their own systems of leverage. And so, our work is connecting work. It is inherently connecting work … we think about it as fundamental”

Elisabeth contends that “connecting” is “fundamental” to the organization’s work with low-income families, as such, staff members of the organization are, as she described, “connectors”. Beyond the direct services provided to program participants, I have found evidence of a ‘culture of connection’ encouraged among staff members throughout organization.
From my participant observations, review of program and agency documentation, and through my own experience as a CWU staff member, I discovered three examples in which the organization fosters a ‘culture of connection’. The first two examples, “Mentoring Mondays” and shadowing opportunities, involve ways the organization actively tries to broker ties and resources amongst staff members and others in an effort to broaden staff members’ professional network and skills. Staff members’ participation in such activities is encouraged throughout the organization. The last example - reinforcement - illustrates the ways in which successful connections brokered by staff members for program participants are widely praised and celebrated, which in effect supports the practice of and encourages further brokering activities.

The first example is “Mentoring Mondays”. Several times throughout the year, the organization’s CEO, Elisabeth Babcock, makes herself available on Monday afternoons to any CWU staff member interested in discussing their professional development and wanting to seek advice from the organization’s leader. All staff members are invited via email to attend this small group discussion. As one email invitation to employees read, “It’s your chance to bring questions and concerns about career development, continuing education, and balancing work and family life.” The meetings are typically held around a large conference table in the living room of the organization’s largest programming site – a congregate family shelter located in Brighton. This activity provides employees from all strata of the organization direct access to the CEO and her resources – mostly career advice and in some cases, her own network. By participating in “Mentoring Mondays”, employees can activate their tie to the CEO and tap into their own social capital.

The second example is shadowing opportunities, which are promoted and encouraged by the agency’s human resources department at monthly agency wide staff meetings and via email.
These are occasions for staff members to connect with their colleagues in other departments for career exploration and professional networking within the organization. Shadowing can be a day long experience, or part of the day. The shadowing opportunities are framed as professional development for staff members to learn about other roles within the organization they might like to advance into. Shadowing is also framed by the human resources department as a way to learn what colleagues are doing in their program to strengthen professional relationships internally.

These two agency-wide activities, “Mentoring Mondays” and shadowing, benefit not only individual staff members, but also program participants they directly serve, as staff members develop their own skills to model social network development and tie cultivation. In fact, during one observation of a WTW team meeting, a staff member suggested that Kara, a WTW student interested in pursuing a career in business administration, set up a shadowing day with CWU’s assistant to the executive director. This WTW staff member transferred the skills she witnessed and learned through the organization’s modeling and is applying it to create opportunities and grow connections for WTW students.

While these efforts help staff members develop their own professional networks with their CWU colleagues, there is a recognized need within the organization to do more in promoting direct service staff members’ understanding of how social networks develop and how that can transfer to their work with program participants. COO Charles Carter shared:

“We need to think more explicitly (as staff and as an organization) about how we access and identify networks ... there are a number of staff who ... have networks and don’t realize it in the same terms, and so they don’t know that they already have the knowledge already there to utilize, ... and they don’t practice doing this either ... tapping into the process of their social network. ‘What is my social network’, ‘How did it get to be that way’, ‘What did I do’, ‘What did other people do’, and ‘How do I translate that to use for when I’m trying to describe to a participant how they do that same thing’.”
Charles expressed an interest in further developing direct service staff members’ skills and knowledge around the process of social network development and the value of social capital. It is anticipated that an organizational investment in building staff capacity in this realm will result in their increased capacity to coach participants in their network development. In doing so, a ‘culture of connection’ is fostered throughout the organization.

Lastly, well-made connections with successful outcomes are reinforced and widely praised, as described in the opening passage. The value CWU places on building social networks and the importance of brokering ties has also been touted and praised externally through the organization’s quarterly newsletter, Thrive! The Fall 2012 edition of the newsletter highlighted the theme of social networks by showcasing two women, a board member and a program participant, and how they came to be a part of the organization. As recounted in the Fall 2012 edition of Thrive!, a former board member and donor was, “invited to the annual luncheon … during lunch, she was introduced to the organization’s executive director and, in an impressive example of fast-track social networking, soon was invited to join the board”. This story highlights the board member’s own networking skills and how it resulted in an invitation to join a nonprofit’s board of directors. A second story in the newsletter featured a participant of the Career Family Opportunity (CFO) program:

“When asked at the time what motivated her to apply to CFO, she said, ‘I wanted to meet other single mothers in the development and network with them. Hopefully, they would have similar goals to mine.’… Understanding the value of in-person support, [participant] and fellow CFO participant … started … a group for parents of children with special needs. Currently, [she] is negotiating for a meeting location, which she found – not surprisingly – through networking, for the six member group.”

In highlighting the value and benefits of social networks through these two stories, CWU
reinforces a ‘culture of connection’ not only amongst staff members and program participants, but also with their broader external network of readers via the wide newsletter distribution.

b. **Programmatic Brokerage**

Through my interviews with staff members and participants, observations, and my own professional knowledge of the activities occurring within CWU, I uncovered two types of brokerage that occurred within the organization’s programming – meaning specific program models, approaches, and activities: 1) brokerage that creates connections amongst similar peers; and 2) brokerage that creates connections amongst dissimilar people. The section below outlines how these forms of brokerage occur both formally and informally.

**Creating connections amongst peers**

“I think the [peer group program] design, just having other [program participants] there and learning from them and their experiences and getting resources for them – it’s nice to hear from somebody who is a peer rather than someone who is an authority…. Of people who are on the same page as you.” --- Karen, case manager

Through this research, I encountered examples of how CWU’s program design and activities – with varying levels of direct staff members’ involvement - helped to foster an environment in which relationships between low-income women formed and strengthened. CEO Elisabeth Babcock explained the organization’s objective for creating these peer to peer connections:

“We connect people to individuals like themselves who share their struggles, and share their aspirations … because we hear from our families all the time that if they want to move to another economic level, or another social/cultural/economic/educational sphere, that often times their own social networks are not reinforcing of that movement. So, we … connect women to other women who share some of their problems, struggles, day to day issues, and will be understanding of those issues. But also are similarly trying to
Elisabeth’s comments echo the desired outcomes shared by the social service providers I interviewed and presented in the previous chapter. They illustrate awareness by social service organizations serving low-income individuals that their existing networks can be limited in providing support of economic advancement. Therefore, there is an interest to connect low-income individuals to peers traveling a similar path, with shared aspirations, in order to provide encouragement and support to each other. Elizabeth’s observations that low-income women’s existing networks “are not reinforcing of that (upwardly mobile) movement” reflects the literature on downward leveling norms as presented by Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner (1993). The authors cite leveling pressures as one example of the negative aspects of social capital, in that the preservation of collective norms and solidarity of oppressed groups can serve to restrict individual actions to advance economically. In achieving economic mobility, successful individuals would undermine the solidarity of group members which has been formed out of shared adversity and oppression.

In part to counter downward leveling norms, program activities found within some of CWU’s program models broker peer connections. These activities primarily take the form of group meetings, organized throughout the organization by various program staff members for participants. Some group meetings are organized with the purpose to share helpful resources and information. In this way, the institution serves as a resource broker, the critical bridge between participants and resources that are channeled through the organization as Mario Luis Small documented in his work on childcare centers (Small 2006). For those who are socially isolated,
this may be the only pipeline of critical information. Other programs organize meetings centered on a skill-building activity, such as resume writing or college exploration. And some programs, like Karen’s peer group design referenced in the opening passage, organize meetings to purposefully foster helpful relationships among program participants.

Regardless of whether purposive brokerage is the primary purpose of these organized activities, the meetings physically bring participants together in one space, often serving as a place where ties could be formed with peers - either intentionally or unintentionally by program design. Such bonding ties, that is ties amongst similar others, can result in bonding social capital – a network of trusting relationships, cohesion, and reciprocity.

One example of how intentional brokerage occurs within the program as a result of a program activity can be found in one of the organization’s family shelter programs. The family shelter is a ‘scattered site’ model meaning that the organization rents apartment units throughout Boston used to temporarily shelter families. In this model, families experiencing homelessness are ‘scattered’ throughout Boston neighborhoods and often don’t know the other families served by the program unless the program brings them together. The CWU shelter program brings families together by organizing group meetings to update parents on new information and resources. While the primary purpose of the meetings is to share updates and not to overtly facilitate social connections amongst parents, staff members do try to find ways to purposefully broker ties amongst the mothers, often to help expand their network of ties that offer support. Joyce, a family shelter case manager explains how she actively tries to identify helpful connections and make introductions between parents in order to remove transportation barriers for those attending group meetings. She explained:

“... There are very few people who have their own cars, and there are some [who don’t]. Sometimes we can sort of help make that
The program’s regular group meetings, which bring together parents experiencing homelessness, have a primary purpose of resource sharing, having the agency serve as a resourcebroker. However, a secondary function is facilitating interaction between parents. By helping parents ‘make that connection’ to other parents at the group meetings, staff members are actively trying to broaden parents’ social networks for support, such as favors to get by day to day like a ride home in the example shared by Joyce. Joyce continued on to share how in these group meetings program staff members also try to build support amongst parents by encouraging them to share similar experiences or information amongst each other:

"...[W]e do try to ... point out that someone else might know something that might be helpful to [them], or went through the same thing. Or they will talk to each other. They’ll interrupt [the presentation] and talk to each other, and you let them take the ball because they can explain it."

The group meeting element of the program design plays a critical role in brokering individual ties simply by creating the space and opportunity to physically bring parents together on a regular basis. Ties are further fostered within group meetings by staff members’ intervention as they find ways to identify and connect parents. This actor-driven brokerage, that is, the process by which individuals within the organization broker ties to other individuals, organizations, or resources, will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

While many CWU programs, like the above example, may not design programming with the primary purpose of intentionally brokering ties amongst peers, others do. One example is a multi-year program aimed to support low-income women achieve economic independence. According to the program model as outlined in the organization’s documents, “a smaller subset
of [participants] formed around shared goals, interests, and schedules … meet monthly to form a social support network” (Dobruck Lowe 2012). An intentional part of the program design is to incorporate a peer group component into the model to encourage the development of women’s social network and their social support. In an interview, CEO Elisabeth Babcock shared how the peer networks developed in this long-term program have served a dual role of not only providing support, but also leverage:

“You have women who are together to achieve similar goals of economic independence who start out in a very similar place of subsidy dependent housing - and they come together. They not only support each other in trying to obtain goals, but they also provide leverage to obtain those goals ... by introducing the women to the resources they have used to accomplish what they’ve done. For example, one [participant] who worked at [a medical center] and had ... [received] a promotion there and had ingratiated herself with the HR department there – so, they were having a career fair and she [said other program participants] ‘Hey, we’re going to have an open house for careers at [work] and if you want to come to the open house, I could introduce you to the HR person’ ... And so, the women who are peers, they serve as social support, reinforcement ‘you go girl’ kind of peers ... but they also serve in a social leveraging role because as they begin to bridge into other new worlds, they pull their fellow compatriots along with them.”

The idea that low-income peers could serve as a source of leverage is counter to the notion that low SES individuals themselves have no or limited access to resources and information to ‘get ahead’ that they could then pass along to peers. Because of their current socio-economic positions, the quality of jobs, in terms of income, that students could pass along to their job-seeking peers is likely to be low – jobs that are unable to help them become economically mobile (Huffman and Torres 2002). However, in this multi-year program, as low-income women are making traction in their own economic advancement, they are sharing resources and offering to serve as a bridge for their peers to be able to access the same
opportunities. I was curious as to how this happens; given Susan Smith’s (2007) findings that poor black job holders are reluctant to assist job-seekers for fear that their workplace behavior will jeopardize their reputation and tenuous employment. I inquired what Elisabeth thought attributed to women’s ability and interest in helping their peers. She responded that it was in part due to trust built over time and partly due to a culture shift in norms:

“It also becomes culturally routinized so that they see it happening all around them ... I think it becomes a cultural norm of the new cultural group. And that by shifting the social networks to these new networks, you shift the cultural norms, you shift the expected behavior, and what is perceived as being ‘the right thing to do’.”

In this multi-year program model with a high level of group interaction, women develop a trust in one another, and develop a “new network” in which the norm and expectation is one of sharing resources among peers that will lift each other up as they themselves advance. In this way, low-income women participating in this program are replacing downward leveling norms found within their previous social networks, with a new cultural norm of resource sharing and encouragement to economically advance. This reflects the principle of bounded solidarity, which Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) note grows out of shared adversities faced by a class of people, can “lead to the observance of norms of mutual support, appropriable by individuals as a resource in their own pursuits” (p. 1325). While Portes and Sensenbrenner argue that this source of social capital can serve as a negative force, imposing downward social norms within an oppressed group, likewise, it can likewise serve as a positive force in reinforcement and encouragement of economic mobility among group members, as observed in CWU’s multi-year program.

The WTW program, the primary focus of this research, is another example of a program model designed to intentionally broker ties amongst peers. WTW is a cohort based model in
which students begin the program at the same time and graduate in a commencement ceremony together at the end of twelve weeks. Students spend six hours a day, five days a week together in a classroom setting over this twelve-week period. This intense level of interface and interaction among students and program staff members contributes to the development of social ties. As Rosie, a WTW student, shared during her interview:

“I built other relationships with people just through the class work and hearing some of their interests and areas where they wanted to work. And then, some people, because of their personalities are just more verbal and vocal in carrying on a conversation, so you tend to get to know those people better. ... It was just nice to begin to see people feel like, okay, we are building relationships here and I can feel comfortable talking”

Rosie’s experience of ‘building relationships’ over time with her classmates as they began to share their interests and aspirations supports Wellman and Wortley’s (1990) findings that interactions and relations within groups such as the WTW cohort group, are positively associated with companionship, meaning discussing ideas, doing things together and participating together in an organization.

The cohort model design has been shown to influence the dynamics of the classroom experience for WTW students. In 2011, the program briefly restructured the cohort model to a “cohort and drop-in hybrid-model”, which allowed some students not able to or interested in registering for the full twelve-week program to attend selected workshops. Those students who chose to attend portions of the program dropped in for some class offerings, but did not complete the entirety of the WTW curriculum. While this restructuring allowed the program to be open and available to students who otherwise would not be able to commit to the intensive twelve-week program, the hybrid-model proved to be unsuccessful as staff members noticed the group dynamic was negatively impacted. WTW staff members shared in a weekly team meeting and in
individual conversations that within the hybrid-model they felt that there was evident lack of cohesiveness and harmony among those students committed to the entire twelve-week cohort model and the ‘drop in’ students. Staff members’ observed lack of cohesion among students is further reinforced by Denise, a WTW student in the cohort who, during an interview, reflected on her interactions with students in the hybrid-model, as she shared why some relationships didn't form:

“… There was, some of the women who weren’t in our original group who came in the afternoon, some of them were a little standoffish. Then, when they got to meet you it was a little bit better, but it never got to like a bond thing like we did with the other women.”

Denise felt she never created a ‘bond’ between the ‘drop in’ students, like she was able to form with her cohort classmates. Staff members attributed this dynamic to the introduction of the new hybrid structure where not all students moved through the program together. They didn’t all benefit from the intense level of time and personal interactions. As a result, during the next WTW program cycle, staff members decided to return to an exclusive cohort based model to purposefully create an environment to foster and develop positive relations and peer support among the students. This decision indicates that staff members are attentive and responsive to how the WTW program design impacts relationship development and students’ experiences. In the next chapter, I share data and my analysis of the students’ perspective as to which aspects of the program model influenced the development of social ties among students.

While the program duration may be an unintentional form of brokerage, in that program duration is determined primarily by the amount of curriculum content to be covered, during this frequent and intensive amount of time together, the program purposively conducts exercises and activities that encourage students to get to know each other, share goals, and develop skills.
together. The workshops are designed to be highly interactive and engaging. In my conversations with Brenda, the program supervisor, she explained that students are encouraged to share, discuss, and apply lessons learned. In doing so, the learning environment creates an opportunity for students to get to know each other and connect with one another, sometimes with a high degree of emotional intensity conducive to the formation of strong ties (Granovetter 1973).

For example, there is a group exercise, the “rock exercise” facilitated by the WTW case manager and program supervisor which is paired with a structured discussion on students’ hopes, dreams, and obstacles to overcome. During the “rock exercise”, students sat in a circle and were each given rocks to symbolize their challenges. One by one, students shared the challenges they’ve faced in attaining their goals. As they named their challenge, they placed their rock into a bag passed around the room. After everyone shared challenges, the bag is re-circulated, however this time the rocks represent dreams and goals. As students removed a rock from the bag, they stated their goals aloud. Brenda explained that she and her WTW colleagues strategically wait for the right time to introduce this activity - when they feel the group of women is ready to openly share personal goals and struggles to ensure the activity is impactful. During an interview with WTW student, Patricia, she explained the impact the ‘rock’ exercise had on her:

“... It was a turning point when we had the LifeSkills class one day with [Brenda]. It was like a group forum where we all talked about the issues that were holding us back, and we had a bag of rocks and put rocks into it. It got so emotional, to the point where we all like --- I just felt like a new person after that.”

These activities, which are strategically designed for the group to share their desires and barriers with each other, exposed students to the interests of and struggles faced by their peers, with whom they often discover shared commonalities and natural points of connection. Structuring this activity with a high level of emotional intensity and intimacy, as described by
Patricia, is an example of how within the program, activities contribute to and promote tie formation among the women in this program. Working to foster support, in this role, Brenda and her WTW colleagues are essentially acting as fictive “kinkeepers”, meaning they serve as ‘bonding agents’ for students by facilitating activities and exercises that promote a sense of solidarity and ‘sense of continuity’ among this group of fictive kin, that is, social ties that are not related through ancestry or marriage (Rosenthal 1985; Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Additionally, as with CWU’s multi-year program discussed previously, bringing students together around shared goals exposes them to a network of like others traveling a similar path, setting the stage to form ties that can offer support.

Similarly, Julita, a case manager in a CWU family shelter program, shared her observation of how resource sharing amongst parent that happens organically within group meetings creates the potential for tie formation and social support through motivation:

“I’ve seen so many times that one participant will say ‘oh, I heard that this place is taking applications, they’re hiring’ or ‘I heard about this program’. Its huge, as far as resources and just motivating each other. Because we’ve had people come in and say, ‘I’ve saved up this much money and I’m about to do this or that’ and its inspiring because a lot of them are very discouraged – it’s hard to save when you’re living off of what they are living off of … Its sharing resources, its accountability, sharing struggles, and we bring resources, but unofficially it always ends up that someone else, one of the participants has something to share too. ”

However, beyond a network of support providing encouragement and motivation, Julita’s observation suggests that a network of peers with similar aspirations may also serve as a catalyst to help motivate each other to get ahead by sharing the resources and paths they found to be successful to advance. Similar to the observations shared earlier by CEO Elisabeth Babcock, Julita’s observations reinforce the emerging evidence that a network of low-income peers with
similar aspirations of economic mobility in an environment where resource sharing to help others get ahead is the group norm, may evolve to become a source of both support and leverage. This question of whether low-income individuals can serve as a network that provides both support and leverage is further explored in Chapter Six.

Doris, a case manager in another CWU program with a peer group component, shared her thoughts on the benefits of such groups that bring together people with shared goals:

“Having a focus ... they do have all those things in common.... they have that common goal ... I [see the peer group model] more as support for them so they have support for each other and they learn from each other. Emotional support, experience, you know ‘I’ve been going through this and you’re going through this, let’s talk let me tell you what agency can help you, what resources can help you’.”

Doris knows that information, resources, and support don’t just flow from the program to the participants it serves, but that these resources are found within the network of participants and because of the properties of networks and social capital, flows between participants themselves. Program staff members, such as Doris and Brenda, recognize the need for and benefit of these shared experiences and support and structure program model accordingly. Doris’ colleague Karen added:

“I think that’s one of the things that people come to us for, is to look for these connections because they don’t have them. And also most of the connections that we make for them are in some way trying to get them to self-sufficiency, so that’s the ultimate goal...We have a lot of people whose families don’t support them and aren’t really supportive of their educational journey so they aren’t around a lot of people who are doing the same thing as them but then they come to the ... program and everybody is doing the same thing. So they wouldn’t really have either of those supports.”

As Karen explained, some of the program participants, particularly those with a limited
or draining network, purposively sought these ties within the organization or program. Karen’s comments regarding the limited support network of the women in her program and their actively seeking ties within the program reflects Small’s (2006) discussion on neighborhood institutions as often times the only source of resources for the urban poor – in this case, that resource comes in the form of support found in newly created social ties among peers in the program.

Structuring a program model and creating activities that form and cultivate a network of bonding ties can provide a web of motivation, inspiration, and perhaps even a flow of resources that will move participants closer to their goals. This is reinforced during interviews with women. For example, Tanya, a WTW student shared:

“We all had the same intentions. We’re not here to make a joke out of it or not get what we need. We’re here for a reason so let’s get what we need to get out of it. ... I like the fact that we all participate in class, we all participate in it. It’s not just the same one or two people each and every time. I like that. It shows you that everybody was like, “I’m here and I’m actually doing it, like listening and taking in what I need to take.”

The program’s activities provided the space for Tanya and her classmates with the “same intentions” to learn together. The women were focused; they were, as Tanya stated, “not here to make a joke out of it” and come together around shared goals and intentions of getting ahead in their education and career paths.

One example of an activity within the WTW program that is intentionally designed to help students identify and join around their commonalities is the cohort naming exercise. As students move through the twelve week WTW career development program, they begin to see themselves as a cohesive unit with a common goal: program graduation in the short term and ultimately economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their family in the long term. Kelly, a WTW student living in one of CWU’s homeless shelters with her two young children put it best,
“We all have something in common. You know? We all want better lives. We’re all here for the same reason.” This shared experience is represented in a cohort naming exercise. Each semester students are tasked with collectively creating a name for their cohort, one that reflects the attributes that best describe their group and their shared goals. In our conversations, WTW staff members shared how they strategically wait until the right moment to introduce this exercise - they want to ensure the process is a powerful one for the students. During this activity, the group comes together to identify a class name that best represents the group as a whole - they identify the qualities that bond them together. More often than not, based on past cohort names which include “Women Unlimited”, “Women on the Rise”, and “Ladies Determined to Achieve”, the characteristics they congeal around are gender and their shared desire, determination, and potential to advance toward their goals.

For the WTW program in particular, there is a gendered aspect to the formation of supportive ties. As reflected in the program name, (Woman to Woman) WTW is a female-focused program specifically designed to address the needs of women living in poverty. Patricia, a WTW student shared how coming together with other women in particular was an important factor for her in building relationships:

"Their story is almost like mine, similar walks of life. White, Black, Haitian. Their stories are still the same. It’s like women. I’m very into women helping women because if we don’t help each other, who’s gonna? It’s like something about these women that I just connect with you know? ... You’re coming together with a bunch of women who are like going through issues, like housing, you know. And they understand that. And the fact that you’re dealing with women too, you know?"

As Patricia shared, despite racial and ethnic differences, their similarities as women going through same ‘issues’ seemed to enhance her ability to ‘come together’ to help support and motivate her female classmates. If these women don’t support one another, Patricia questions
“who’s gonna?” This could be indicative of a feeling derived from experiencing a broader gender inequality, as reflected in the literature, in which women’s networks are less likely than men’s to provide access to opportunities to get ahead (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982; Moore 1990; Hanson and Pratt 1991; Elliott and Sims 2001). The WTW program’s deliberate strategy of exclusively serving women promotes an added layer of shared experience, safety, and understanding among female students.

While many of the examples provided above illustrate how program design and activities are structured in such a way as to intentionally foster relationships among the women, it is also important to note the value in allowing relationships to grow organically. A word of caution to not overly “social engineer” comes from Karen, a case manager in a multi-year self-sufficiency CWU program, who shared her experience witnessing how relationships tended to form more organically once program staff members lessened their involvement in trying to actively facilitate connections:

“I think that we tried to force it at the beginning of the program, it had to just come organically. I think just time really, people got to know each other … it had to come up by them, just being comfortable and getting to know each other … I still feel like it just had to take that time. I don’t think we really did anything to push it. Even at the beginning we tried to meet with the groups individually… and that didn’t work. So we just kind of backed off I guess. And it just kind of worked itself out after time.”

Similarly, in reflecting on trying to create a connection between two family shelter guests, Joyce, a case manager in a CWU family shelter program noted:

“We are aware that you can over push those kinds of things. But you also can’t over engineer everything and sometimes people can be good influences on each other.”

While an organization can provide the physical space and programming intentionally designed to spark conversation and relations amongst participants, ties can form and strengthen
without direct programmatic intervention and sometimes require staff members to “back off” as in Karen’s experience. Program staff members, like Karen and Joyce, have begun to appreciate when to more actively play a role in brokering ties through activities and introductions, and when to step away and let relationships more organically develop between participants.

Karen’s colleague, Doris, also a case manager, shared how their program structure has a small peer group design component in which participants meet on a regular basis to discuss common goals. While initially the groups were organized and facilitated by staff members, were more formal in structure, and met at the program’s office spaces, over time staff involvement in the groups lessened. As program participants took the lead in organizing them, the groups became more social and less formal in nature. Staff members eventually stepped aside and groups started meeting in group members’ homes. Doris explained:

“The peer groups are becoming fun in a way that they are meeting, but they are meeting in a house. And they eat – somebody cooks and that makes everything sort of low key and relaxed and at the same time they are forming stronger relations between themselves.”

By physically moving the groups out of the program space, detaching from more structured program activities, and creating a less formal, more social aspect without staff involvement, group members were able to build ‘stronger relations’ amongst each other. Similar observations of organically created ties among program participants were shared by staff members in other programs throughout the organization. The vignette below is from a family shelter program case manager, Meredith, who shared how organic tie formation occurred amongst young parents residing in the organization’s large congregate shelter, which serves over fifty-five families:

“I’ve heard of things [guests] do on the weekends or at night, like movie night, and baking cookies. Or the knitting group ... They had a potluck – the guests organize that for the most part. That
was an idea that was started by one of the guests and then staff got involved to help ... I know they thought of the knitting group and movie night, the thought of it is to boost morale ... aside from morale boosting, too it was so that staff could interact with guests in a positive manner. So, it was a lot of staff explaining how to do ... From what I saw, people came down to learn together. It was kind of funny, I couldn't do it really – I never crocheted before. So, it did create an environment that was good for chit chat.”

Similar to Doris, Meredith described how an informal social gathering with limited staff involvement can provide the right environment to create ‘positive’ relationships for support among staff members and guests more organically. Intentionally creating peer connections isn’t without challenge, such as scheduling conflicts, lack of resources, lack of capacity among staff members, etc. Although staff members from throughout the organization expressed a desire to offer and host more activities to promote the creation of ties amongst peers, they candidly shared the challenges and resource limitations they face. Below are examples of challenges shared by two case managers, Joyce and Julita, working in the agency’s emergency family shelter programs:

“Part of it is very difficult scheduling things because people work or are in school or doing what they are supposed to be and don’t have that kind of time ... there is no money [in the program budget], it’s one of the pressures, it’s really difficult ... I wish I had the energy and creativity [to organize events], I’m just too burnt.” – Joyce

“Things come up and people get sick, or don’t want to go out in the weather, you know.” - Julita

Both Joyce and Julita like the idea of offering more opportunities to bring people together and foster supportive ties amongst the parents they serve. However, they also understand the practical limitations, such as not wanting to further strain parents’ schedules. Or, in Joyce’s case, she candidly acknowledged she is “too burnt” to have the energy and creativity to organize an
activity in addition to the crisis management and day to day counsel she provides families in need of some of life’s most essential needs, such as housing, food, and clothing.

Lastly, although peer groups are often created by staff members and programs with the intention of positive outcomes, sometimes peer groups can have a negative impact on both staff members and participants. Meredith, a family shelter case manager, shared her thoughts on bi-weekly community meetings organized by staff members which brought together a large group of shelter guests to share information and resources:

“[The groups] were terrible. They were a forum for complaints. You would just sit there and [guests] would go crazy – they would just start yelling ‘nothing ever gets done’, etc. Sometimes people would bring things up (resources), but it’s not a good situation. I’m assuming it’s still the same because some of my [participants] don’t want to go, they don’t want to hear that negativity ... that’s got to be a ton of people in one group. It’s too much to have a meaningful conversation or anything like that. ”

Meredith identified how the dynamics of such a large group presented a barrier in fostering a positive peer network or in creating an environment for meaningful exchange. As a result, the group took on a ‘negative’ tone, one that some families wanted to distance themselves from to avoid the ‘negativity’, and thereby isolating themselves from interacting with other families.

Creating connections amongst dissimilar people

“It’s part of the program design that [participants] really need to know what’s out there, to connect with others so they can start their career and employment path that is so important. And all the research that’s done now, with the economy, you really need to know somebody to get what you need for work ...” --- Doris, case manager

As Doris stated in the opening passage, it is part of her program design to help participants ‘know what’s out there’ in terms of employment opportunities and to ‘connect with
others’ to help unlock those opportunities. The ‘others’ Doris is referring to a network of people in higher socio-economic status positions such as employers, volunteer mentors, and other professionals within the organization’s network who Doris and her colleagues hope can propel participants forward in their career. In this way, CWU serves as a bridge, creating connections between low socio-economic program participants and dissimilar higher positioned people, such as hiring managers, volunteer mentors, board members, etc. CEO Elisabeth Babcock shared why she feels these relationships are important to broker:

“If you are going to bridge into a new environment, you need a hand from that environment that is basically holding yours and saying ‘welcome, come in, be a part of this new environment’. And so, we do that kind of connection to social leveraging networks in a variety of ways”

If formed and activated, these ‘weak’ ties can provide a source of social leverage for low-income women. Doris’s colleague, Karen, also a case manager, explained how her program introduces participants to new environments, “Even just the trainings we have … [participants] become exposed to agencies that they wouldn’t have known about.” Monthly trainings, in which speakers are invited to present, exposes and connects participants to new ‘weak’ ties. This activity is illustrative of Small’s (2006) discussion of how neighborhood institutions serve as resource brokers, acting as a channel to flow information and resources to otherwise disconnected people. Karen continued on, expanding upon Doris’s earlier point as she reflected on how the program model purposefully attempts to broker ties between people who otherwise would likely not connect:

“I think the whole point of the [program design] ... was to establish those networks and those connections ...with people outside of [the program] and [the organization] ... I think part of the [program goal] is this behavior change and part of that is providing people with the support that they don’t have and the resources that they didn’t have.”
As Doris and Karen explained, the program, through the activities within, is intentionally designed to serve as a link – or bridging tie - between program participants and new people and organizations. This is done in the attempt to open up a flow of resources between the two networks and unlock opportunities for program participants. As they plan and organize such activities, program staff members think carefully about who to invite into the program and, consequently into the lives of participants. Doris explained how she decided not to invite a particular facilitator into the program's peer group meeting after considering the group dynamics:

“This morning, when we talked about getting a facilitator for the meeting, I immediately thought about somebody and then I was like ‘no, no, no. I shouldn’t bring her here because it’s going to be too much drama and we don’t want that’. So, ... I have to think who is out there who is great, but it wouldn’t be great with this group.”

Doris is very intentional about inviting a “great” facilitator into the group – trying to maximize benefit to participants while minimizing or eliminating potentially negative and situations that may cause distraction. Doris wanted this activity to be successful in bringing resources to the group of women, so plays a more active and strategic role in selecting the right person to introduce to the group, armed with her knowledge of the group dynamics and the facilitator’s skills and experience. In doing so, she was very thoughtful about the agency’s role as a resource broker, wanting to ensure it is a successful conduit of information and resources to low-income women.

WTW mentoring component

Similarly, the WTW program takes an active role in strategically trying to broker ties for students and people located in higher socio-economic status positions. They do so by pairing up
students and volunteers in a formal mentoring relationship. As mentioned in Chapter Three, in my role as director of research and evaluation for CWU, I oversaw the mentoring component of the WTW program. In this role, I actively recruited women representing a variety of professions and career fields, educational backgrounds, and life experiences to volunteer as mentors to students. Women interested in volunteering as a mentor completed an application and match form for me to assess whether they would be an appropriate fit for the mentoring role. The form solicits information such as previous mentoring experience, mentoring interest, skills/traits/resources able to offer students, professional and academic experience and interests, and availability. I conducted phone interviews with prospective mentors to explain the program and significance of the mentoring relationship. Further, mentors were provided a guidebook\(^\text{17}\) to orient them to the mentoring process and program. The guidebook explains that:

“A mentor is a trusted guide, advisor, teacher or trusted counselor who supports her mentee. In other words, a mentor is someone who helps another person to achieve something that is important to them. In the Woman to Woman program, mentors assist mentees in achieving their goals, provide support and encouragement, share experiences and helpful strategies and share opportunities.”

The guidebook specifically instructs mentors to share strategies and opportunities to help students get ahead and advance in their careers. Further, it instructs mentors on what is expected of them, including:

“establish a trusting relationship with mentee from which you both can benefit; share your knowledge, expertise, advice, and growth experiences with the mentee especially as it pertains to her education and career goals or personal interests; support your mentee in achieving her goals …”

Before they are paired up, mentors and students attend separate orientations that familiarize them with the dynamics and expectations of the mentor/mentee relationship. During

\(^\text{17}\) CWU, Woman to Woman Mentoring Guidebook, 2011
the orientation process, which I facilitated along with my WTW colleagues, mentors were explained the valuable role they could play by bridging students to new social networks to which they otherwise would not have access. Mentors’ appreciation and understanding of this role was evidenced by Sandra, a volunteer mentor who later reflected on why she introduced her mentee, WTW student Julia, to a colleague for a career opportunity. Sandra stated she;

“...thought it would be helpful for [Julia] to chat with [my colleague] so that she can get experience building and expanding her social-professional network.”

This affirms that Sandra understood that a key aspect of the WTW mentoring relationship is to serve as a bridging tie between Julia and people within Sandra’s network, and perhaps opening up new career opportunities. Similarly, WTW students are oriented to what it means to have a mentor and what they can expect from the relationship. During an orientation, students participated in an exercise referred to as, “Build a Mentor”, where they discussed the qualities they seek in a mentor and began to identify the resources, skills, and advice a mentor could offer that may help them toward their career or educational goals. One at a time, students approached a white board to draw a representation of one identified characteristic. For example, a student drew a large heart to represent her desire to have a mentor who is caring. Another drew a hand to represent someone who would give her an ‘extra push’ to achieve her goals. The picture (Figure 3 below) is one WTW cohort’s illustration depicting the characteristics they would like to have in a mentor.
The discussion generated in the workshop after each woman had a chance to visually depict the characteristic they would like to see in a mentor, resulted in the following explanation of the collectively created mentor picture. It includes; a brain, open mind, guidance, ‘extra push’, ‘someone to believe in me’, the ability to help dream and envision a better future, and caring heart.

During the workshop, some women expressed how this was their first experience having this type of relationship, particularly with someone who was unfamiliar and dissimilar to them. Walking through the dynamics of a mentor relationship was critical in starting to set expectations. Some of the concerns that women expressed during the workshop centered on the instrumental dynamic of the relationship (i.e. one in which they enter to get something out of), and not knowing whether they would ‘connect’ with a stranger who they anticipated may not have had similar life experiences. Margaret, an outgoing WTW student shared her initial reaction to the idea of being paired with a mentor, “I was kind of nervous for it because it was a person
that I didn’t know. Was I going to like them?” Even though Margaret has a very outgoing personality, she was nervous about meeting and having to work closely with a stranger. Similarly, during an interview after the program finished, Leah, one of the younger more outgoing women in the program who struggled finding employment, reflected on how she felt about being paired up with a mentor:

“The mentors however, um, I was kind of skeptical about the whole mentor from [the start] just because I can be a cool person, I’m an open book, I’m very fun, I like people, but when it comes to sharing my personal stuff with strangers, I don’t like that. I like to keep it neutral. I feel like I need to protect. I don’t like to talk about stuff about me.”

Leah revealed in her interview the concerns and skepticism some of her classmates also expressed during the workshop, before they were matched with a mentor. What would it feel like to share personal goals and struggles with a stranger? Leah felt guarded about the idea of opening up to a stranger to share her life experiences and goals – “I feel like I need to protect”.

The theme discussed earlier in this chapter, of finding the right balance between letting ties form more naturally or organically versus having the program design and staff members actively play a role in fostering tie formation, arises again. In the same conversation with Leah, she followed up with some advice for the program on what could have been done differently to result in a successful tie formation:

“If you want my opinion, I think the next time you want to do a mentor for a group, instead of signing people up with a mentor, just have all the ladies and all the mentors and have everyone have questionnaires that they can answer and see who can answer the same. Have them all read out loud so everyone can get to know each other at once and see who attracts who and who interacts with who more instead of automatically pairing them up. Basically, let the girls and the mentors pair themselves up.”

Leah highlighted the need for organizations to seek the right balance between overly
trying to socially engineer a tie – in this case by artificially pairing up the mentor and student without involving either - and letting ties develop more organically by involving both parties in the match as Leah suggested - i.e., having the “girls and the mentors pair themselves up”.

The volunteer mentors and students were introduced to each other at a group luncheon. They were encouraged by program staff members and me to exchange contact information and meet up in person, connect via email and/or phone. Through these interactions, mentors offered career and education advice, guidance, and support to students who are striving to become professionals, but who may face significant challenges in their lives. They continued to come together as a group at luncheons once a month with other volunteers and students. During these meetings, mentors facilitated workshops on resume writing and interviewing techniques, shared their own experiences overcoming personal and professional challenges, offered internship opportunities to students, shared leads on job openings and scholarships, and arranged job interviews for students. Luncheon workshop themes with mentors presenting to the group included, “Facing Challenges and Defying the Odds”, ”SMART Goal Updates and Next Steps in Your Mentoring Relationship”, and “Accessing Careers in the Health Insurance Field”. Sonya, a WTW student shared her thoughts on the workshops offered:

“I liked when you guys had the guest speakers, like, I almost cried. Some of their stories were like, wow, from the first panel (theme was ‘Overcoming Challenges’). I was interested in the whole time they were talking. I was like wow. Its inspiring to see that like, anything is possible.”

As Sonya shared, she was inspired by hearing the life experiences presented by volunteer mentors. Although they are now located in high status positions, those who presented at the ‘Overcoming Challenges’ workshop that Sonya attended shared how they struggled with poverty, being a single parent, learning disabilities, and experiencing homelessness.
Communicating these experiences to the group helped students find places to relate to other women who, upon first glance, may have seemed to have lived carefree lives. Seeing their struggles, which were not all that different from those of students, helped Sonya to realize and proclaim that “anything is possible”. Meeting successful women who have been able to move past their personal and professional challenges and overcome obstacles provided Sonya, and perhaps her classmates, a role model they may not currently have in their existing network.

After participating in the WTW program's career exploration classes and mock interview exercises, Rosie, a WTW student, shared what she gained from attending a volunteer mentor led panel workshop entitled, “You’re Hired! Advice, Tips, and Lessons Learned from Hiring Managers”. She stated:

“The last set of panelists you had we thought that was the best ... [the panelists] could tell us right away the things that really jump out and look good [on resumes] and just based on what they said I can go back and do a little more tweaking to my resume. It was really helpful, so you never know what information is going to come out that is relevant to you that you’re going to find new value and hold onto it and use.”

The programmatic activity of having mentors present and lead workshops provided students social support through encouragement and social leverage through advice and professional guidance offered from a set of women they may not have otherwise encountered.

Team meetings as a place to strategize brokering

The mentoring component is just one way in which the program design intentionally brokered ties for students. Another key aspect of the program structure is the weekly team meetings in which staff members review each student’s goals, their progress and any challenges they faced. I asked the program director if I could attend weekly WTW team meetings to quietly observe the discussions, she agreed. In my participant observations of team meetings, I witnessed
the group of WTW staff engage in conversations to brainstorm ways in which they could be helpful in supporting each student in pursuit of her goals. Most times, ideas generated in these brainstorming conversations resulted in concrete connections staff members could make on behalf of students. One example occurred during the team’s weekly case review of Mona, an unemployed single mother with a solid work history and strong interpersonal skills, but unable to find her next job. Mona’s goal was to find employment in the human services field. During the case review, staff members collectively expressed confidence that Mona would be employed soon given her skills and work history. The group began to discuss what employment opportunities were available to share with her. After learning more about Mona’s career interests as presented by the staff member working closely with her on her employment goal, the program director thought of a job opening she learned of through her professional network at a local youth organization that matched Mona’s interests and previous work experience. The program director forwarded the job opening to her WTW colleagues to pass along to Mona. As a result, Mona applied for the position, had a phone interview, which eventually progressed to an in person interview, and ultimately was offered and accepted the position.

Weekly team meetings are structured in such a way as to generate ideas and brainstorm points where connections can be brokered as well as which resources are available for participants. This practice is not unique to the WTW program. Doris, a colleague in a multi-year self-sufficiency program at CWU shared how their team meetings - which sometimes include the organization’s CEO - also generated valuable connections for participants:

“[The CEO] comes once a month to meet with us and we talk about successes and challenges that [participants] have and she also has resources. She will say ‘why don’t you connect the [participant] to this person’ or ‘I’m going to see if I can get somebody to meet with this person’.”
Within regular staff meetings, staff members conduct case reviews to intentionally generate conversations and ideas to help support participants reach their goals, and encourage various ways in which staff members can create connections and opportunities for participants. Therefore, while having an individual staff member connect a participant to job opportunity or introduce to people is considered actor-driven brokerage, to be discussed further in the next section, I contend that the structure of the program’s meetings is a form of institution-driven brokerage. It is an intentional part of the program’s design and process.

III. Actor-driven brokerage

Through participant observations, interviews, and focus groups with colleagues from various CWU programs, I witnessed and documented the various ways in which intentional actor-driven brokerage, that is, people purposively connecting people to other individuals, organizations or resources, occurs within the organization, with a particular focus on the WTW program. In this section, I examine 1) how staff members understand brokering as part of their role, 2) strategies used to broker ties; and 3) factors that influence the brokering process.

a. Brokering as part of staff members’ roles

By and large, CWU colleagues expressed a real appreciation for how program participants with limited social networks faced a deficit in resources and support as a result. Consequently, staff members’ actions and ability to broker ties to increase participants’ social network and the social capital within was valuable. Karen, a case manager working with low-income women participating in a multi-year program designed to help them achieve economic self-sufficiency, shared a conversation she had with a participant residing in a South Boston public housing development. Karen was surprised that this woman was limited in her knowledge
and awareness of resources in the surrounding area. Karen explained:

“She was looking to move somewhere and I just thought about Cambridge and she was like, ‘But do they have a Boys and Girls Club in Cambridge?’ … she didn’t even know that other places have very similar resources to access that they do here [in South Boston] …. people who had grown up here and maybe didn’t have a ton of work experiences and stuff like that, it’s harder to have a broader world view if you’ve never been exposed to it or experienced it.”

In her comments, Karen reflected on how this participant’s limited work experience coupled with her residential immobility – growing up living in one of the public housing developments in South Boston and having not lived elsewhere, has limited her exposure to a broader source of resources and institutions within the immediate surrounding communities.

Similarly, CEO Elisabeth Babcock shared how program staff members try to prepare participants for the process of connecting to new people and networks by first having them get “comfortable stretching beyond the norms of their current social boundaries”. She explained:

“… [M]any of the families we work with have lived, traveled, worked, survived, in a given geographic neighborhood that is very very small. … the experience of traveling both physically and metaphorically to a new environment – and to find that as something positive – is a great great sort of leveraging into new social spheres and leveraging networks. Feeling more comfortable with it, and feeling like maybe on the other side of these walls, these barriers, there is something there for you to. It isn’t just for the other guys, that its your world as well”

Elisabeth attributed this limited ability to navigate beyond their neighborhood as a deficiency in the brain’s executive functioning abilities, caused by the trauma of living with the stressors of poverty (Babcock 2014). Both Karen’s and Elisabeth’s assessment of the limited geographic circle within which low-income families operate and how it severs them from an awareness of resources beyond their neighborhood reflects what has been found in the literature: that urban residents of neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and social isolation
are cut off from social ties and networks that could provide much needed social capital (Harrington 1962; Wilson 1987; Wacquant and Wilson 1989; Massey and Denton 1993). While many urban poor may have strong social ties, comprised of similar others, their networks tend to be insular – and therefore not likely to expose them to new sources of information and resources (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Stack 1974; Newman 1999; Menjivar 2000; Smith 2007; Venkatesh 2009; Dominguez 2011).

Within the WTW program, it was evident through interviews and observations that staff members understood that an aspect of their role was to help facilitate new relationships for students; by providing opportunities to meet others or, as one WTW staff member, Laura, explained, by teaching soft skills to develop ‘successful’ relationships. During an interview Laura shared that she sees part of her role at CWU as, “teaching [students] how to form relationships to be successful … to teach empowerment and support”. As Laura understands it, her role entails helping students develop the confidence and social skills to establish social ties with the intention to generate positive outcomes.

While Laura highlighted the need to “teach” relational skills, it was also apparent that this type of skill building is placed into action by actively brokering ties for students. To this end, staff members were very intentional in their approach as observed in the WTW team’s weekly case review meetings. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the team’s weekly meetings were an example of how the WTW program structure, which incorporated individual case reviews at team meetings, is a form of institution-driven brokerage. However, in examining ways in which actor-driven brokerage occurs within the organization, I turn to the individual staff members’ actions within these meetings, and their individual actions as follow up to the discussions and brainstorming within, as an example.
The WTW team met weekly as a group to review participant cases. Sitting around a table in a small conference room, this case review process involved each staff member responsible for presenting on a group of students’ goals, their progression and any barriers they faced. During the case presentation portion of the meeting, colleagues would chime in to add to the case review, embellishing it with their observations or interactions with the student so the team could compile a full assessment of that student from multiple perspectives as they moved through the program. After hearing each case presented, I observed colleagues engage in a brainstorming session facilitated by the program director to collectively identify resources and/or strategies to support a student in progressing toward her goals. Often, resources identified by staff members were in the form of introductions or connections that staff members or volunteer mentors could make for students. For example, after a case review presenting on Tammy, a WTW participant whose goal was to own her own floral company, the program director asked that an email request be sent out to the group of volunteer mentors to inquire whether they, or anyone within their network, was willing to provide Tammy with an informational interview or an apprenticeship in her identified career field. An email was sent to the network of volunteer mentors and resulted in a response from one mentor willing to make an introduction between Tammy and a local florist. While the structure of the WTW program’s weekly team meeting is a form of institution-driven brokerage in that identifying resources through student case reviews is built into the design of the program’s weekly meetings, the action on the part of the mentor to make an introduction between Tammy and a florist is an example of actor-driven brokerage – one that was triggered by the program director reaching into the organization’s network of volunteers on behalf of the student to generate opportunities and resources to help advance her goals.

Beyond the borders of the WTW program, colleagues from across the organization work
in collaboration with each other by engaging in actor-driven brokerage. I work in the Research and Innovation Department within CWU. At one point during this study, I received information about a $1,000 scholarship opportunity provided by the South Shore Women's Business Network awarded to women ages 35 or older embarking on a career transition. Aware of the WTW program goals of enrolling in higher education and/or gaining employment, and knowing several of the WTW students would be eligible for the scholarship given the knowledge I gained through participant observation of team meetings for this research, I forwarded the scholarship information to the WTW program supervisor, who then encouraged three eligible students to apply. This action resulted in three students submitting applications for the scholarship and all three becoming finalists. Two students were ultimately awarded the scholarship, helping them advance their post-secondary educational goals. According to a follow up conversation with the WTW program supervisor, I learned that one student planned to apply her scholarship toward her master's degree in early childhood education and the other planned to put her scholarship toward her associate's degree and professional certificate. This is just one example that illustrates the broader collective workings amongst CWU staff members to share relevant key resources and opportunities with colleagues and students – effectively creating a web of brokerage which occurs at the individual actor-level.

One of the scholarship recipients told a WTW staff member that she intends to give 10% of the grant she was awarded back to the scholarship fund to help other students in the future. This reciprocal act may help to rebalance the relationship between recipient and donor. Reciprocity is discussed further in the next section as a factor influencing actor-driven brokerage. As a result of the interactions WTW students and staff members had with the scholarship fund committee, Brenda, the program supervisor, was recruited to serve on the scholarship fund’s
Board of Directors - growing her own professional network and ultimately that of the organization.

Through interviews with colleagues working in the family shelter programming, I learned of more ways in which staff members actively try to make connections between participants for support. One case manager, Joyce, shared how she advised her team members to make an introduction between two shelter guests – so that one mother could help support the other in accessing resources by using her own experiences to motivate and encourage her. Joyce explained:

“Today I had supervision with one of the case managers, and she was really struggling with how frustrated she felt about trying to get this woman to take advantage of some [domestic violence] resources because it was really effecting her depression and ... was kind of spinning her wheels. She was really not thinking very clearly and she had a lot of decisions to make. Well, ‘why don’t you see if this one other guest who kind of jumped right on the referral and is just so glad she is in counseling and faced it and got help – maybe this person could talk to her’, not just the case manager.”

Joyce, an experienced social worker, was aware of the benefit a connection to another woman with similar experiences could yield for the woman experiencing domestic violence. Joyce’s suggestion for staff members to connect the two shelter guests – one who is “spinning her wheels” and one who went through a similar experience and ‘is just so glad’ she sought out services – could provide the encouragement needed to help this guest seek out and engage in helpful support. However, Joyce was also mindful of the potential for a tie to become emotionally or financially draining to occur when brokering ties amongst shelter guests:

“If guests become really good friends and something, one of them becomes involved in a situation with an abusive boyfriend, or some kind of financial thing, it kind of pulls ... recently, there was a friendship between guests and she went out of the country and didn’t tell anybody and had her friend watch her kids for a couple
of days, which put her in jeopardy (of losing shelter).”

Joyce knew that while at times supportive ties among women living in shelter can be a source of much needed help – babysitting, lending money when needed, emotional support, etc - relationships can sometimes, as Joyce stated, ‘kind of pulls’ and present a drain on already limited resources (Stack 1974; Menijivar 2000; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Curley 2009). Much like how social service providers interviewed in Chapter Four reflected on the complex nature of social capital, Joyce also recognized that the trust and reciprocity she and others may try to foster for women for positive outcomes, can also work against them – it can serve as a negative aspect of social capital (Portes 1998).

b. Strategies used to broker ties

This section highlights three strategies used for actor-driven brokerage: 1) cultivation of staff members’ professional networks, 2) helping women identify ties within their existing network, and 3) coaching women on how to develop their network and activate the social capital within.

**Cultivation of staff members’ professional networks**

“In my role as an advocate [for over 20 years] ... I have a lot of connections with advocates in the field. I know a lot about the ...laws ... I know what agencies are there that help.... So, because I have that previous knowledge, I think I’m able to connect the [participants] here to those resources.” – Doris, case manager

Such opportunities for staff members to broker ties for participants would be limited if staff members themselves or the organization had a limited network. During interviews, some of my colleagues – particularly those further along in their career - shared how they actively cultivate and maintain their own and the agency’s ties works as a strategy to better connect
program participants with employers, social service providers, health care professionals, volunteer mentors, and others to expressly unlock resources and opportunities for program participants.

An experienced colleague, Joyce, a social worker in the organization’s family shelter program, shared during an interview:

“I guess one of the things that I kind of define myself, is that I’m always looking for people out there, whether its [welfare] contacts or whatever the arena is that I know will go the extra mile in their job. So I’m able to say [to a participant] ‘if you go and spend six hours at [the welfare office] getting nowhere, here is someone you can ask for that you have to respect that other people are probably telling and saying the same thing because this person does go above and beyond’.

Joyce is able to broker connections between her participants and her professional contacts as a way to ease participants’ often difficult experience in navigating the complex and bureaucratic welfare system. Joyce demonstrated an appreciation of the value of such connections for participants. She explained:

“How discouraging and depressing it can be when you’re frustrated and [participants] give up or lose whatever motivation you’ve helped them with or they internally have. So, I think it helps to keep things on track overall if you can facilitate some of these difficult situations and make connections with people who are helpful.”

When brokering a tie, Joyce coached participants on how to interact with her ties, essentially asking them to “respect” that her contact may be stretched thin because she is called on frequently by others --- perhaps Joyce’s way of protecting her tie by preemptively preparing participants for what to expect:

“A lot of it is sort of a coaching thing too. Please respect that because this person is so good that they are probably really busy. That your frustration is real, but please don’t take it out on them
because you want them in your corner. I’m always kind of aware that these are skills that will help them to advocate for their kids at school – they have to respect that the person on the other end, because they are so good are probably really stretched. Appreciate that. I do really protect those good people in a way. ... I’ve had situations where the [participant] has completely exploded in anger, totally understandable. But really inappropriate and unfair. And I didn’t hear back from this one person that I could always count on. And I thought oh no, I lost this [relationship], but I sent her an email and gave her a little background about why this person was so difficult and disrespectful and their usual way of doing things isn’t whatever, and please don’t let this disrupt us because I really respect you and count on you and if ever cross that line where the expectation is ever higher than you can possible handle just tell me and I’ll totally get it ... we didn’t even talk about it, we just got right back on track. Maybe I was just imagining but the fact that she was always so responsive and then there was a lag that made me a little nervous, that she was quite upset. It’s well worth the work though because you really need those people, or you just waste so much time and so much frustration.”

While Joyce brokers ties by connecting participants to her professional contacts within state agencies for assistance, in order to protect her own professional relationships, Joyce is careful in whom she chooses to connect. This is reflective of Sandra Smith’s (2005) findings on how individual-level reputation – both of the job contact and the job seeker - can influence job seekers ability to activate their social capital in terms of job leads. Similar to Smith’s findings, Joyce is concerned that her own reputation with her contact will be damaged by the behaviors and actions of the program participants she refers. To mediate this, she carefully prepares them for the interaction to ensure not only the participant will get the help and information she needs, but also so that Joyce can maintain her good reputation in order to continue to serve as a pipeline for other participants.

This goes both ways. In focus groups and interviews, staff members revealed how colleagues from external organizations will call upon them for favors or information. Being in a
position to reciprocate favors for external colleagues helps CWU staff members to further cultivate their own professional network. As Joyce explained:

“If [external colleagues] are frustrated with trying to reach case managers or they’re not sure who is assigned to a particular [participant]. … There are definitely people at [state agency] that call me first and know that I will pick up my phone – That’s part of the issue with my phone, I will pick it up. It’s hard to break that.”

Joyce’s colleagues at the state agency know that Joyce will always be there to ‘pick up’ her phone and assist a colleague in need. As a result, state agency staff members call on Joyce often – and in return, Joyce can activate her social capital by calling on her colleagues at state agencies when she needs something for a program participant. Meredith, a case manager, shared her experiences with reciprocity:

“[At] Greater Boston Legal Services, there is this one particular lawyer who kept getting all of my referrals for some reason, and so she and I talked a lot at one point. So, know if I have any sort of general welfare questions, I just call her and ask her and she gets back to me ... and she’s also asked things of me like – they’re trying to file some sort of [lawsuit]. She wanted more information about my experience dealing with different organizations like DTA, things like that because she needed to, wanted to legally do something because the Dudley DTA is a mess and so she’s asking me about my experience. She’s using what I said to help her as well.”

While some staff members have had positive results in cultivating their professional networks, others are at the beginning stages of their careers and are learning to build a network, while others have struggled. During a focus group, a group of new case managers from the organization's family shelter program shared how they create their own “personal lists of providers” to refer participants. Their lists develop as contacts are shared and swapped among colleagues, as Julita, one of the case managers explains, "we get [contacts] from each other and the lists are passed down from the coordinators and other case managers and we add to our list."
Her colleague, Meredith, jumped in to share more on how this process works:

"We’ve all generated our own lists. So, it’s not like I’m aware of all that’s on [my colleague Lucy’s list]… I’ve never seen [Lucy’s] list before, and Lillian has never seen my list before. If I had an issue that I’d never encountered before, then I might be like ‘Hey [Lucy], have you ever come in contact …’ or if I have any sort of housing issue, and I feel like I need assistance, I would always go to [Lucy]."

In this way, staff members who are new to the field and either don’t yet have professional contacts or have not yet developed their own expertise with a subject matter, inherit their colleagues contacts and resources and are able to begin creating and developing their own ‘personal list’ from which they can begin to cultivate their own professional networks.

Two case managers, Karen and Doris, share their experience during an interview of how difficult it has been for them to break into a tight knit Boston community that has experienced a lot of intergenerational poverty. This is a community in which the organization did not previously have a presence. Doris and Karen were part of a team launching a new program, and so attempted to connect with other professionals working within the community – wanting to get to know the resources and conduct outreach efforts. Karen stated, “[the community] was very insular, and granted, we didn’t really have an end product to sell. Self-sufficiency, right but what does that really mean? … [We felt] very kind of pushed away …” I asked for clarification, “Because you were new to the community?” Karen responded, “Yes, really more that than anything else.” The sentiment of isolation was echoed by her colleague Doris, “I still feel very disconnected because our participants’ needs and priorities are not the needs and priorities of the community. So there is also not a lot of connection there.”

Being disconnected from colleagues and resources within the community limits the opportunities to broker local ties for program participants. This illustrates one of the negative
consequences of social capital – the exclusion of outsiders (Portes and Landolt 2000). While strong ties found within insular networks facilitate ease of access to resources within the group, it excludes others. In this case, Karen and Doris, professionals who are new to the community, have experienced difficulty in creating a network of established colleagues already in their new community, which has prevented them from accessing resources and information flowing through this insular network for the women they serve.

Identifying existing ties

In my observations of staff members’ interactions with participants through individual case management sessions, and during WTW program workshops, I encountered a strategy that I contend is a variation of brokerage – one in which staff members help participants to identify existing ties and social capital. Intentional brokering occurred not just through creating connections to new social ties, but also through helping participants to identify existing social ties and re-activate the social capital within their network. This was a strategy also employed by Empowered Girls and Teens United as respondents shared in Chapter Three.

While most of the intentional brokering, I observed involved new social ties - whether connecting participants to peers, volunteer mentors, colleagues, employers, etc. - there were some situations, both actor-driven and institution-driven, in which staff members helped participants identify the social ties and social capital that already exists within their own network and encouraged or coached to activate them. Helping to identify and activate existing social capital has value since research has demonstrated that compared to their white male counterparts, women, blacks, and Latinos are less likely to mobilize their influential ties - such as hiring contacts - when looking for employment (Ensel 1979; Smith 2000). Although research indicates
that in the labor market, mobilizing influential ties doesn’t necessarily translate to increased earnings, the consequences of underutilizing ties should be further explored. Whether or not ties are utilized can become the difference between access to social capital and mobilization of social capital.

One strategy to identify existing ties can be found within the WTW program. One of the exercises introduced into program curriculum and facilitated by the WTW case manager, Donna, is an eco-mapping exercise. Eco-mapping is a technique found in the social work field in which a family’s informal and formal supports and conflict laden relationships are graphically depicted, often as a precursor to developing a case plan with a family (Hartman 1995). In the WTW program, the eco-mapping technique was used with students for the purpose of helping them identify both positive and negative people and resources in their lives. In conversations with Denise, she explained that in using the eco-map exercise, she would walk the class through creating a map of their supports, then engage in conversation around where gaps exist and where support is strong.

Another example shared by WTW program supervisor, Brenda, that illustrates this actor-driven process occurred when Jemma, a program alumna with a history of homelessness, substance abuse, and incarceration, approached Brenda after she was denied affordable subsidized housing from the local housing authority as a result of her previous criminal record. Jemma was encouraged by Brenda, an experienced drug counselor, to re-connect with her past social workers, counselors, and other professionals - ties within her existing social network who could speak to her character and provide written references that could be used to appeal the denial of subsidized housing. As a result of this encouragement and the process of brainstorming contacts Jemma could reach out to, she reconnected to past providers for character references.
Brenda shared Jemma’s surprise at the number of letters of support she received – especially from people she had lost touch with over the past ten years while she was in rehabilitation and incarceration. When Brenda later reflected on the situation with me, she noted that Jemma - like other women in the program - tended to focus on her mistakes. Focusing on the negative aspects may have initially prevented her from recognizing the social capital she already possessed within her network. The character reference letters, which spoke to Jemma’s determination and drive, helped her realize that she has many positive attributes, building her self-esteem, and helping her realize that social capital can be found and activated within her existing network.

Jemma was encouraged by Beth to use these character references to appeal the housing authority’s initial denial of subsidized housing. She did, and the housing authority reversed their decision and approved her for affordable housing. Jemma moved from homelessness to permanent affordable housing and has since enrolled in another CWU program, one that is a multi-year program to support economic independence through employment, asset development, and peer support. While this research didn’t explore the various reasons why Jemma may not have initially activated her ties, other research by Sandra Susan Smith (2005) has explored this issue among black urban poor with regard to job search activities and concluded that functional deficiencies of their job referral network, such as perceptions of pervasive untrustworthiness, contribute to joblessness. For Jemma, being able to mobilize the resources within her network meant the difference between homelessness and being stably housed.

Joyce, a case manager in one of CWU’s shelter programs, shared how she also used the strategy of helping parents identify individuals in their network, what their existing resources are, and how to mobilize them:

“I met with this couple last night ... they were really resistant about putting their baby into day care which is holding them back”
from doing things. ...But then, somehow something clicked with her, she was talking about a cousin – a day care center that her cousin sends her kids to – sometimes all you have to do is help them to think about who in their life has meet this challenge and that can be a little bit more convincing to think about that the other things I try to pull out of my hat. And that’s another thing, using their own social network to rethink their approach.”

There is more to learn here around why some low-income women may not readily identify the ties and resources they already have within their network. Understanding this inability or reluctance will help social service providers better support low-income women in being able to mobilize existing social capital in such a way that avoids unwanted consequences, such as placing an excessive burden of reciprocity on them or place trains on their existing ties.

Coaching to develop network and activate social capital

“I counsel people that they should do that same thing [looking for people who will go the extra mile in their job] wherever they are – keep on the lookout for the person that they will recognize will be a good advocate for them, or take them seriously or help them.” – Joyce, family shelter case manager

While cultivating a large, diverse social network is important, unless the social capital within it is activated and leveraged, the network itself has limited value. Here, mobilization of social capital, that is the active use of a social tie and its resources (Lin 2005), may be a key process in linking social capital and status attainment. To encourage students to continue to activate their new pool of resources after program completion, CWU staff members continually remind students to stay connected to each other and CWU staff members and volunteers for additional resources and support as they pursue their education and career goals. Sonya, a WTW graduate, shared during her interview:

"Oh gosh, they tell you all the time 'the doors are not closed, we're
Another WTW graduate, Leah, shared a similar feeling of being able to come back to the program and staff members if needed, "here I feel like I can always come back. I can use the computer, I can come back to talk if I’m bothered, I can come back for anything." The organization has formally developed ways to keep program alumni engaged. For example, current and former participants are invited to participate in CWU’s Voices Advocacy Council, an advocacy group comprised of current and former program participants that come together with CWU staff members to set policy priorities and formulate strategies for state and local advocacy efforts.

Additionally, program alumni are encouraged to maintain contact through continued services, invitations to speaking opportunities, and events. This invitation to continue their engagement with CWU is often echoed in speeches delivered by the Executive Director at program graduation ceremonies in which she welcomes graduates into the CWU ‘family’ and encourages them to return to the organization for additional services, events, and to share their successes with staff members and peers. It is not uncommon to find WTW alumni returning to CWU offices to meet with staff members for advice on their next goal, or to share that they just completed their first semester of college or landed a job, or to participate in advocacy efforts.

c. Factors that influence the brokering process

Three key factors emerged during the analysis of interviews, focus groups with CWU staff members, as well as participant observation that appear to influence the brokering process. They are reciprocity, reputation, and the presence of key connectors.
Reciprocity

Research has shown that while limited in their ability to provide leverage, social networks of the poor, through reciprocity and trust, can serve as a source of financial and emotional support in times of need (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Menjivar 2000; Venkatesh 2009). Being able to reciprocate helps to somewhat rebalance the relationship between the organization and program participants. And, as Dominguez and Watkins (2003) found, opportunities for low-income women, on their own terms, to reciprocate support provided by institutions is one factor in facilitating institutional support. Below, I detail the ways in which WTW students were given avenues to reciprocate institutional support within CWU.

Joining CWU’s advocacy efforts provided a way for WTW students to reciprocate. CWU partnered with the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) to provide students legal assistance with their complex student loan debt. If students entering the WTW program disclosed they were burdened with college debt, staff members referred them to an attorney from NCLC's college debt program. Here, an attorney helps students navigate their college debt, in many cases helping students negotiate manageable payment plans or help bring student debt out of default. During the time of this research, CWU and NCLC, along with various other partner organizations, were actively engaged in advocacy efforts to create a state commission to examine for-profit colleges. When a public hearing at the state house was scheduled, CWU and NCLC asked students if they would be willing to share their experiences with legislators to help put a face to the problem and supporting statistics. In an interview with Margaret, a WTW student, she shared how enthusiastic she was to have the opportunity to join in the advocacy efforts and testify at the state hearing:

“I told [the NCLC lawyer] when she interviewed me for my default (of student loans), she said, 'if we need you to advocate for this,
would you?’ And I said ‘hell yeah’.

Margaret then proceeded to show me a picture on her cell phone that captured her testifying at the Massachusetts State House. By her enthusiastic tone in retelling the story and her excitement in showing me the picture, it was evident to me that this was a proud moment for her. Margaret was able to join with CWU and NCLC in their advocacy efforts by sharing her experiences with a legislative panel, and perhaps influencing how the state regulates for-profit schools in the future. Margaret benefited from CWU’s partnership with NCLC, and when asked to help advocate, she jumped at the chance to give back. Institutions can provide opportunities for low-income women to contribute back and somewhat rebalance the relationship. Not only did the advocacy request allow Margaret to return assistance, it also provided her the opportunity to effect change as a self-propelling agent, “an efficacious individual who sees social mobility as a realistic goal and takes steps to materialize it” (Dominguez 2011:18).

Brenda, the WTW program supervisor, shared how Maria, an alumna from the WTW program accepted Brenda’s request to be a speaker at the next program graduation:

“[Maria] says she is finally on her way and is so grateful for all of the support she has received along the way. I have asked [Maria] to come and speak at graduation in December and she is thrilled and said she would love to.”

Maria was ‘grateful’ for the support of the WTW program. When given the opportunity to give back to CWU by participating in the graduation ceremony as an alumna speaker, Maria was ‘thrilled’ at the chance. This opportunity allows Maria to return assistance to the organization in a way that is comfortable to her. She is able to give back to the program and influence women by sharing her story with the next class of graduates.

The WTW program offers new and gently worn donated professional clothing to students
to help them build a career appropriate wardrobe. During an interview with another WTW student, Rosie, she reflected on her experiences with the donation closet and how the closet became a way not only for students to take clothing, but to also donate clothing:

"You guys (CWU) open your [clothing donation] closet to us… [a WTW student brought in] a whole bunch of stuff [to donate]. A lot of it was brand new, a lot of stuff she bought for her daughter that her daughter didn’t like and it was just sitting there and she couldn’t take it back. ...[Another student] came in a few weeks later [while] I was going through [the donation closet] ... I had a nice pair of comfortable khaki jeans, she was like, 'I brought these [in] especially for you because I don’t know anyone who’s taller than us'. And I was like ‘yes!’ I got home and tried them on and ... they’re so ... comfortable. I came back and had to tell her ... [W]hen people found that that closet is there, they said ‘Hey, I have this really nice dress or shoes that I bought and they hurt my feet’, I’m going to bring them and put them in the closet."

The clothing donation closet provided by the program created a place to give back, where students benefiting from services and donations were able to somewhat level their relationship with the organization and perhaps each other by bringing in clothing donations so that others can benefit.

The above examples illustrate how places for reciprocity within the organization were created in such a way that doesn’t place undue burden on women, while still providing an opportunity to give back in a way and manner they feel comfortable.

Reputation

As demonstrated in the literature, the reputation of the resource seeker can influence brokering both positively and negatively (Smith 2005). I witnessed the two influences of reputation in the WTW program as well. When a student developed a “good” reputation based on her actions, behavior in the classroom, and previous work history, as someone who would likely
have a positive outcome or make a good impression with a brokered tie, staff members and mentors seemed more likely to facilitate the connection. For example the “good” reputation developed by WTW student, Julia, helped open doors for her. Julia is an attractive, outgoing young mother with a strong previous work history who openly expressed interest in returning to the workforce. She was paired with a volunteer mentor, Sandra. In correspondence, Sandra shared that she introduced Julia to a colleague for a potential job opportunity, referencing Julia’s ability to persist, “with her charming personality.” Sandra shared how she approached her colleague, a professor at a local university, regarding Julia’s interest in pursuing employment at the university. She states, “I told him [Julia’s] very well-spoken and professional and has good (work) experience.” Sandra, a bridging tie, shared Julia’s resume with her colleague and arranged for them to meet to speak further through an informational interview. Julia had impressed her mentor as someone who was “charming”. This positive characteristic, combined with Julia’s consistent work history made Sandra comfortable in making the introduction to someone in her own network. Julia benefited from her good reputation and was connected to a potential employer.

Conversely, reputation can also prevent or hinder brokering efforts - for example, if a student develops a reputation for being unprofessional, or if a volunteer mentor fears that a student’s poor performance will tarnish her own reputation with colleagues. One example, Nancy, a volunteer mentor employed in the human resources department at a local financial institution arranged for a job interview for her mentee, Kim, a somewhat shy, recent immigrant from Rwanda, with previous accounting experience and a post-secondary degree but a limited social network in Boston. During a weekly team meeting, the group of staff members collectively agreed that this interview opportunity as a great way for Kim to “get her foot in the
door”. However, as Nancy shared with WTW staff members, Kim didn’t show up at the interview and didn’t call to cancel or explain her absence. Although Nancy was sympathetic to Kim’s situation, she expressed that the missed interview strained her own relationship with her colleagues and as a result, Nancy is reluctant to advocate for another interview to be arranged on the Kim’s behalf. Kim’s action of missing an interview without calling is seen by Nancy to be indicative of her future behavior, thereby negatively affecting her reputation. As a result, Kim will no longer be able to activate her tie with Nancy, a human resource professional and hiring contact, the most influential of personal contacts in the job search (Smith 2000). Further, the situation potentially had a negative impact on Nancy’s reputation among her own colleagues, a reputation she is trying to manage and protect by not advocating on Kim’s behalf to reschedule the interview on behalf of Kim.

Although Kim reported missing the interview because she was unable to find the office, during a weekly team meeting I observed WTW staff members speculate whether Kim missed the interview because she did not seem really “engaged” in her job search, or lacked soft skills, or wondered whether perhaps there was a cultural difference in how Kim approached the job market. Program staff members recognized that Kim’s education and previous work experience should position her well for jobs within the financial field, yet her limited professional network and soft skills present a major barrier in her ability to access the labor market. After the missed interview, WTW program staff members realized they needed to help Kim better prepare for job opportunities before they could connect her to interviews or expect Nancy and other mentors to arrange for interviews for her. During a weekly team meeting, the group discussed a new strategy to practice mock interviews with Kim before making new introductions to potential employers. By taking a new approach to the situation, staff members are able to protect and
preserve their own – and others - ties for future participants that go through the WTW program.

This example supports Sandra Smith’s findings that the reputation of the participant is an individual level factor that influences brokering efforts (Smith 2005; Smith 2007). The mentor and program staff members are being strategic with who and how they brokers ties for this student moving forward, employing strategies to preserve and maintain their own ties and reputation with colleagues (Smith 2005; Smith 2007). Future research should explore the potential ramifications of organizational brokerage, particularly the aspect of power dynamics and what it may mean to have people such as staff members and volunteer mentors determine whether a student’s reputation, which is subjective, warrants brokering.

The presence of key connectors

“I think there are some case managers that are always thinking about what is out there. And others that, they’re just overwhelmed thinking about other things. We all have things that we just aren’t very good at or just don’t stress enough ... there are definitely case managers who are really good at intentionally [connecting participants to each other]. Like [my colleague] is really good at that ... and she’s also intentional. She knows that’s valuable, so she makes that happen quite often.”

- Joyce, family shelter case manager

While my observations of and interviews with my CWU colleagues and WTW program volunteer mentors demonstrated that they understand why brokering ties is important for successful outcomes, and see it as part of their role, the process of brokering was deployed differently across individuals. There was evidence of variation among people's comfort level and approaches to brokering ties for participants. For example, people like Joyce, who have been successful in developing their own professional networks, seem better positioned to serve as a bridging tie for others in that they have the experience of successfully developing a large and diverse professional network. These individuals I refer to as ‘key connectors’, people who are
skilled at cultivating ties within their own network and appear to intentionally broker many connections for others. These key connectors can be found among staff members, volunteer mentors, and WTW students and help maintain and influence the broader agency wide culture of intentional brokering.

There was one staff member in particular who stood out as an example of a key connector, Laura. Laura is a WTW case manager and teacher who has had a long career working in the human services and academic sectors. Through my interview with Laura and observations of her case management sessions with WTW students, it was evident that she moved through her own world purposively building relationships with people, often for the instrumental purpose of opening up resources for WTW students, and actively brokering ties between WTW students and colleagues within her own network. Laura shared that while her initial objective in forming these relationships with colleagues was instrumental, relationships evolved over time into friendships between her and the people she met. Laura’s experience reflects the notion that leveraging ties may also be supportive ties, a tie that can offer both leverage and support.

In interviews and in observations, Laura shared her approach to ‘networking’. In brokering ties for participants, Laura draws from her own life experience and the positive results she had in cultivating her own social ties as a nontraditional student who returned to college later in life. As a student, one strategy she had employed to maintain good grades and meet fellow students, was to bring together her classmates for study groups. In forming study groups with peer students, Laura explained that she improved her academic skills through the group’s collective learning process and ultimately gained friendships and peer support which provided encouragement through her college career. Laura brings her personal experience forming and maintaining ties into the WTW program. She uses the study group model to encourage WTW
participants and participants from other CWU programs to form small groups, as she explained:

“Study groups became successful relationships and successful outcomes... a perfect [model] to develop relationships ... [a] key dynamic for networking ... look around and find three students to join a group ... [it’s the] beginning of a tight reliable network that women don’t typically have yet ... [a way] to replicate the ‘good old boys’ network.”

Laura intentionally places students into small group settings and coaches them to begin to develop relationships. Laura sees the value of the ‘good old boys network’ as a closed network that creates career opportunities and social support for well-connected men, and wants to replicate these advantages for the women she advises and teaches at CWU.

Further, Laura actively expands her own professional network expressly to unlock resources and opportunities for participants. For example, during our interview Laura explained how she has developed and maintained professional relationships over the years, for the purpose of expanding resources for the people she serves. She shared that at a conference she attended in a previous role, she met a colleague who works for a national nonprofit organization that promotes college access for students of all ages and backgrounds. When Laura came to work at CWU, she purposively maintained the relationship knowing the resource would be useful to the participants at CWU. Laura explained that she, “pushed the door open” by continuing to stay in touch with her colleague via email and phone so that she could leverage her colleagues’ educational resources for CWU’s participants. Laura actively cultivated her own professional connections as a resource to pass along to the students she serves.

Likewise, evidence of “key connectors” was found among participants and volunteer mentors. As previously discussed, I consider Julia’s mentor Sandra to be an example of a key connector. Key connectors differ from others who broker in that they are skilled at cultivating ties within their own network and serve as a bridging tie by intentionally brokering a high
number of connections. It was Sandra who quickly responded to the request for connections to a florist for Tammy, Julia’s classmate. Also, Sandra passed along Julia’s resume to her colleague and set up an informational interview for her. On both occasions, Sandra actively tried to broker leverage ties for CWU students.

Examples of key connectors were also found within the WTW classroom. Several WTW students mentioned a fellow student, Patricia, as being someone who actively brokered ties. One of Patricia’s classmates, Margaret, shared:

“*Oh good lord, [Patricia]! The networker! You said you were looking for this thing and that thing and the other thing and boom! Oh boy, the next day you had a piece of paper on your computer! That woman was the networking queen. You said you needed an internship here and your piece of paper was right there!*”

Likewise, another classmate, Leah shared:

“*Yeah, like [Patricia] ..she’s awesome. Her uncle works at [state social service program] ...she gave me his information and we’ve been corresponding, but there’s no openings, no budgets, no nothing. But he said he’ll keep me in mind, he has my information.*"

And in her own words, Patricia reflected on her brokering activities:

“*[Social Worker] still sends me a lot of job [openings], so whoever I think needs it, I forward the jobs to them ... I also pass out [WTW program] flyers to ... the [housing] projects. ...I pass a bunch of flyers to people who are interested in the program, trying to explain the program. I think it’s a wonderful program for women who don’t know where they’re going, to give them the opportunity to dig into themselves to see what they want to do, whether its job training, school or computer training. The resources, the [staff], the networking, it’s really good here. ... A friend of mine told me years ago, when I worked at a career center, that a lot of jobs aren’t posted, it’s about who you know. So, if I can help somebody, I want to help somebody. That’s what I want to do.*”

The presence of these ‘key connectors’ begs the questions, *What if these key connectors*
were not part of the equation, would intentional brokerage within organizations look different? Or is intentional brokering so infused into the program and organizational structure that it will continue to occur? These questions were not examined within the scope of this research as the ‘key connectors’ were present throughout the project, however, it would further inform the field for future research to address. This aspect should be further explored: to what extent does individual, organizational culture, and program structure impact brokerage? Do they have equal influence on the outcomes of brokerage or is one type of brokerage more impactful – in terms of creating new ties - than another?

IV. Discussion

In this chapter, I sought to address the following set of research questions: What are the mechanisms by which a social service organization intentionally tries to broker ties for program participants? In other words, how do direct service staff members understand and operationalize the goal of social tie brokerage? How are program designs and organizational policies and practices structured in an effort to intentionally broker ties? What specific actions do staff members take in their efforts to broker ties for program participants? What are the underlying mechanisms that influence how brokerage occurs?

I found that purposeful brokerage activities occur within two different institutional settings, within the programmatic setting and throughout the broader organizational setting, which necessitates a new typology that expands upon Small’s concept of institution-driven brokerage. Susan Smith (2000) contends that, “the weak ties of low-status individuals are ineffective at bridging dissimilar actors and broadening opportunities because these ties are being mobilized from small, dense, homogenous networks that lack influential ties, networks that
likely inhibit access to people and groups offering new and different information”. This is consistent with Granovetter’s (1973) argument of unequal benefits from the use of weak ties, that for those of low socio-economic status, weak ties appear to only provide access to opportunities that are no better than they might have gotten through strong ties. Yet, my research seems to challenge this notion since it appears that the limitation that Smith notes is what organizationally brokered ties can help overcome. As seen throughout this case study thus far, the organization serves as a bridging tie between low socio-economic status participants and dissimilar actors (e.g. mentors, corporate partners, hiring managers, etc), in an attempt to supplement participants’ own small, dense, and homogeneous social networks.

I also found that for ties to form through purposeful organizational brokerage a balance must be struck between heavy program intervention and simply providing an environment for actors to develop relationships more organically. Another finding is the discovery of program strategies and activities centered around helping individuals activate social ties and mobilize their existing social capital. This suggests the need to expand the concept of brokerage to include social network mapping, coaching, and other similar activities designed to achieve this objective.

The final key finding is the influence of ‘key connectors’, that is, individuals who are skilled at cultivating ties within their own network and serve as a bridging tie by intentionally brokering a higher number of connections for others. While structures, systems, policies, and activities can be intentionally created by organizations and programs to institutionalize the brokering process for low-income women, the presence, influence, and impact of individual ‘key connectors’ may be just as valuable and critical to explore. To what extent is intentional brokerage institutionalized so that you don’t need the presence of ‘key connectors’ to broker ties? Is the organization only able to broker ties because of key connectors?
The next chapter explores to what extent intentional brokering activities and efforts within WTW and the organization as a whole were effective. Did the social networks of the WTW participants grow and diversify as a result of the brokering efforts? And if so, what made certain ties initially ‘stick’ and others not?
Chapter Six
“You can do it, I’m gonna do it, we’re gonna do it!”:
Evolving social networks

“...[Y]ou meet people or you know people who have a lot of enthusiasm, and make good connections [for] a [resident] but you’re not sure what the outcomes really end up being. ... I feel like I may make a good connection... and still not really quite know.”
–Joyce, Family Shelter Case Manager

I. Introduction

As Joyce laments in the opening passage above, while she attempts to “make good connections” for the mothers residing in one of CWU’s family shelter programs, she doesn’t always know whether or not her brokering efforts were successful. In other words, has her brokering resulted in a tie formation, ideally one that builds homeless mothers’ social capital by providing resources and/or support? While, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the WTW program and staff members intentionally broker ties for low-income women to create opportunities, support, and expand their resources, do the ties actually ‘stick’, that is, when an organization purposefully brokers ties, do women identify them as part of their social network?

The findings presented in the preceding two chapters demonstrate that social service organizations focused on education, economic empowerment and/or workforce development for low-income people do engage in intentional brokering and uncover the purposeful institution-driven and actor-driven brokering strategies employed by CWU, with a particular focus on the WTW program. This chapter extends the analysis to determine the short term impact of intentional brokering activities found within the WTW program. In this chapter, I seek to answer whether after program participation, intentional brokering has a noticeable impact on the size and composition of low-income women’s social networks. I also explore which factors lead women to identify some intentionally brokered ties as part of their network but not others. Further, I seek to uncover whether the intentional brokerage process has unintentional consequences.
To address these questions, I present the findings from name generator surveys administered to students at the beginning of the WTW program and during the last week of classes. The survey data capture the size and composition of students’ social network at two points in time to assess changes in social network and to determine whether students identify intentionally brokered ties as part of their social network post-program. Further, through analysis of pre- and post- survey data and interviews conducted with students within weeks after program graduation, I uncover why brokering efforts led to some ties initially forming while others did not. Finally, drawing on interviews with students, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the benefits and unintended consequences of an organizational strategy to intentionally broker ties to supplement low-income women’s social networks.

The key findings in this phase of the research are as follows. Analysis of the network surveys reveals that students’ network size and composition changed over the twelve weeks of the WTW program. The overall size of women’s social networks increased by 2.6 distinct people. This appears, in part, to be attributed to intentional brokering, as 35% of ties identified in the post-survey were comprised of CWU brokered ties, such as classmates, staff members, and mentors. Also, in comparison to the pre-survey, the post-survey data reveal that six more students were able to identify more than two ties in the career and small favors domains. Further, network composition diversified in terms of the educational attainment and employment status of ties, resulting in a less homophilous network – mean degree of network homophily along the these two variables decreased from 42% to 35%. Also, students’ overall mean network tie strength weakened 8.9% post-program, most notably in the ‘school’ domain – which experienced a 10.4% decrease in intensity of tie strength. Further, post-survey data reveal that some students identified professional ties (CWU staff members and other professionals) as strong ties.
The findings from the interviews I conducted with WTW graduates within weeks after graduation revealed why some of the intentional brokering strategies were effective, while others were not. Key factors found to influence whether intentional brokerage led to tie formation include: 1) the ability to relate; 2) helpfulness and competency; 3) confidentiality and trust; 4) opportunities to reciprocate; and 5) frequent contact.

Lastly, while CWU intends to broker ties for positive outcomes, I find that there were some unintended consequences that arose from purposive brokering. Specifically, students preferred relationships to evolve more organically in certain instances; the introduction of new people into the lives of low-income women may cause unanticipated drains on their time, energy, and emotions as they try to develop and cultivate the new relationships, some of which are not always absent from the negative dynamics found in other relationships, resulting in hurt feelings.

II. An evolving social network

Social networks are not static; they are ever evolving (Kossinet and Watts 2006) as we move through our social world, interacting with people and institutions to varying degrees and at different points in our lives. It is to be expected then, that the social networks of the WTW students also evolve and change over time. I contend that the way in which students’ social networks evolve, as they move through the WTW program, interacting with classmates, staff members, and others, will be influenced by the institution-driven and actor-driven intentional brokering efforts found within CWU. I contend that students’ network size will increase and the composition will diversify, with a diminishing degree of homophily in the domains of educational attainment and employment status.

To assess how students’ networks evolved, that is, whether changes occurred in their social network size and composition, I administered pre- and post-surveys to students enrolled in
two WTW classes: one cohort starting in January 2011, the ‘Winter/Spring’ cohort, and the other starting in April 2011, the ‘Spring/Summer’ cohort. I designed the survey, which can be found in Appendix I, using a name generator technique previously used in surveys assessing social networks (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1983; Lin, Fu, and Hsung 2001; Reingold et al. 2001; McDonald et al. 2009). The survey captured students’ cognitive social network, meaning the people students perceive as someone they could turn to in need, by asking them to list and describe up to five people they feel they could go to for assistance in each of the following domains: 1) career-related advice, guidance, and job leads; 2) school/training-related advice, guidance, and resources; 3) small favors such as borrowing money, child care, and transportation needs; and 4) emotional support and encouragement. For increased confidentiality, respondents could chose to list the full name, partial name, or initials of people in their social network. Ties were categorized using Xavier De Souza Briggs (1998) two key dimensions of social capital found within networks; social support and social leverage. Ties listed as offering small favors and emotional support were analyzed as ‘ties that offer support’ and ties listed as offering career advice and resources and educational advice and resources were analyzed as ‘ties that offer leverage’. Further, basic demographics (e.g. gender, race and ethnicity), employment status, occupation, educational attainment, tie strengths, and relationship, were requested for each name generated. These data were captured to determine whether the tie was a CWU brokered tie, to assess level of status homophily in terms of educational attainment and employment status, and to determine the mean tie strength of students’ networks.

Thirty-one students enrolled in the two WTW classes (Winter/Spring 2011 and Spring/Summer 2011) during the scope of this research. A distinct count of 25 students completed at least one survey (either pre- or post-) and a distinct 15 students completed both a
pre- and post- survey. To capture baseline data, pre-surveys were administered during the first week of classes. Twenty-three students, representing 74% of the total enrollment, completed baseline surveys. Student absence from class during survey administration was a factor in not being able to obtain a 100% response rate. Two students left the program within the first three days prior to the survey administration. Further, one student started the program three weeks after the program began, so was not included in the study. During the last week of classes, post-surveys were administered to students. Seventeen students, or 55% of total program enrollment, completed the post-survey, 15 of whom had also completed a baseline survey. Nine students left the WTW program prior to the last week of classes. These students were not administered a post-assessment since their average time in the program was 33 days and they did not complete the program or experience the full range of intentional brokering activities. Factoring in the nine students who did not complete the program, the response rate for post-surveys increases to 77%.

a. Changes in network size

The first aspect I examined was network size. What was the size of the 23 students’ networks when they first began the WTW program and, for those 15 students who completed both the pre- and post-surveys, did the size of their network change over the twelve weeks after participating in classes and workshops? If so, how?

Table 8 below displays the baseline data for all 23 pre-survey respondents (i.e. total) and, for the purposes of direct comparison, responses for the subset of 15 students (i.e. subset) who completed both pre- and post-surveys. Since the survey was designed as a name generator with an upper limit of five possible names or initials in each domain, the potential range for the distinct number of overall ties a student could identify is 0-20 overall, and 0-5 within each of the four domains: career, school, small favors, and emotional support.
# Table 8

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Social Ties Reported at Baseline</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong> (distinct individuals)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>Mean # of ties identified</td>
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<td>Range of ties listed</td>
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<td># of respondents with ≤ 2 ties</td>
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<tr>
<td># of respondents who identify 0 ties</td>
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Surprisingly, while the mean number of supportive ties in both the ‘small favors’ and ‘emotional support’ domains is the same (mean is 2.667) for the direct comparison subset and similar for the larger group (with a difference of only .217), within each domain there is a notable difference in the percentage of women who identify fewer than three people. As illustrated in Figure 4, 52% (n=12) of the total pre-survey respondents and 53% (n=8) of the direct comparison subset reported fewer than three people they could turn to for 'small favors' in comparison to 35% (n=8) and 33% (n=5) respectively for 'emotional support'. Using Briggs’

![Figure 4](chart.png)

**% of Respondents with ≤ 2 Supportive Ties at Baseline**

- Emotional Support: Subset 33%, Total 35%
- Small Favors: Subset 53%, Total 52%
(1998) key dimensions of social capital found within social networks, the ‘small favors’ and ‘emotional support’ domains are both indicators of supportive ties. Therefore, I anticipated similar results between the two domains. However, the difference may speak to the lack of material resources, such as money, a car ride, childcare, etc., available with which to reciprocate and share within low-income women’s network. This interpretation of the finding would support previous research that found that impoverished households that lack resources to reciprocate avoid or limit friendships to avoid incurring debt to the provider of assistance (Menijivar 2000; Wellman and Frank 2001) or to avoid financial drains - meaning the burdens that deplete one’s material resources often through unreciprocated requests others may place on them (Portes 1998; Dominguez and Watkins 2003).

Interviews conducted with students after graduation further explored their baseline network ties as reported in pre-surveys to get a better understanding of their networks and the extent of social capital within as they began the WTW program. During the interviews, students were asked to describe the people in their lives before starting the WTW program and their perceived support and resources or lack of found within their network. Students’ responses fell into three broad categories: 1) those that had ties that offered support but no or limited leverage, 2) those that had ties that offered support, no or limited leverage, and had ties that were draining, and lastly, 3) a network comprised of primarily draining ties that offered no or limited support or leverage.

The students who fell into the first category started the program with a network comprised of people they perceived they could turn to primarily for support and some leverage. For example, Rosie, a 51 year old American-Indian single mother with previous work experience and some college, explained:
“For the most part those people [extended family and previous co-workers] have been positive, helpful. Of course, my two sisters are probably the two that are more helpful and supportive all around as far as financially, you know, emotionally, you know. Just to be there. That I can count on.”

Rosie’s family and co-workers are ‘helpful’ to her and ‘positive’. As such, they comprise her support network. Rosie was not alone. Other students also shared how they have a network of friends and family they can rely on for support to get by day to day. Sonya is a 23-year-old multi-racial married mother of three children whose family is currently experiencing homelessness. Despite her current housing hardship, she explained how the people in her social network have encouraged her personal and professional goals and have provided resources to help her family get ahead:

“My mother-in-law and my husband are really like the two strong support systems I have right now... My mother-in-law helps, ‘cause she’s also a housing specialist and works for [a local social service organization], so she helps give us [housing] applications on time. She helps financially too if we need it because we have three kids, so sometimes things get a little crazy... they’re really happy I did this program. They’re really happy that I’m doing things and you know, they’re proud of me to see how much I’m growing – they said it to me already. Yes they did – my mother-in-law actually went and took me shopping and she was like, ‘this is ‘cause you graduated’. Then, my husband, he was so happy. He came [to the WTW graduation ceremony] clapping all loud (laughs) and he told me too, ‘I’m so happy for you, you’re doing your thing’, like, he was really happy.”

Sonya has a stable supportive network, comprised of her husband and mother-in-law, encouraging her to achieve her goals. Her mother-in-law also serves as a tie that offers leverage as she draws upon her professional knowledge and access to housing resources to help Sonya secure stable affordable housing – which will help Sonya’s family move out of shelter and ‘get ahead’.

Rosie and Sonya’s description of their networks during their interview reflect their survey
responses, mostly comprised of supportive ties who can serve as a ‘support system’ as Sonya describes. While seemingly rich in support, they have limited leverage. Rosie and Sonya’s experiences with a supportive and positive network with no or limited leverage network, tended to be in the minority. More commonly, while some women shared stories of having friends and family they could go to for small favors, like babysitting, they also revealed emotional and financial drains from people who are unsupportive of their goals to advance or who are financially burdensome. These women fall into the second category: those with ties that offer support, no or limited leverage, and have draining ties. For example, Tanya, a 26 year-old unmarried African-American mother shared how her network is a mixed bag of support and drain:

“(My friend) is positive and negative. Like, certain parts, like me succeeding in life, she’s a negative. You know, she’s supportive, she’ll do things if I needed her to, like babysit. I can get her to do stuff like that. ...’Cause she has no goals herself. And I have goals. And me just hanging out with her every day, it was like comfortable for both of us. But I wasn’t as comfortable with it as she is. ‘Cause she has no goals at all.”

Tanya’s friend, while someone she could turn to for small favors, such as babysitting, was also a drain on her advancement. Without goals of her own, Tanya’s friend became a negative force, potentially pulling down Tanya and her goals to get ahead. In this sense, Tanya’s experience is reflective of Portes (1998) critique of the negative aspects of social capital, that a common experience of adversity that cements group solidarity can serve to stifle individual success and ambition and contributes to a ‘downward leveling norm’.

In a study of formerly homeless and near homeless mothers, Robert Hawkins (2010) found that the social capital within mothers’ networks of friends and family was complex, that it “can be as hurtful as it is helpful” (p. 45). WTW student, Margaret, shared a similar complex mix
of supportive and draining people in her network. Margaret, a single mother of a pre-school child, was experiencing homelessness while she was a WTW student. While Margaret shared in her interview that she has contact with her family and her son’s father and his family – who she considers financially and emotionally demanding - she tends to keep to herself:

“Family members, pretty much they were there, but I’m pretty much a loner. And then I had my son’s father, he’s the drainer [financially and emotionally]. His whole family is.”

Before entering the WTW program, Margaret’s social network was a complex mix, comprised of family members who were “there” and her son’s father who was a “drainer”. Being ‘pretty much a loner’ may be Margaret’s strategy to avoid additional emotional and financial drains, similar to Dominguez and Watkins’ (2003) findings of low-income mothers limiting friendships for this very reason.

Still, falling into the last category is a smaller number of students who reported not having any people in their lives before starting WTW that they felt they could turn to in times of need. Although they have networks comprised mostly of family members, they explain that these ties aren’t sources of support or leverage and / or are purely draining ties. Patricia, a 46 year-old African-American single mother of a school aged child reflected on her family relationships:

"...me being the oldest and me being the strongest, there wasn’t that much support, they relied on me for support ... Financially, emotionally, it was like draining to me.”

In her family, Patricia is the one people rely on to cope, for emotional and financial support, without feeling she has someone she could go to herself when in need.

Another student, Kelly, a divorced White single mother of three young children, is currently experiencing homelessness and rebuilding her life after experiencing trauma and violence. She revealed in her interview how prior to coming to the WTW program, with the
exception of a health care professional, she felt socially isolated:

“Well, before here, the only positive person I had was my [therapist]. He was the only one I could go to and talk to and trust. I have a lot of family members, but ... a lot of them have the same past as I do, so they’re going through their own emotional stuff. So, each in our own different ways, so that takes a lot out of me ... A lot of them come to me for advice and to cry on my shoulder and stuff. So, that’s tiring. And I spent a lot of my life looking at all them instead of me. And then I didn’t do that until I got here, at Crittenton... I didn’t have a lot of positive people out there in the world. I was pretty much doing it alone... and that’s why I live in the shelter right now. Because I have been doing it alone, so it’s been difficult.”

Having no support among family or friends, Kelly turned to professionals. She is creating an institution-based support network to fill the gap, reflective of studies that have found that low-income women without strong or reliable networks turn to service providers and professionals to supplement their support networks (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Hawkins 2010). Further, despite having survived her own trauma and currently experiencing homelessness, Kelly’s family members who are experiencing similar situations lean on her for support, for a shoulder to cry on. Kelly, like Patricia, felt she has no family or friends she trusts who she can turn to in times of need. As Kelly shared, she feels alone, unable to look to others for help, “…and that’s why I live in the shelter right now”. In a time of crisis, faced with homelessness, her family members were not able, or willing, to be a resource for her. As a result, Kelly and her children are living in a family shelter. While Kelly didn’t speak about her history of seeking support from family members, studies have indicated that homeless families have often strained their network from previous over-reliance on these individuals (Rossi et al. 1987).

Next I sought to address the research questions: Did the size of students’ network change after completing the WTW program? If so, how and in which domains did changes occur? Post-surveys were administered to students during the last week of class. Below, Figure 5 illustrates a
comparison of the 15 women who completed both a pre- and post- survey. The mean number of overall ties women identified in the post-survey increased by an additional 2.6 individuals. A closer examination shows an increase of 1.6 people in the career domain; an increase of 0.9 people in the school domain; an increase of 1.1 people in the small favors domain; and an increase of 0.7 people in the emotional support domain.

At the time of the post-survey, more women were able to identify more than two people in each domain, as illustrated in Figure 6 below. Decreases in the number of women who identified two or less ties are most notable in the ‘career’ and ‘small favors’ domains, which both experienced a decrease of six women reporting less than two ties.
Lastly, post-survey results indicate that at the end of the WTW program all respondents could identify at least one person in each domain (see post-survey results in Appendix VII). This is an improvement from pre-surveys where there was at least one respondent who was unable to identify a person in each domain to go to for assistance (Table 8).

Next, I examined whether the increases found in the overall number of social ties and increases within each of the domains can be attributed to CWU’s efforts to intentionally broker ties. To begin to answer this question, I looked at responses to the survey question, “How do you know this person? For example, are they a friend, co-worker, family, classmate, neighbor, service provider, etc?” From these responses, I calculated the percentage of women’s social networks, post-program, that were comprised of CWU brokered ties. I identified CWU brokered ties as CWU staff members, WTW classmates, volunteer mentors, or any other professional identified as having been brokered through a direct connection to CWU. The analysis reveals that intentionally brokered ties accounted for 35% of students’ overall reported social networks during the last week of class.
Social leverage

A closer look at each domain shows where increases in social network size could be attributed to CWU brokered ties. To measure their leverage network, the survey asked respondents to list up to five people in each category they can go to for a) “career advice, guidance, job leads, etc.” and b) “school and/or training advice, guidance, resources, etc.” Post-survey results show that 52% of students’ career contacts were comprised of CWU-brokered connections such as staff members, volunteer mentors, or external service providers. Similarly, 57% of students’ school/training contacts post-program consisted of CWU-brokered connections.

While the findings are encouraging, it is likely that since the surveys were administered at the WTW program offices during the last week of class, students were primed to respond by listing WTW contacts and CWU brokered ties given their close proximity (in both time and space) to the program. Name generator surveys, like the one used in this study, tend to be biased to reflect stronger ties, that is, ties that are closer in terms of intensity of relationship, and ties that are within close geographic proximity (Campbell and Lee 1991). That being said, students continued to identify CWU brokered ties during the interviews held within a few weeks after graduation.

Interviews with students helped to better illuminate what the survey data revealed. After graduating from the WTW program, Sonya, the young wife and mother experiencing homelessness described above, identified WTW staff members as part of her social network. In fact, Sonya’s post-survey revealed that CWU brokered ties comprised 33% of her overall social network. During the interview, held two weeks after graduation, Sonya shared how she re-connected with program staff members after graduating from the WTW program to seek
assistance with her financial aid applications for college:

“I feel so much relief now that I [applied for student financial aid] and I know how much money I’m getting... That feels so good to me because ... I was so worried about the money part of school that I didn’t want to do it. But now I know I’m good so it’s like [snaps fingers]!”

In her post-survey, Sonya identified WTW staff members as people she believed she could go to for education advice and guidance. After graduating from the program, she successfully activated these ties, and the resources within. As a result of reaching out to the intentionally brokered ties in her network and mobilizing her social capital, Sonya received assistance from a WTW staff member in completing applications for student financial aid. Sonya now has an academic and financial plan for attending college next semester, advancing her closer toward her self-sufficiency goals.

Similarly, Kelly, a recent WTW graduate looking to enter the job market, identified WTW staff members as part of her network of people she can turn to for career advice and resources:

“[Brenda] introduced me to [a domestic violence organization]. So, I’m going to be calling them and try to volunteer there. And then there is a homeless shelter in Boston or Cambridge that I’m going to be volunteering for. So, then I’ll get my foot in the door. And [the domestic violence organization] sounds good. ... [Brenda] brought up [the volunteer position at a homeless shelter] and said that someone called her looking for people, and it’s administrative, so I’ll be doing that. Yeah, isn’t it awesome!? ”

WTW supervisor, Brenda, was able to serve as a conduit of information and resources coming into the organization, passing them along to students. She acted as a resource broker (Small 2006), channeling the organization’s resources, in this case an open volunteer position at a partner organization, to Kelly. In doing so, Brenda helped Kelly identify and connect to volunteer opportunities in her desired field to help her get her “foot in the door”, potentially
leading to a paid position and at the very least contributing to her resume. In her post-survey, Kelly identified Brenda as a contact that could provide leverage. She perceives Brenda as someone she can re-connect to, a social tie she can activate for career advice, even after the program has ended. Had Kelly not perceived Brenda as a social tie that she could activate for job contacts, she may not have sought her help, and wouldn’t have benefited from accessing the full range of resources moving through the organization.

Similarly, Tammy, a married African-American mother pursuing work in the field of business administration, also shared how she mobilized social capital found within newly formed intentionally brokered ties. Tammy was paired up with a volunteer mentor, Khloe, employed as an administrator in the human services department at a local hospital. During Tammy’s interview, when I asked her about her interactions with Khloe, she identified Khloe as someone she went to for career support:

"I think the last session I gave her my resume and she said she was going to make some corrections on how to make it better ... I’ll want a resume I know is typed nicely, so she’s going to make some corrections on that and give it to me at that last session. And also, ... I did my informational interview with her."

Tammy activated her cross-class tie with Khloe, reaching out to her for assistance with her resume development and interviewing skills. In doing so, Tammy benefited from Khloe’s expertise as a human resource professional. The WTW program’s mentoring component was intentionally designed to create connections between students and volunteers who could serve as a tie that could offer leverage, that is, volunteers who could offer career and educational advice and resources to help students get ahead. Ties that offer leverage, can also serve as a bridging tie or link to distant networks not yet accessed by students. In the case of the WTW program, some mentors provided a bridging tie between students and their network of colleagues. Some students
benefited from volunteer mentors ‘bridging’ as I discuss later, however, not all students were
able or willing to activate the tie in this manner, as in Tammy’s case. During the duration of the
program, Tammy benefitted from Khloe’s guidance, however, after I probed further to see
whether, after the program ended, Tammy would continue to see Khloe as someone she could go
to for career advice, Tammy hesitantly responded:

"I think if she were to contact me I wouldn’t ignore it and I would respond and ‘oh how are things going just wanted to know if you
need help with this or that’ you know, I wouldn’t reject that. I don’t think I would be pushing myself on her ... I probably would ask her if she would be open to that, I don’t want to be invasive. You know, because the program is over. I don’t know, that’s something that I’ll have to touch base with her about."

Tammy is worried about being perceived as too ‘invasive’, not wanting to ask too much of
Khloe after she graduates the program. In this situation, Khloe, as a human resource
administrator at a large local hospital, is positioned to be a bridging tie, one that could connect
Tammy to her network of colleagues and job opportunities. However, Tammy’s hesitancy to
mobilize this resource, not wanting to be “pushing” or “invasive” may ultimately work against
her. Perhaps Tammy doesn’t want to be a drain to Khloe, if she feels that she is unable to
reciprocate, as seen in Menijivar’s (2000) research, where she found that extremely
impoverished households who lack resources to reciprocate experience a drain in social capital
as such exchanges are highly irregular.

Earlier I discussed how social service providers expressed concern over whether people
are able to maintain ties after leaving the program or services. For example, CWU’s COO
Charles Carter noted that after leaving services, “[support networks] won’t be in place and the
gains that [participants have] worked so hard to make may be at risk if they don’t have the same
kinds of support in place.” For organizations that want to encourage women to continue to
activate their new social capital, it's important to communicate to participants that while these ties may weaken over time and the frequency of contact may diminish, it is helpful to keep the connection ‘warm’ and know that the resources can still be activated in the future - that the end of the program does not mean an end to a relationship or to the resources found within those ties. This message was not lost on Leah, another recent WTW graduate, who shared how she felt she had the “confidence” to re-activate ties after graduation. She explained:

“[CWU staff members] gave me the confidence to come back and ask for help. They are always here for me, not to give up, you know, keep coming. Every time I call [Laura] she’s available for me. Every time I call [Donna] she’s available for me. They always return my calls, they never just throw me away and stuff like that like other programs did. Like [Laura], she even visited the internship, where I did the internship. ... here I feel like I can always come back. I can use the computer, I can come back to talk if I’m bothered, I can come back for anything. There’s always someone here to listen.... So, this is the only place I got the computer, got the job search and got the support. I can always come back.”

Leah was encouraged by WTW staff members to return to the program and activate her ties. As a result, she feels confident doing so, whereas Tammy earlier expressed hesitation in reconnecting to her mentor post-program. Similar to findings from Dominguez and Watkins’ (2003) research on the networks of African-American and Latin-American low-income mothers and their utilization of social capital, that institution-based network, Leah may also find that her relationships with program staff members are “less stressful and burdensome in terms of reciprocity” (p. 129).

Given the career focus and long term self-sufficiency goals of the WTW program, I anticipated students would identify program staff members and volunteer mentors as people they felt they could go to for career and educational resources and advice, as ties that offer leverage. However, it was apparent in my conversations with students and in some of the post-survey
results, that by the end of the program they began to perceive each other as providing those resources as well. As recent graduate Rosie explained, at the end of the program, all the students in her graduating class shared their phone numbers and career interests with each other in a spreadsheet so they can serve as a source of job leads for each other:

“... [B]ecause we can start our own network and we can help each other. I said, if you know I’m in property management and you’re looking or you get a job and you hear or you have a friend or a family member, you tell me. If I know you’re looking to get into finance, like I even told [classmate, Gloria] go to some of the Sovereign [Banks], I knew for a while they were looking for people to come in. You get your foot in the door and you don’t know where your next job will be. ... now let's network, get everybody employment in six months and we can call them up and say listen, we’re all working.”

As students learned networking skills through program activities and formed ties with each other, they began to see each other as a potential source of career leads. Students identified that throughout the program, classmates have been a source of support and encouragement to each other, but now equipped with their networking skills and shared goal to ‘get ahead’, could they also provide leverage to each other by sharing resources that will help each other advance toward self-sufficiency? While students may perceive each other as resources for job leads, and may be inclined themselves to pass along job resources to job seekers when they are able to, perhaps as a way to, “partake in obligations of exchange that might serve them in the future” (Smith 2005:31), will students actually able to provide leverage to one another given their current socio-economic positions? And if not now, given their current positions, will they in the future lend assistance to their classmates if they are in the position to do so? If so, this would challenge Smith’s (2005) findings from her research with black urban poor job seekers and job contacts, which found that job contacts are reluctant to assist others in the job search due to certain interpersonal dynamics. Specifically, they tended to view the job search process as an
individual enterprise where there is success in perseverance, and were reluctant to assist for fear of tarnishing their own reputation at work or jeopardizing their tenuous employment. Furthermore, research has indicated that even if this group of women were willing to exchange job leads and resources amongst each other, because of their tenuous socioeconomic positions, the jobs to which they would have connections would likely be of low quality. In other words, they would have access to jobs that are generally low-paying, have few benefits, and may not offer opportunities for significant advancement (Huffman and Torres 2002).

Social support

A smaller portion of the increases to social network size, found in the two domains indicative of social support, ‘small favors’ and ‘emotional support’, can be attributed to women’s involvement in the WTW program as well. When asked in the social network survey to list up to five people respondents could go to, ‘if you need a favor such as borrowing money, someone to babysit, need a ride, pick up child from school, etc.” and “for emotional support, for example, someone you can talk with about your good and bad days, someone who is supportive, someone who encourages you, etc.”, the subgroup of 15 students identified CWU-brokered connections as 9% of their small favor contacts and 10% of their emotional support contacts post-program. The CWU connections identified in both these areas were primarily classmates and WTW staff members.

Interviews with students explored why some identified classmates and staff members as ties that offer support, while others did not, trying to understand why some intentionally brokered ties initially form while others don’t. Margaret credited an intangible feeling of ‘chemistry’ as to why she formed ties with her classmates. She explained:
"It was after one of our classes, [a classmate] just started busting out crying. She said ‘I feel appreciated’ and I’m like ‘I told you, I told you these people are magic! You have a great support system.’... [why?] I think it’s really unexplainable. I think it’s really just chemistry. You know, magic!"

Similarly, fellow classmate Patricia shared how she also felt a special connection form with her classmates that extended beyond the program:

"...we connected. We realized we all talked about different things. The connection was there. On more than just a school level, because after class we called each other because we all wanted that same goal. We just wanted a job...The connection of being in the same boat, we’re all like after the same things. You know, trying to get a job, trying to get a career."

Patricia was able to more concretely identify that ‘chemistry’ Margaret felt. For Patricia, the tie or “connection” was formed over their shared career goals and “being in the same boat” – perhaps a shared understanding of the obstacles low-income mothers face as they try to get by with limited resources, raise children, find work and build a career that will lead to economic self-sufficiency. What to Margaret felt “unexplainable”, like “magic”, can be attributed to bonding social capital (Putnam 2000), the glue that binds similar people together and allows trust and reciprocity to easily flow amongst a homogenous community.

Sharing goals and aspirations helped tie formation between many WTW students. Another student, Tanya, expanded upon the potential power she felt a web of support can have in helping women achieve their goals:

“We [WTW classmates] opened our eyes at the same time and instead of just having one person encourage each other, it’s like we all encourage each other. It’s like you can do it, I’m gonna do it, we’re gonna do it!”

For low-income women who have limited or no social support within their existing contacts, organizations can intentionally supplement women’s networks by introducing others
who have goals and aspirations in common and are traveling along a similar path. Students formed ties with classmates and drew support from each other. A small number of students identified their new classmates as part of the two domains indicative of supportive ties in the post-survey. Within the twelve week program, these students created networks of “fictive kin” (Stack 1974) amongst their classmates. Similar to Carol Stack’s (1974) findings that fictive kin, ties who are close social relations that are not familial, of poor black families often provide the necessary material resources to help each other survive day to day, WTW students relied on each other for encouragement, emotional and material support as they pursued similar mobility goals together.

However, this wasn't the case with the majority of students, as 60% of post-survey respondents did not identify CWU contacts among their supportive ties post-program. As one WTW graduate, Tammy, shared in the interview, for her, it takes much more time for these supportive ties to form and develop. Tammy is married, is active in her church, and reported having a large network in the pre-survey prior to entering the WTW program. While Tammy was a friendly student and interacted well with classmates, she did not indicate any of her WTW classmates as supportive ties in the post-survey. During her interview, Tammy reflected on a medical crisis in her life where she drew on the support of longtime friends and when I questioned whether, in a similar situation, she felt she could turn to her WTW classmates for a similar type of support, she responded:

“... those were friends who had been in my life for years years years. Um, so, I don’t know, it’s different. These are ladies I just met so I don’t really look to them for support like that ... I don’t think I take their feedback to heart like that as far as support and stuff like that. It’s different.”

Tammy explained that it took “years” for her to develop this level of intimacy or
closeness, characteristic of a strong tie which offers this level of support she needed when faced with a medical crisis. Tammy’s response regarding the difference in type of support she would seek from her new classmates versus friends she has known for years supports research that has shown that the stronger the tie, the more likely to provide emergency support (Wellman and Frank 2001). In this situation, Tammy’s existing ties of friends, family, and the church constitute her support network which meets her needs; she didn’t need to invest further in creating new relationships for this resource.

b. **Changes in social network composition**

In this section, I explore changes found within students’ network composition pre- and post- program by measuring changes in mean network tie strength and changes in the degree of status homophily along two variables: educational attainment and employment status.

**Tie strength**

Tie strength, as measured by closeness of a relationship (Granovetter 1973, Marsden and Campbell 1984) is a valuable variable to track as research has shown that it is often our weak ties that connect us to information from distant social systems (Granovetter 1973) that our close insular network of friends and family have not encountered. This is most important for low socioeconomic status individuals, since given a tendency for people to have homophilous networks, an insular network of like others will likely not provide information to ‘get ahead’.

In the pre- and post- program surveys, for each person listed, students were asked to “rate how close you are to this person” along a scale of 1 = not close, 2= somewhat close, 3=close, and 4=very close. To analyze these data, I used Mark Granovetter’s (1973) method of coding responses of 1 and 2 as weak ties and responses of 3 and 4 as strong ties. Table 9 below presents
the findings of baseline mean tie strength for all respondents and for the subgroup of 15 students who also completed the post-survey.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL (distinct individuals)</th>
<th>LEVERAGE TIES</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE TIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Subset</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Weak (1,2)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>[40/167]</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Strong (3,4)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>[127/167]</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baseline data for overall mean tie strength indicates strong ties were dominant within students’ social networks, with an overall network strength of 3.22 for the larger group and 3.38 for the subgroup of 15 students. Strong ties, indicated by a rating of 3 or 4 along the scale, comprised 76% and 80% of women’s overall social networks respectively, for each group. This is consistent with research that indicates that the social ties that exist among the poor tend to be strong ties, typically comprised of close friends and family members who often provide support (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Stack 1974; Newman 1999; Menjivar 2000; Smith 2007; Venkatesh 2009; Dominguez 2011). My comparison of tie strength between the two domains that offer leverage (career and school) and the two domains that offer support (small favors and emotional support) indicates that stronger ties are found in the supportive domains. Within the two support domains, strong ties comprised 93%-98% of ties compared to only 61% - 77% of
ties in the leverage domain. Strong ties are associated with providing support, and can positively reinforce trust among ties in a close knit community and lead to labor market connections (Portes 1995; Newman 1999). However, lower socioeconomic individuals often have strong ties with few or no weak ties connecting to them to distant social networks and the information and resources within (Granovetter 1983).

*Does tie strength within students’ networks change post-program?* To answer this, I compared mean network tie strength reported in the pre- and post- surveys for the 15 students who completed both surveys. Figure 7, below, illustrates this comparison.

![Mean Tie Strength](image)

In all categories, the average strength of ties overall and in each domain decreased. The largest decrease of 0.324 occurred in the ‘school’ domain and the smallest decrease, of 0.131, occurred within the ‘small favors’ domain. Although tie strength weakened in all domains, only in the ‘school’ domain did the mean tie strength (2.78) drop below 3 points, consequently categorized as a weak tie. Since the sample size of 15 students is so small, I cannot draw conclusions about significance and cannot generalize to a broader population. However, the data
suggest that after participating in a program that intentionally brokers ties, students’ social networks increase in percentage of weak ties, contacts likely to serve as new sources of information and resources from distant social networks.

Figure 8

% of Social Network Comprised of Weak Ties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Favors</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the intentional brokering activities, as outlined in the previous chapter, that occurred within the WTW program, coupled with students identifying CWU brokered ties in the post- survey results, I anticipated the post-survey results would indicate an increased percentage of weak ties within the two leverage domains (career and school). However, the opposite occurred, most notably in the career domain. Rather than an increase in the percentage of weak ties found within the leverage domains, the percentage decreased from 34% to 23% for career and 35% to 31% for school. The percentage of weak ties found within the two support domains increased from 5% to 9% for small favors and from 3% to 4% for emotional support.

Why might this be the case? To answer this, I re-analyzed the post-survey results to see how students rated tie strength for the CWU contacts listed in their post-survey. Often, students identified WTW staff members, CWU colleagues, and other professionals as strong ties with a
rating of three or four along the tie strength scale. Granovetter’s (1973) explanation of how the strength of a tie is often a linear function of the combination of time, emotional intensity, intimacy (i.e. mutual confiding), and reciprocity might help to account for why students perceive social service providers as a strong tie. For example, Leah explained why she listed WTW case manager, Donna, as a close tie in her post- social network survey:

“And Donna is great because a lot of personal problems I was having, she’ll just listen. She’s a good listener. And she gives good advice. Sometimes I thought I was going to go through the roof and she reminded me I’m still standing on the ground.”

Leah identified Donna as someone who is a strong tie in her social network, as someone she has a close relationship with, someone who she was able to go to with her “personal problems” and knows that her problems will be heard by a “good listener” who can also provide “good advice”. While Offer’s (2010) research suggests that low-income women are unlikely to turn to agency based support as a strategy to limit their interactions with draining ties and reduce social burden, my findings suggest that for emotional support and leverage, agencies can provide new supplemental sources of social capital with less burden than existing networks. Similarly, Hawkins (2010) found in his research that low-income women perceived social service professionals as close relationships, sometimes friendships, at times regardless of whether the professional saw the relationship in the same way. In an examination of social capital in the lives of formerly homeless and nearly homeless single mothers, Hawkins (2010) finds that, “the most useful social capital may not actually come from friends and family, but from ‘strangers’ or people whom the mothers did not have a prior or long –standing relationship.” Hawkins found that mothers who lacked strong or reliable social networks relied on professionals for help – finding that some service providers took on a greater role, beyond professional, in the lives of
women. Dominguez and Watkins (2003) likewise found that institutions are becoming important links in women’s social support networks; that along with material resources, institutions also provide “strong emotional support” and can be a “primary source of social support and validation” (2003:122). The authors found that institution-based networks provide reliable high quality resources and relationships “that are less stressful and burdensome in terms of reciprocity” (2003:129).

For women who turn to an institution-based network for support, what happens if and when services or programs come to an end? Do the ties remain? A similar concern was shared by some social service providers during these interviews, as discussed in Chapter Four. Their concern was over a ‘vacuum of support’ that the program participant might experience when their participation with the program ends. As a result, the professional tie that they have begun to perceive as a close tie offering support may also come to an end.

**Status homophily**

Status homophily, meaning the level of shared socio-demographic characteristics (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; McPherson et al. 2001) is based on dimensions of status characteristics that stratify society such as gender, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, employment status, geographic location, etc. can be used to determine how insular one’s social network composition is. In my analysis of status homophily, I focus on two variables of achieved status: educational attainment and employment status.

In the name generator surveys administered at the beginning and end of the WTW program, students were asked to provide demographic information on the individuals they listed in each domain. The data captured included: gender, race, ethnicity, educational attainment (i.e.
whether they attended college), employment status, and occupation. The name generator survey can be found in Appendix I.

To determine the degree of achieved status homophily, each student’s highest level of education and employment status was compared to each of the ties listed. A value of zero was assigned to variables where there was a difference and a value of one was assigned to variables that were the same. For example: If an unemployed student with a GED and no college attendance listed a tie who is employed and never attended college, the degree of homophily would be calculated at 50% since one out of the possible two variables is alike. A mean percentage was calculated to determine the overall degree of homophily for each student’s network. Where the educational attainment or employment status of an individual listed in the survey was unknown, it was excluded in calculations.

Figure 9 below illustrates the degree of status homophily for the subset of 15 students who completed pre- and post- surveys.

![Degree of Homophily in Overall Network Pre vs Post](image)

At the start of the WTW program, students overall networks had a 42% degree of
homophily. By the end of the program, the overall degree of homophily decreased to 35%, meaning the ties within their social network became more dissimilar to them in terms of educational achievement and employment status. However, as Karen Campbell, Peter Marsden, and Jeanne Hurlbert (1986) noted in their research, “reaching diverse others is not sufficient if none of them is placed highly enough in the social structure to be instrumentally useful” (p. 98-99). Simply having a diverse network of dissimilar others will not necessarily position students to receive information and resources that will help them get ahead – the position of their ties needs to be explored as well, as, for example, Susan Smith found that job contacts that have the authority to hire are the most influential contacts (Smith 2000).

III. Factors that influence tie formation

"...It was just like contagious, ... people’s attitude about really trying to get along and really help one another out. And creating friction and you know the jealousies or insecurities, it was like, no, at this point I think people are just so tired of struggling and feeling like they’re never getting anywhere.” – Rosie, WTW graduate

In the vignette above, Rosie shared how students were tired of “struggling” without making any progress. They found they could turn to each other for support, “trying to get along” and “really help each other out”. What where the factors that made this process “contagious” as Rosie observed? Thus far, I’ve uncovered the ways in which a social service organization purposively tries to broker ties to supplement low-income women’s social networks, as a strategy to increase their social capital. Further, I’ve found that, on average, WTW students’ social networks post-program experienced an overall increase of 2.6 distinct people, some of which can be attributed to intentionally brokered organizational ties such as staff members, volunteer mentors, and classmates. Lastly, students’ social networks experienced a weakening of mean network tie strength, most notably in the leverage domain, suggesting that students’ social
networks were becoming less insular. However, what is still yet to be uncovered is which factors account for the formation of brokered ties. To answer this, I’ve turned to the WTW students to gain their insight and experiences with the brokering process.

I recruited students for interviews during the last week of WTW classes. I attended the beginning or the end of class and also made an announcement inviting women to participate in an interview, then passed around a sign-up sheet with contact information and time/date of availability for those interested. In addition, I emailed and called students who left the program prior to the last week of class (with the exception of two students who left the program within the first three days) to recruit them for interviews. I invited all students to be interviewed at a time and place most convenient to them. Twelve indicated interest in being interviewed and ultimately ten students were able to coordinate schedules and be interviewed. I conducted all student interviews within the few weeks after graduation. All interviews took place within CWU’s administrative offices, which is also the location of the WTW program.

In the next sections, I present the findings from the interviews conducted with WTW graduates. They indicate that five key factors influenced whether intentional brokerage led to tie formation: 1) the ability to relate; 2) helpfulness and competency; 3) confidentiality and trust; 4) opportunities to reciprocate; and 5) frequent contact.

**Ability to relate**

Students revealed that one of the factors that aided in tie formation amongst purposefully brokered ties, was the ability to relate to one another. For example, when Leah, a WTW graduate, was asked in her interview what made some relationships she made within the program ‘stick’, she answered:
“Because they can relate...The bottom line is that when someone can understand your struggle and they can relate and they've been there and they can understand, and understand better – like, they get it. They don’t have to pretend to get it – they really really get it. Because, it's like one of those things, like I've been there so I understand where you're coming from.”

Leah was able to form a relationship with her WTW classmates because they could understand each other’s struggles. They did not “have to pretend” since they could relate to each other in a way others without the shared experience could not. Similarly, Leah’s classmate, Tanya shared how she formed a relationship with her classmate, Sonya, over their shared aspirations as well as their shared experience of being young mothers:

“I think it's like our life and where we're going and where we're at, at this point in time. It's very similar, like me and [Sonya] very, you know we’re young, we both have kids, and I don’t know, it’s just like now we both have goals whereas before we both might not have always had the goals and then now we’re like whoa, hey. We’re both like open our eyes at the same time and instead of just having one person encourage each other, it’s like we encourage each other. It’s like you can do it, I’m gonna do it, we’re gonna do it! ... We’re both on the same path. We’ve had that talk too. We’re both going down, trying to get our lives together. We might not be turning to the same things, but we’re on the same path in life.... We all had the same intentions. We’re not here to make a joke out of it or not get what we need. We’re here for a reason so let’s get what we need to get out of it. And we all, like I like the fact that we all participate in class, we all participate in it. It’s not just the same one or two people each and every time. Like, I like that. It shows you that everybody was like, “I’m here and I’m actually doing it, like listening and taking in what I need to take.”

Tanya formed a bond with Sonya over their commonalities as young mothers who are encouraging each other as they pursue “the same path” in life. As a result, they formed a relationship that offers support. This tendency for Leah and Tanya to relate to their classmates
who share similar aspirations, experiences, or other characteristics is not unexpected. These bonding ties, that is, ties formed with a community of similar others, is indicative of homophily, the principle that similar people connect at a higher rate than dissimilar people (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954). Homophily is helpful in explaining why some ties initially form while others did not. In other words, some relationships may have a harder time taking root because the individuals involved are too dissimilar. During the interview, I probed further with Leah to get her thoughts as to why some intentionally brokered ties didn’t form for her. For example, Leah was paired up with a volunteer mentor, Molly, an human resource professional at a large urban hospital. However, Molly and Leah didn’t have a strong connection and Leah didn’t identify Molly as a contact in her post-survey. When asked about that relationship, Leah explained:

"So, what happened with the mentor, she wasn’t too much talkative. And I’m chatty chatty. So it was like, we had two different personalities. It was like we were night and day. She’s nice, I have nothing bad to say about her, she’s sweet, she’s nice. But we wasn’t compatible. She is probably like shy and scared to reach out to me and I’m here being shy and weird reaching out to her. So, we were just cold with it…. I didn’t feel comfortable to open up to her. I feel like she was from a different part of the world”

Leah felt she and Molly were ‘night and day’; their dissimilar personalities prevented a relationship from developing into a tie that potentially could offer leverage and support to Leah – especially given Molly’s role in a human resources department of a large employer. While Leah highlights differences in temperament as a factor for her incompatibility, I couldn’t help but also wonder whether differences along race and class also impacted tie formation, as Leah is a low-income African-American woman with limited education and Molly is an employed Asian woman pursuing post-graduate work. When I asked Leah to clarify what she meant when she felt that Molly was from a “different part of the world”, Leah reflected more on their differences:
“Like, I felt like she was kind of square, preppy, kind of like ... she’s married at a young age, she’s not even 25. She finished college and is about to go to dental school, she lives in the suburbs, totally different from my world. Like, I’m not from the suburbs, I never got married, dentistry isn’t my thing. We weren’t compatible”

In Leah’s situation, the match wasn’t a successful one because there were too many dissimilarities, such as marital status, career path, educational status, personality, and location. Leah felt there wasn’t enough substance to form a connection. While the intent of the WTW program’s mentoring component is to serve as a bridging tie for students, connecting them to new people and social networks, for Leah, Molly was too different for her to build a relationship. As a result, this tie did not form, and Leah did not identify Molly in the post-survey or in the interview as someone she felt she could go to for support or advice.

Helpfulness and competency

A second factor that influenced tie formation for WTW students was the ability to receive useful and helpful advice or resources from another person. WTW student Tammy shared how she and her mentor, Khloe, connected despite, as she explains, their "outward appearances being very different". Tammy, an African-American woman in her late-30s and Khloe, a Caucasian woman in her mid-20s employed as a human resource professional at a local urban hospital, connected mainly because of Khloe’s open personality and her helpfulness in advancing Tammy’s goals. Tammy shared how Khloe;

"... gave me a lot of really good advice. She’s warm and friendly ... She was helpful with (school), she sent me some emails, math. She did send me some (resources) where I could go online and work on the computer and ... practice tests. Those were very helpful."
While Tammy saw Khloe as someone who was “helpful”, by sharing resources and information, as shared earlier, Tammy expressed some hesitancy in re-connecting with Khloe after the end of the program. It remains to be seen if this instrumental relationship, which has the potential to be an ongoing leverage tie for Tammy, will continue to serve as a source of social capital for Tammy in the future.

In my interview with WTW student, Sonya, I asked her about her experiences with her volunteer mentor, Janice, employed as a researcher at a local university. Sonya expressed a similar feeling of her mentor sincerely wanting to help her reach her goals:

“I got hooked up with a mentor here and my mentor is in biotech, she works at a lab. … We email each other all the time. I did the informational interview with her. She had a lot of stuff to share. … Both people have to be on the same page. I have to want to do it for myself and the person has to want to really help me.”

Both Sonya and Janice were “on the same page”; both women were motivated to interact with each other toward a shared goal – to see Sonya increase her career opportunities.

Dominguez and Watkin’s (2003) research found that competence was one of three factors, along with confidentiality and opportunities to reciprocate, found to facilitate institutional support, institution-based relationships between low-income women and service providers. For such relationships to form and become a network tie, institutional staff members and others need to be seen as competent. This theme arose during interviews with WTW students as they identified relationships with program staff members as people they could turn to, for support or leverage. As WTW graduate Sonya shared:

“You know, it was different … like [WTW staff members] are on point with everything. If I see that there’s something that [WTW staff members] don’t know about you go and you find out and learn about it and then you guys go off of situations that come to you. Like if someone comes to you with a situation where they own a
loan, like one of my friends ... had a loan from Everest (Institute) or something and [WTW staff members] are helping her. ...Even [Laura], I think [Laura] knows the CEO for some lab research company. She’s great – I love her, she has all the connections. She knows everything – every question. She said once I start school and get into it she would introduce me to the lady and everything. ...the way [staff members are] really helpful and like, on top of things. Like,[Laura], she will email you. Like if you have an appointment with her and you’re not there, she will email you. Okay, like you can always count on an email, reminder.”

In her post-survey, Sonya identified Laura as a tie that can offer leverage. Sonya had trust in Laura’s competence and ability to help her, which aided in tie formation. The factor of competency was also a theme when speaking with WTW student, Denise about her relationship with her mentor, Cindy. To her surprise, despite their age difference, Denise was impressed with, and had confidence in, Cindy’s ability:

"She is so freaking smart it blows me away. It’s like this woman is incredible. And she wanted to help. That was a big thing. She really wanted to be a mentor and wanted it to work.”

Not only was Cindy “smart”, but she “wanted it to work”. Both Cindy and Denise desired a similar outcome – Denise’s success in reaching her goals. Sonya, another WTW graduate, shared how the ‘vibe’ of sincerity and compassion she received from the WTW staff members helped to foster the tie between them:

“I’ve been to so many different organizations and like out of all of them, this one, I got a different vibe from it. Like a genuine vibe, like people really care. ... They’re just so friendly and nice, it’s not fake. You can tell it’s real genuine, like you can tell.”

The theme of a genuine interest in wanting to help re-appeared when I spoke with Rosie. She discussed how the “genuine” feeling she felt from staff and classmates helped to build her self-esteem, and served as a catalyst and motivator for her. She explained:
“... And people really felt genuine, like what you were saying was more genuine than the typical kind of stuff that you hear. ... it was easier for people to recognize good qualities in other people and mention it to make people feel good because we were all feeling better about our own selves as we went through the program too. So, I think it’s almost something that ignites the next level. ... I just found it so warm and the relationships so sincere. ... The fact that people really give us the impression that they really want us to succeed. Just stay open minded you don’t know where you’ll go from here. In the end, people were like, wow, they really do care about us. Yeah, they do. That’s one thing you should let other staff members know and Crittenton should pride itself on, especially with this program, that people really thought that people were sincere.”

Confidentiality and trust

Consistent with Dominguez and Watkins’s (2003) findings that if mothers do not feel that they can trust social service organizations, they will exclude them from their social support networks, I also found that confidentiality and trust were important in building a relationship.

Kelly, a student who entered the program with a very limited network explained how she was able to gain a feeling of trust with a staff member when they both opened up and shared their personal experiences with each other. "I feel like very close, I trust [CWU staff members] enough to open up obviously since I have in the past, and there’s not too many people who I open up to.” Because Kelly had confidence in staff members’ professionalism and competence to maintain confidentiality, they earned Kelly’s trust. In doing so, she became more sociable and outgoing and was able to form helping and supportive relationships with staff members – which was also reflected in her post-survey.

Confidentiality and trust were important determinants of tie formation not only between students and staff, but also between classmates. Students discussed in interviews how the environment created by the WTW program enforced a safe place for women to feel comfortable
disclosing personal experiences, challenges and goals. Denise described how she was also able to open up and create relationships with her classmates because of the confidentiality maintained within the program, and within the organization. When I asked what Denise what she felt contributed to her feeling that she and her classmates were able to “bond”, she stated:

"I also think it’s the confidentiality in the classrooms and in the building. ... if it wasn’t for the confidentiality and the openness, I don’t think a lot of the women would have felt that open. You know? Because we’ve all been through a lot in our lives and you don’t always want to bring that out.... doing the confidentiality piece I think is huge, it’s huge."

As a CWU employee myself, I can attest to how my colleagues and I are very aware of the sensitive nature of the personal information being shared, particularly among a vulnerable population, and therefore are very mindful to remind staff members and students throughout the program that confidentiality is to be respected. Because of this, Denise and other students are more likely to open up and share their experiences in the classroom, having faith that their classmates and WTW staff members will not reveal personal information outside the classroom.

**Opportunities to reciprocate**

In Chapter Five the concept of reciprocity was discussed as a factor influencing the purposive organizational brokerage process. During my interviews with students, it was apparent that they had reciprocal relationships with each other – they explained how they looked out for each other, making sure everyone had something to eat, had clothing available to them, were able to get the class help they needed, etc. Below are a few examples offered by students that illustrate how they found ways to receive and offer support to one another. In the first example, WTW student Sonya detailed the various ways in which classmates reciprocated favors:
“I don’t think anyone ever went home without a lunch. I mean, I don’t think anyone was here and did not eat. Like, if someone, like if I don’t have money one day then [Tanya] would buy me lunch or if she didn’t have money one day then I would buy her lunch. You know, if she was out and missed something I would get her work for her or she would do it for me. We would remind each other of important things that we need to get done, like....Yeah, if someone was late we would call like ‘where you at?’ ...I guess it was a mutual thing, we just automatically, you know. Everyone was all like ‘how did you guys get so close’, but I don’t know, we just did.”

Sonya explained how she and her classmates had a “mutual thing” in which they took care of each others’ day to day needs – food, homework, reminders, etc. In this way, Sonya and her classmates became a support network to each other, similar to the networks low-income women form to cope as described by Carol Stack (1974) and Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein (1997). The second example of reciprocity, presented by WTW student Rosie, illustrates how classmates began to see themselves collectively as a source of support and small favors – and began to reciprocate those favors:

“I can’t buy lunch and ... there were times very quickly within a few weeks where people were like ‘listen, don’t worry, none of us are going hungry, if you don’t have food’. Or someone would go out and it was like don’t worry, we’re going to get this plate and people were splitting large servings. It was very quickly, and I was joking that listen, we have to start networking and you know, look out for one another. And I think that’s when people really started connecting and you saw who lived next to who because you started seeing people coming together and there were even days when people said, ‘you know, I really don’t have ....’ Don’t worry, here. It was really a reciprocation. It was really a new thing forming and it was really nice to see and again, it might of happened in certain cliques where people felt more comfortable doing it, but it was happening in all of the groups. And everybody, I don’t think there was one person there that really felt excluded. ... [Kara], a lot of times in the beginning really struggled. And I think it was [Sonya] one day when she was absent and went over everything (computers) with her and the next day she came in and brought her something and said ‘I got you this gift and I really appreciate it that you stopped to take the time to show me what I had missed instead of going on like the rest of the class”. And really, from that
point there was really a reciprocation. Even like the other day for graduation, [Kelly] was talking about her hair, saying ‘I don’t even know what to do with my hair’ and [Sonya] said, ‘if you want, come over my house. I have long hair and I can straighten your hair and do a nice do for you’. And they went.”

Rosie’s comment in the above vignette, “we have to start networking, you know, look out for one another”, illustrates how the women began forming instrumental relationships with each other for support and favors. They were able to use the process of reciprocity to ensure favors and support would continue to flow within their network. Rosie also explained how CWU provided a clothing closet for donations of professional clothing for women to use for interviews and in their new jobs. The structure that was established by CWU allowed for Rosie and her classmates to use it as a way to pass clothing amongst each other:

“[CWU] opens [the clothing donation] closet to us... [Tammy] bagged up a whole bunch of stuff. A lot of it was brand new, a lot of stuff she bought for her daughter that her daughter didn’t like and it was just sitting there and she couldn’t take it back. She dispersed it throughout the classroom. [Kelly] came in a few weeks later. I was going through ‘cause I was getting ready to move or thought I was moving and found these things and brought them in. I had a nice pair of comfortable khaki jeans, she was like ‘I brought these especially for you because I don’t know anyone who’s taller than I us’. And I was like ‘yes’ I got home and tried them on and these feel like pajamas; they’re so soft and comfortable. I came back and had to tell her I might use those as my lounging pants. But it was that kind of thing that when people found that that closet is there, people said ‘hey, I have this really nice dress or shoes that I bought and they hurt my feet’, I’m going to bring them and put them in the closet.”

**Frequent contact**

Just being around people every day and speaking with them about their interests led one student, Rosie, to develop relationships with her fellow classmates. She explained, “I built relationships with people just through the class work and hearing some of their interests and
areas where they wanted to work.” Conversely, a derth of regular interactions appears to be why some ties didn’t initially form. I asked WTW student Denise why she didn’t form relationships with some of the people she met through the WTW program. She responded:

“There was some women who weren’t in our original group who came in the afternoon, some of them were a little standoffish. Then, when they got to meet you it was a little bit better, but it never got to like a bond thing like we did with the other women.”

Denise reinforced how relationships struggled to congeal with students outside the cohort who just participated in the afternoon session. The women who weren’t in the original group, who came in the afternoon, missed out on all of the interpersonal interactions that occur during the morning class time and throughout lunch. They didn’t have an opportunity to get to know the ‘original’ group and create a bond with students, which may explain why they were a bit ‘standoffish’. As a result, Denise didn’t develop a relationship with these students like the ‘bond’ she created with her cohort classmates.

Similarly, Tanya shared how she wasn’t able to connect well with her mentor due to time constraints that resulted in limited contact:

“I think it was more, not because of our personalities or anything like that, I think it was more because of the timing and our schedules are totally off. … she was [working] in the morning. For me, at night, I go home and I’m a mother, I’m a mom. That’s my job for the rest of the day and for the rest of the night. Like, until I get up in the morning and I drop [my son] off and do the same thing. … I have to get him and it’s just me and him, so. That’s, I think that’s why we didn’t even get a chance to connect. We haven’t even had a chance to try to make a connection. Because you know, you both have to. It can be draining, inconvenient. You know, even though you like a person it can be like hey, it just doesn’t work out because of that.”

Despite desire on the part of both women to connect, their busy schedules and commitments resulted in infrequent contact. Both women were faced with other pressures and
time constraints – work and family. Adding another commitment into an already full schedule is ‘draining’ and ‘inconvenient’ for Tanya and, I imagine, for her fellow classmates who are also trying to balance school, parenting, job search, and other responsibilities while dealing with the daily stressors associated with poverty and, in some cases, homelessness.

According to Margaret, her inability to develop a close attachment to her mentor was also a function of limited contact, “Her and I didn’t really connect. But I know that if I need a resource I have one. ...She could only meet during the week, not during the weekends.” While infrequent contact negatively impacted their ability to “connect”, fortunately, Margaret still perceived her mentor as someone who is there for her as a resource if she needs it, despite their inability to meet due to scheduling conflicts.

In some instances, the frequent interaction was not an intentional program design aimed to effectively broker ties, yet still occurred – unintentionally - and factored into stronger connections forming between students. Rosie explained how increased contact led to stronger bonds:

“I discovered [Sonya] was two blocks away from where I live. So, we started coming together. [Mona] and [Kara] realized they were two blocks away, so they started coming together. [Kelly] and [Julia] or somebody else was from the Quincy area, so they began to come together. So, even from our own communities and realizing that hey, you live there, you go that way? That’s why some relationships and connections were a little tighter than others because you were seeing and commuting and doing a little more so you got to share and got to know that person better”

While the frequent classroom gatherings initially fostered the development of some relationships, these bonds grew ‘tighter’ through additional interactions outside the classroom walls as students formed friendships, “got to know (each other) better” and became resources to each other. Kelly, a quiet and more reserved student, who was slow to open up at the beginning
of the program shared how she formed friendships when her fellow classmates encouraged her to join them for lunch:

"I don’t know, the students they’re awesome. They pushed me, they did. I never went out for lunch and they literally grabbed me by my arm and said ‘you’re coming out’ and I went out and then I didn’t stop going out. I liked walking around with them, being a part of something. And now I’m friends with all of them."

By encouraging Kelly to join them for lunch, her classmates were able to bring Kelly into their regular lunchtime routine, providing the space and time to learn more about each other through their regular lunchtime walks around downtown Boston – resulting in deeper friendships forming. While these lunchtime walks were not organized by the WTW program, and therefore not an example of intentional brokerage, the resulting increase in frequency of contact and feeling “a part of something” was a critical element with Kelly’s development of friendships with her WTW classmates.

IV. Unintended consequences

Interviews with students reveal that while purposive brokering efforts had several positive outcomes, there were also some unanticipated consequences that can help us to better understand the brokering process and where it may fail at times.

Artificial versus organic ties

As I previously mentioned, the WTW program has a mentoring component in which students were paired up with a volunteer mentor. Pairings occurred without the input from students or volunteers, with the exception of their responses to questions asked on their respective ‘match forms’. As a result of this blind match, students expressed a bit of apprehension. For example, WTW student Tanya shared the awkwardness of the matching
process and getting to meet her mentor for the first time at an orientation luncheon, "… that first
connect piece was a little bit awkward. But I didn’t want to set the pace, I waited for her to set
the pace, and she did and she’s good at that." Fortunately for Tanya, her mentor was “good” at
easing into the relationship in their initial introduction. However, this hesitancy was felt by other
students as well. Margaret recalled, “I was kind of nervous for it because it was a person that I
didn’t know. Was I going to like them?” Additionally, as Leah shared earlier in the chapter, she
was skeptical about being paired with a volunteer mentor:

"...[W]hen it comes to sharing my personal stuff with strangers, I
don’t like that. I like to keep it neutral. I feel like I need to protect.
...I don’t like to talk about myself so much.... I think the next time
you want to do a mentor for a group, instead of signing people up
with a mentor, just have all the ladies and all the mentors and have
everyone have questionnaires that they can answer and see who
can answer the same. Have them all read out loud so everyone can
get to know each other at once and see who attracts who and who
interacts with who more instead of automatically pairing them up.
Basically, let the girls and the mentors pair themselves up.”

Leah felt uncomfortable with the artificial pairing made by the program. The artificial
pairing didn’t allow students and volunteers to find natural points of connections, and as a result,
may have felt forced and manufactured or insincere – making it a challenge to form a tie.
Instead, Leah suggested a more organic development of mentor/mentee pairings. This is
reflective of a similar earlier findings – interviews with my CWU colleagues also noted the need
to strike a balance between organic and artificial overly engineered ties

Another unintended consequence may have been that not everyone is comfortable with or
interested in the intense level of sharing and connecting that the WTW program design delivered
as a way to form ties amongst students. As WTW student Denise noted not everybody is able to
reveal personal experiences and connect with others, perhaps feeling too vulnerable:

“I think there were some women who left [the WTW program

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early], I think it was just too much for them. And I think that by breaking down the wall it broke down some of their defenses that they need. So, I think that was something that they just weren’t ready to do that. Maybe they need more of a support system at home ... “

This research is limited in that I was unable to interview students who left early from the program. The perspectives of this subgroup of students on intentional brokering activities was not captured and as a result may lead to a positive bias found in the data. For example, students who left the program early and were not responsive to interview requests, may have been able to offer a different, perhaps less positive, perspective of the brokering process. Therefore, this is an important piece for future research to explore.

Drain

By definition, brokering is introducing new people into the lives of others. For low-income mothers who are balancing the stressors of poverty, the challenges of balancing family and other commitments – such as work, education, provider meetings, and programs - time and energy are limited resources. By introducing new people and new commitments into their lives, it can result in an unanticipated drain on their schedule and stamina. In an earlier quote, WTW student Tanya shared how the time commitment of the mentoring program was a strain on her already stretched schedule:

“Because you know, you both have to. It can be draining, inconvenient. You know, even though you like a person it can be like hey, it just doesn’t work out because of that.”

Similarly, student Sonya expressed that, “sometimes there were days where I was like overwhelmed with meeting people (laughs) and talking and you know …”. This emotional drain that Sonya experienced, feeling “overwhelmed” at having to be social with different people, is an
example of an unintentional consequence of bringing new people into one’s social circle – it can be taxing on one’s energy.

In addition, when ties are brokered, they may not always result in a positive experience for women, resulting in a different kind of drain - an emotional drain. WTW student Patricia recalled how her feelings were hurt after her mentor, Lisa, decided to drop from the program after realizing she was more interested in serving as a mentor for youth:

"...[but when it didn’t work out] It kind of felt hurtful in a way. Because it’s like I mean, if that’s how you felt, if I’m emailing you saying “what’s going on”, Lisa could have had a phone call and said “Patricia, I spoke with Jocelyn and this is how I feel”. I never understood that. I was a little disappointed because it’s like another sense of abandonment, you know. It’s like [Lisa] could have did that to me, not just ignore me. That’s my biggest pet peeve, ignoring me. When you are trying to communicating with them and they don’t want to be bothered, say “I don’t want to be bothered”. Or, “this is what I’m doing now and I can’t keep the connection between ...”, then I can’t get mad about that because you know you better than I know you. It’s like we all have different ... life."

While Patricia very much wanted to be connected to a volunteer mentor, she was disappointed when her assigned mentor abruptly ended the relationship – she felt “ignored”. As a result, this attempt at brokering a helpful connection for Patricia resulted in the unintentional consequence of hurt feelings.

V. Discussion

This phase of the research found that social ties formed within an organizational setting can serve as alternative or supplemental social networks for women. These new ties are distinct from stronger ties with family or friends and as a result, are less likely to be a source of emotional or financial drain as they do not come with a burden of reciprocity – although as mentioned in the previous section, experiencing a drain is not completely absent in these relationships.
An analysis of the pre- and post-surveys administered to students as they entered the WTW program and during the last week of class revealed that students network size increased by 2.6 distinct people, in part due to intentional brokering. Furthermore, the composition of their networks changed, resulting in less homophily over the twelve weeks. Key factors found to influence whether intentional brokerage led to tie formation include 1) the ability to relate; 2) helpfulness and competency; 3) confidentiality and trust; 4) opportunities to reciprocate; and 5) frequent contact.

Lastly, while organizations intend to broker ties for positive outcomes, I find that there were some unintended consequences that arose from purposive brokering. Some students preferred relationships to evolve more organically in instances where program intervention was too heavy in relationship formation. In addition, the introduction of new people into the lives of low-income women may cause an unanticipated drain on their time and energy as they try to develop and cultivate the new relationship. Lastly, new relationships are not always immune from the negative dynamics found in other relationships – and may result in hurt feelings, an emotional drain.

This phase of the research has limitations. Because of the small sample size, I am unable to make claims regarding the statistical significance of the survey results; thus these data should be considered preliminary and suggestive. Further, since changes in the size and composition of students’ social networks were assessed only in the short term – within the scope of the 12 week program - it remains to be seen how the students’ social networks will continue to evolve and transform over time. Future research could explore how transient or stable are these purposefully organizational brokered ties.

With the survey design, using a name generator presents some issues with informant
accuracy in recalling one’s cognitive networks. The survey asks respondents to list people they perceive they can go to for various dimensions of support and advice. However, a cognitive network is unable to determine whether the ties listed actually provide enacted support and resources if and when the time comes. Also, the survey administration occurred in the program setting, during the last week of class. This proximity makes it likely that students were primed to name WTW connections. While findings are encouraging and can uncover a trend, keep in mind that the name generator data tends to have a bias in that it reflect stronger ties and ties in close geographic proximity (Campbell and Lee 1991). Future research should get distance from program in terms of time (i.e. schedule interviews more than a month after program completion) and space (i.e. locate interviews away from the program offices).

Lastly, because interviews and survey only included students who successfully graduated from the program, their positive experiences may have biased them to name WTW ties. Future research should keep this in mind. Also, I wasn’t able to successfully recruit students who left the program early into the interviews. Therefore, the interviews conducted did not include the nine women who left the program before graduation and therefore does not capture their experiences with brokering. Since their absence from the results could result in selection bias or bias the results in a positive manner, there is still more to be learned from these students that could be informative. Future research should explore the networks of students who left the program early and determine whether their ties influenced their decision to leave. What where their challenges? Are they excluded from an institution based network? They may have had a negative experience with intentional brokering, but I would not be able to capture this given the limitations of my data (Hawkins 2010).
Chapter Seven
Conclusion

A rich body of literature demonstrates that social networks influence various aspects of our life, including our health, mobility, and status attainment (Granovetter 1973; Wellman 1983; Lin 1999; Putnam 2000; Briggs 2002). Social networks have influence because of the social capital found within – the resources inherent within our social networks that can be accessed and mobilized through our social ties. Studies have documented substantial inequalities in social networks and social capital (Campbell et al.1986; Moore 1990; Lin 2000; Briggs 2002; Pinchler and Wallace 2009). For example, studies have shown how differences in social network composition and mobilization of social capital between men and women result in disparate access to job leads, and in some cases, wage advantages (Ensel 1979; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982; Hanson and Pratt 1991; Smith 2000; Huffman and Torres 2002). Such inequalities in social networks and social capital can restrict one’s access to resources and limit life opportunities (Lin 2000).

Low-income women, the focus of this study, are likely to have a network that is insular, mostly consisting of strong ties that offer support – providing resources to help survive the hardships faced with living in poverty. However, their networks are also likely to provide no or limited resources to help them ‘get ahead’ and can be a source of drain on their emotions and limited financial resources (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Menijivar 2000) - in this way, social networks can serve to perpetuate inequality.

The purpose of this study was to document the process of purposive organizational brokerage - the deliberate process of creating connections between individuals served by an organization and other individuals and agencies within that organization’s network (Small 2009). Further, this study sought to explore whether brokerage impacted the size and composition of
low-income women’s social networks and to uncover factors that influence tie formation. In
doing so, the findings from this study contribute to the growing body of research on network
inequality that focuses on the role of institutions influence on social networks and social capital
(Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Small 2009; Offer 2010).

Summary of general findings and limitations

Phase One

The first phase of this study established that, to varying degrees, social service
organizations seeking to advance low-income individuals’ socio-economic status engage in
purposive brokering. Their brokering efforts grew out of a premise that low-income individuals’
existing networks are either limited in size or limited in the resources they could, or were willing
to, provide. The majority of service providers I interviewed stated that the organization engaged
in intentional brokering to increase social support for individuals, using strategies such as
creating many opportunities for participants to come together to share, interact, and develop
trust. Additionally, many of the organizations purposively engaged in brokering ties that offer
leverage for program participants to create opportunities for social mobility, helping participants
advance toward their career and educational goals.

Strategies to broker leverage ties included developing the organization’s own network,
serving as a bridge by connecting participants to internship opportunities, or pairing with
mentors, and/or creating alumni networks. Serving as a bridging tie to social networks was not
without challenge - as some providers shared how bridging cross-class ties resulted in
individuals struggling to find commonalities to connect with dissimilar others. In this first phase
of the research, it is important to note that a social desirability bias may have impacted
providers’ positive responses that social service organizations are engaging in purposive brokerage. Since creating social ties is generally seen as a positive activity, it is possible that social service providers may have overstated these activities during their interview, leading to an overestimation in the findings. This limitation can be addressed in future research by exploring whether evidence exists within each organization to support the stated value of social networks, such as documented outcomes, or documented evidence of intentional brokerage activities.

Phase Two

In the second phase of the research, a case study of CWU with a particular focus on the WTW program, I examined intentional brokerage strategies, measured changes in women’s social network size and composition, and uncovered factors that contributed to and inhibited tie formation. Similar to the social service organizations interviewed in the first phase, CWU also engaged in various strategies to broker ties – including: assessing participants’ social networks, creating goals to develop social networks, inviting higher socio-economic status individuals to participate in program activities, encouraging well-made connections by staff members, making direct introductions, and creating an environment to foster tie formation. In my exploration of the intentional brokering strategies found within CWU, I am aware that my status as the director of research and evaluation, a managerial role within the organization, may have complicated my ability to recruit colleagues for the study, and my colleagues comfort in candidly disclosing information. Relationship dynamics, such as trust, confidentiality and power, were considered while I was recruiting and conducting interviews with students and my colleagues, however may have biased the results.

My analysis of WTW students’ networks pre- and post- program revealed that networks
changed in size and composition. Because of the small sample size of WTW students surveyed and interviewed, I am unable to make claims to generalize the findings. However, I can speak to the trends that I see emerging. After participating in the WTW program, students identified 2.6 additional ties, weaker ties (overall mean network tie strength decreased by 8.9%), and a less homophilous network (the level of student’s network homophily along educational achievement and employment status variables decreased from 42% to 35%). These results indicate that after participating in the WTW program, students perceived they had more people who are not intimate ties that they could go to for advice – most notably in the area of career advice. This appears to be attributable, at least in part, to purposive organizational brokerage, as 35% of the ties identified in the post-program survey were CWU-brokered ties, such as classmates, staff members, and mentors. These CWU attributed ties were found mostly within students’ career contacts (CWU brokered ties comprised 52% of career related ties) and education/training contacts (CWU brokered ties comprised 57% of education related ties). This means that after participating in the twelve week program, students recognized CWU brokered ties as people they could turn to for support and leverage. Since changes in the size and composition of students’ social network are assessed only in the short term – within the scope of the twelve-week program - it remains to be seen how students’ social networks will continue to evolve and transform over time.

There are some notable limitations with the pre- and post- survey design and administration. The name generator approach comes with informant accuracy issues in recalling one’s cognitive networks. The surveys asked respondents to list people they perceive they can go to for various dimensions of support and advice, however a cognitive network is unable to determine whether the ties listed will actually provide enacted support and resources if and when
the time comes. Also, surveys were administered in the WTW program setting, during the last week of classes. This proximity, in both time and space, makes it more likely that students were primed to name WTW connections. While findings are encouraging and can uncover a trend, keep in mind that the name generator data tends to have a bias in that it reflect stronger ties and ties in close geographic proximity (Campbell and Lee 1991). Future research that uses a name generator survey should administer with some distance (time/space) from program.

Interviews conducted with ten graduates within weeks after graduation revealed why some of the intentional brokering strategies were effective, while others were not. For ties to form, students explained that they needed to relate to the person. This was particularly so in attempts to form cross-class ties – if differences were too great, a tie did not form. However, in cross-class tie formation, if students felt that the contact was helpful and competent, they were more likely to connect and develop a relationship. Further, creating an environment that respected students’ confidentiality and developed trust amongst peers and agency staff members positively influenced tie formation. It also appeared that when opportunities to reciprocate were present, whether through the organization or through peer relationships, students engaged in reciprocal transactions. Lastly, simply having frequent contact with one another allowed deeper relationships to form and ties develop.

Key findings and sociological relevance

In this section, I highlight four key findings and their sociological relevance. First, I found a need to further develop Mario Luis Small’s (2009) definition of institution-driven brokerage to account for the process that occurs throughout the organization as a result of organization-wide policies, practices, procedures, and/or culture (cultural brokerage) and the
process that occurs within a particular program design, policies, and activities (programmatic brokerage). This further distinction allows analysis to occur at two levels; cultural brokerage, which permeates the broader culture of the organization and, and the programmatic brokerage, which is specific to a particular programming model or design and doesn’t necessarily extend to other activities within the organization.

Second, I propose an expansion of the definition of purposive organizational brokerage (Small 2009) to include activities that engage participants in conversations on the value of social networks and social capital, assess social networks, discuss strategies on how to activate and nurture ties, and identify and map out existing social ties and social capital. This expanded definition is a result of the discovery of strategies used by social service providers to engage program participants in a broader set of activities and conversations that work to support the brokering process. These activities were deemed by social service staff members as an important step in the brokering process – not only to prepare participants to develop and activate new and existing ties, but to also nurture ties over time for future activation.

Third, my analysis of WTW students’ networks pre- and post- program reveal that they experienced a change in the size and composition – as discussed in the general findings. While this study did not examine whether students benefited from their new ties, interviews with social service providers and CWU staff members indicate that some of these new connections have resulted in opportunities for participants – as illustrated in Maria’s story referenced throughout this paper. Maria was offered a full-time job from the volunteer mentor she was connected to through the WTW program supervisor. This presents a challenge to Susan Smith’s (2000) contention that, “the weak ties of low-status individuals are ineffective at bridging dissimilar actors and broadening opportunities because these ties are being mobilized from small, dense,
homogenous networks that lack influential ties, networks that likely inhibit access to people and groups offering new and different information” (p. 531). I contend that the evidence presented in this study suggests an emerging trend of organizations, through purposive brokering, can and do bridge dissimilar actors and broaden opportunities for mobility. To make broader more generalizable claims, future studies should include an analysis of a larger number of organizations. Further investigation is also warranted to examine whether students activate their newly organizational brokered ties and whether mobilization results in socio-economic advancement over time.

Fourth, I found emerging evidence that organizations can serve as a place to create new networks, and new cultural norms – through a ‘culture of connection’ - that can work to counteract downward leveling norms experienced by low-income individuals. As low-income individuals begin to make advancements in their career and education and as they become embedded into new networks of others with similar aspirations and as they adopt new group norms of “connecting” (as described by Elisabeth Babcock of CWU) and/or norms and expectations of “paying it forward” (as described by Tina from Cooks Inc. and Darlene from Community Health), they have the potential to serve as a source of support and leverage to peers within their network to encourage and help them ‘get ahead’. This finding also presents a challenge to Susan Smith’s (2007) findings presented in Lone Pursuit that 1) poor black job holders, who view the job search process as one of individual self-reliance and perseverance, are reluctant to assist job-seekers – afraid that their workplace behavior will jeopardize their reputation and tenuous employment; and that 2) job-holders that are more secure, less overwhelmed by social and economic circumstances, are less likely to help job-seekers as they aren’t in a situation where they need to trade favors. Instead, emerging evidence suggests that
when a ‘culture of connection’ is intentionally fostered by an organization, some low-income individuals come to view the economic mobility process as a reciprocal and networked process.

**Additional programmatic implications**

The findings from this study have implications for how social service providers can more effectively work with low-income individuals to develop their social networks and social capital as a way to help them become economically mobile – I highlight three programmatic implications below.

The first is to allow opportunities for ties to develop organically. While social service organizations should be intentional about creating an environment and offering activities to support tie formation, they also should appreciate the value in organic relationship development and recognize the moments when to step back and lessen intervention. This discovery grew out of insights shared by both CWU staff members and WTW students during interviews exploring the relative effectiveness of different intentional brokering strategies. Staff members explained how they sought the right balance between actively engineering low-income women’s social networks through structured and planned activities, such as pairing students with volunteer mentors or organizing and facilitating group workshops intended to foster connections, and letting women develop and cultivate relationships on their own without intentional intervention on the part of the organization or individual staff members. Students echoed this finding, providing advice that future WTW mentoring initiatives should allow for students and mentors to play more active roles in pairing up with one another.

Second, the experiences of WTW students and social service providers suggest that when brokering cross-class ties, social service providers should anticipate and preemptively respond to
the challenges that often arise, as it’s hard to connect if commonalities aren’t apparent.

Interviews with WTW students, Tricia of Empowered Girls, and Rebecca of Females Together shared a theme of difficulties in forming cross-class connections if there was “nothing in common” or contacts felt they were from “different social worlds”. If commonalities are not readily found, the relationship may struggle to form – as witnessed in Leah’s inability to connect with her mentor, Molly, who Leah felt was “from a different part of the world”.

Third, I found evidence that suggests that ‘key connectors’ seemed to positively influence the brokering process, leading to my recommendation that organizations would find benefit in building staff capacity to broker by developing their skills and ability to build their own professional network, improve skills to identify opportunities where purposive brokerage can occur to benefit participants, and increase level of comfort in brokering ties for instrumental purposes.

**Suggestions for future research**

The first suggestion for future research is to expand the timeframe of this study by conducting a longitudinal study to determine whether ties formed through intentional organizational brokerage extend beyond the walls of organization and last beyond program services. This is an important area to explore, as many of the social service providers and CWU colleagues I interviewed expressed a concern that having social ties embedded within an organizational network could result in a vacuum of support when the connection to the organization ends. However, there is promising evidence from discussions with Tina from Cooks, Inc., Michael from A Step Ahead and Darlene from Community Health that suggests that some of the ties formed through the process of purposive organizational brokerage remain after
the programming ceases. Future research can explore how transient or stable purposefully brokered ties are over time, what attributes to ties remaining beyond program activities, as well as examine whether and how participants experience a ‘vacuum’ as suggested by some providers.

Second, during my interviews with social service providers, some shared that they were motivated to engage in purposive brokering because of the research and literature on social networks they encountered. For example, Darlene from Community Health indicated her familiarity of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, and Brian from College Now referenced research on the correlation between relationships and educational outcomes that led to College Now integrating purposive connections into their program model. While not explicitly explored in this study, future research can help add to the knowledge of how ideas and theories diffuse throughout an industry and come to shape activities and programming.

Third, I found evidence of key connectors– i.e. individuals who are skilled at cultivating ties within their own network and serve as a bridging tie by intentionally brokered a higher number of connections for others - in the brokering process. However, this study didn’t examine the extent of their influence. While structures, systems, policies, and activities can be intentionally created by organizations and programs to institutionalize the brokering process for low-income women, the presence, influence, and impact of individual ‘key connectors’ may be just as valuable and critical to explore. Future research on the influence of key connectors could better illuminate this area to better understand the dynamics occurring within the actor-driven brokerage process.

Fourth, future research should explore whether low-income women activate their newly brokered weak ties and benefit from mobilizing resources. This research explored whether ties
form over a twelve-week period of time as a result of purposive organizational brokering. However, we don’t yet know whether low-income women will activate these ties after the program and whether they will continue to identify brokered ties as perceived sources of support or leverage in the future. This question arose from interviews with service providers throughout the research as a concern that once services end, will participants experience a ‘vacuum’ of support? Therefore, future research can add to the literature on social network evolution and mobilization of social capital by doing a longitudinal study to follow participants post-program to determine whether intentional organizational-brokered ties remain part of low-income women’s perceived networks and what factors contribute to whether ties are activated for support and leverage.

Fifth, this study is limited based on who was and was not included. It is possible that the data I collected may be skewed as a result of the students who participated in the surveys and interviews. Since the surveys were administered only to students still enrolled during the last week of classes, the data may be biased by students’ positive experiences – resulting in listing more WTW contacts. I wasn’t able to successfully recruit students who left the WTW program early into the interviews, therefore, the interviews conducted did not include the nine women who left the program prior to graduation. Their self-exclusion from the study does not allow me to capture their experiences with purposive brokering. This is an area still left to be explored as it could uncover additional unconsidered aspects of purposive brokerage that were not captured in this data. Also, future research should explore the networks of those who left the program and whether ties impacted them leaving the program. What where their challenges? Are they excluded from an institution based network? They may have had a negative experience with intentional brokering, and I’m unable to capture this (Hawkins 2010).
Lastly, while this study was exploratory in nature, future research can determine the degree to which changes in network size and composition can be attributed to purposive brokerage by using a control group.

Conclusion

This study adds to the literature on the role institutions play in intentionally shaping low-income women’s social networks as a way to reduce structural inequalities in social capital. The findings suggest that social service organizations engage in purposive brokering as a way to build support and leverage networks for individuals. They do so through a variety of strategies that are found to occur throughout the organization, within program structure and activities, and at an individual level through direct connections and contacts. The findings, while not generalizable, reveal an emerging trend that indicate that purposive brokerage efforts are attributed, in part, to students perception that they have more people they can turn to for support and leverage, and that these people are ‘weaker’ and dissimilar ties – meaning they are more likely to bridge to distant information and networks. Most encouraging is the emerging evidence that an organization can be intentional in developing a new network of low-income women with similar aspirations and goals, thereby creating new group norms that encourage sharing resources and information to promote mobility amongst the group. As individuals make economic advancements, the group can benefit from their gains and move forward together. In this way, there is potential to create peer ties that not only provide support, but leverage as well – a new source of social capital.
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support in the functioning of patients with unipolar depression” in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. Vol. 140 No. 4. Pages 473-476.


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Miller, Maurice Lim. 2011. “The Uphill Battle to Scale an Innovative Antipoverty Approach:


University Press.


APPENDICES
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. I am interested in learning about the people and organizations that are part of your social network. All the information you share will be kept confidential. In fact, I ask that you only use the first name of the people you know to also protect their privacy. As you’re completing the survey, please feel free to ask if you have any questions.

Thank you!

1. List up to five social service organizations you have received services from at least once within the past 12 months. Types of social service organizations include community-based nonprofits, childcare centers, community health centers, etc.

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<tr>
<th>Name of Agency</th>
<th>About how many times during last 12 months did you visit the agency or receive services?</th>
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2. List the first name of *up to five* people you can go to for **career** advice, guidance, job leads, etc.

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<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>How do you know this person? For example: are they a friend, co-worker, family, classmate, neighbor, through social service organization, etc?</th>
<th>Rate how close you are to this person: 1= not close 2= somewhat close 3= close 4= very close <em>Please circle …</em></th>
<th>Do they work a steady job? If so, please list their job title</th>
<th>Did they attend college?</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Is this person Latino/a or Hispanic?</th>
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4. List the first name of *up to five* people you can go to if you **need a favor** such as borrowing money, someone to babysit, need a ride, pick up child from school, etc.

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<th>First Name</th>
<th>How do you know this person? For example: are they a friend, co-worker, family, classmate, neighbor, through social service organization, etc?</th>
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5. List the first name *up to five* people you can go to for **emotional support**, for example, someone you can talk with about your good and bad days, someone who is supportive, someone who encourages you, etc.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>How do you know this person? For example: are they a friend, co-worker, family, classmate, neighbor, through social service organization, etc?</th>
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APPENDIX II
Interview guide: nonprofit organizations

I am interested in learning about how organizations influence the social networks of the people they serve. Sometimes this happens intentionally (i.e., a program will purposively try to connect clients to other people they might not otherwise know – for example, mentoring program) and sometimes this may happen unintentionally for a variety of reasons, such as a result of the way a program is structured (for example, sitting next to the same people in a classroom environment a client may naturally connect with a fellow student). I’d like to learn more about your program and services and whether or not your organization seeks to intentionally expand people’s social networks.

Who is the organization’s/program’s target population? (i.e. income level, age, gender, geography, etc)

Can you tell me about the services you provide at [name of organization]? (i.e. service goals)

Do any of the services intentionally try to expand the social network of the people you serve … in other words, does the program purposively try to connect clients to other people (i.e. peers, providers, volunteers, employers, etc)?

If so, do you have a sense of why? (i.e. opportunities, foot in the door, more exposure, networking, etc.)

Can you provide some examples of how this process happens at the organization/program?

Can you give me some examples of how these intentional attempts/acts may have impacted the social network of clients?

Do you see any potential downsides to this practice?

Does the organization/program track this process or impact in any way?

Thank you so much for your time. I can send you a copy of the final paper if you’re interested.
APPENDIX III
Focus group and interview guide: CWU direct service staff

Thank you for taking the time to help me learn more about the ways in which social service organizations intentionally connect clients to other people, organizations and resources. As a CWU staff member who works directly with the women CWU serves, you are in the best position to help me learn about this process.

This focus group/interview will last about one hour and will be recorded using a digital voice recorder so I don’t forget anything. But please remember, our discussion will be kept strictly confidential only to be seen by me and only used for research purposes. Do you have any questions before we start?

→ Instructions: I want you to think about the various ways in which you connect clients to other people, programs, organizations and resources at three levels: personally, programmatically and organizationally. We’ll use these three flip charts (with themes written on each chart) to map out the various ways in which this happens and will use a fourth flip chart to map out any other ways mentioned.

Drawing on your experience, can you tell me about the ways you personally have connected clients to other people, organizations and resources? (ie. referrals internally, externally, guest speakers, introductions to other CWU staff, introductions to other CWU clients, etc)
  o Can you walk me through how these connections happen?
  o What are some typical reasons for connections? What was the need presented?
  o What are the expected outcomes of the connections? Ie. leverage, support, both?
  o How do you develop your own professional network of resources/professionals to connect clients to?

Now, think about the structure, program design and policies of the program you work in. Can you tell me about the ways your program has connected clients to other people, organizations and resources? (ie. groups, cohorts, alumni, etc)
  o Can you walk me through what you know about how these connections happen?
  o Is there a distinction between connections that are intentionally made and those that just happen?
  o For those that are intentionally made …
    ▪ Why? What was the need presented?
    ▪ What are the expected outcomes of the connection? Ie. leverage, support, both?

Finally, think about the larger organization, Crittenton Women’s Union. What are some ways the organization has tried to connect clients to other people, organizations and resources? (ie. partnerships, initiatives, advocacy, etc)
  o Can you walk me through what you know about how these connections happen?
  o What are some typical reasons for connections? What was the need presented?
  o What are the expected outcomes of the connections? Ie. leverage, support, both?
Wrap Up
Is there anything else about how you, your program or the organization connects clients that you’d like to mention that you didn’t yet have a chance to? Is there anything else you’d like to share?

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences
APPENDIX IV
Interview guide: Woman to Woman students

Thank you for taking the time to help me learn more about what factors help women make advancements in their careers, education and personal finances. As a recent graduate of the Woman to Woman program, I’m hoping you can help me better understand what roles the people and organizations in your life play as you take steps toward your goals.

This interview will last about one hour and will be recorded using a digital voice recorder so I don’t forget anything. But please remember, your responses will be kept strictly confidential only to be seen by me and only used for research purposes. Do you have any questions before we start?

Expectations of Program and Existing Network
When you first signed up for the Woman to Woman program, what were your expectations? (ie. what were you hoping to gain as a result of your participation? what was your motivation for enrolling?)

Prior to enrolling into the Woman to Woman program, can you tell me about the role the people or organizations in your life played as you tried to reach similar goals / achieve similar expectations? For example …

- Explain …

Progression toward Goals
I understand that during the Woman to Woman program, you developed ‘SMART’ goals. Can you tell me about the SMART goal you developed and how you came to choose that goal?

While in the Woman to Woman program, did you work on other goals or areas beyond the ‘SMART’ goal (for example, computer skills, personal goals, family goals, etc)?

What steps did you make toward achieving any of these goals (SMART and other) during and after the program?

In thinking about all the steps you made toward your goals (‘SMART’ goal as well as any other goals), can you tell me in detail what aspects you found helpful to you in taking these steps? Who?

Prompts:
- Guidance or advice from mentor, from staff, from other students, others, etc.
- Confidence and emotional support from mentor, staff, other students, others, etc.
- Material or in-kind resources provided (ie. childcare, transportation, clothing, etc)
- Information on job leads, scholarships, educational programs, etc
- Introductions or connections made to other people
- External people (i.e. friends, family, etc), other organizations, etc
- Other?

During your involvement in Woman to Woman program, did you have the opportunity to share resources (i.e. information, advice, guidance, connections, etc) and support/encouragement with other students, staff and mentors?
  - If so, what?
  - How and where did sharing take place?
  - Why (i.e. motivation) did you share resources?

In thinking about your involvement with CWU and Woman to Woman, what aspects of the organization were most impactful for you (not necessarily goal related)?

**Regarding Challenges and Barriers**

In thinking about your goals and expectations of the Woman to Woman program, did you experience any challenges or barriers along the way? (i.e. CORI, holes in resume, transportation issues, financial barriers, child care, etc) Please explain …

If so,
- Where you able to address them or overcome them? How?
- Where/Who did you draw on / go to for assistance?
- What assistance/resources was provided?
- What resources or assistance wasn’t provided that would have been helpful?

If not,
- Where you able to try address them or overcome them? How?
- Where/Who did you draw on / go to for assistance?
- What assistance/resources was provided?
- What resources or assistance wasn’t provided that would have been helpful?

As you pursued your goals, can you think of types of resources, support or assistance that you didn’t receive that might have been helpful in achieving your goals? If so …
- Explain …
- Do you know anyone or anywhere you could access this resource/assistance?
- Was anyone aware of these needs?

**Dynamics and Shifts in Social Network**

Can you tell me what it was like to be paired with a mentor, someone you didn’t know prior? Explore the inorganic nature of the relationship and power dynamics/class dynamics in mentor relationship. Explore the +/- of the relationship.

Do you consider any of the people (i.e. students, staff, mentors, others) you met while a part of CWU and the Woman to Woman program as now part of your circle (i.e. social network)? Explain …

If so, in what instances might you reach out to them?

Are there any (or do you anticipate any) difficulties/challenges in adding new people to your circle? (i.e. time commitments, travel, expectations, etc.).
Wrap Up
Is there anything else about CWU or Woman to Woman that you’d like to mention that you didn’t yet have a chance to? Is there anything else about the steps you made toward your goals that you’d like to share?
Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences
APPENDIX V
Interview guide: CWU senior staff

I am interested in learning about how organizations influence the social networks of the people they serve. Sometimes this happens intentionally (i.e. a program will purposively try to connect clients to other people they might not otherwise know – for example, mentoring program) and sometimes this may happen unintentionally for a variety of reasons, such as a result of the way a program is structured (for example, sitting next to the same people in a classroom environment a client may naturally connect with a fellow student). I’d like to learn more about CWU’s view and approach to social networks.

I’d like to begin by asking you to share with me how CWU understands social networks, and what they mean for the women and families we serve?
   - What value / purpose does the organization see in maximizing social networks?

I’d like to get an understanding, if you recall, the development of the Bride to SS and how social networks came to be one of the identified sub-pillars.
   - What was the inspiration for including social networks? As opposed to another category?

Are there ways in which the organization intentionally tries to develop participants’ social network position on the Bridge? How so - examples?
   - Within program models?
   - Individual staff efforts and activities?
   - Are there ways non-program staff contribute?
   - Are there things that CWU does as an organization (rather than an individual program model) that contributes to these efforts? Approaches, activities, events, etc.
   - Does CWU draw upon the organization’s network of partners, providers, volunteers to find ways to connect participants to people as a strategy to maximize their social network?
     ▪ How does the organization cultivate these ties?

Are there ways in which CWU supports staff around these efforts to create connections for participants? How so?
   - Are there tools provided?
   - Skill building? Workshops
   - Activities / Team Meetings?

Can you think of any downsides to trying to develop people’s social networks? Can you provide examples of challenges women may face, or any negative aspects or unanticipated consequences encountered?

Do you know of ways in which CWU may maximize participants’ social network position on the Bridge that aren’t intentional, but happen anyway?
# APPENDIX VI
## CWU Bridge to Self-Sufficiency™ assessment tool

## Bridge to Self-Sufficiency™ Assessment Tool

### General Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant/Guest’s Name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWU Program:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMI Specialist:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWU Case Manager/Stabilization Mentor:</td>
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</tr>
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### Family Stability

#### Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
<th>Column 5</th>
<th>Column 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2b</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless / emergency shelter</td>
<td>Homeless / co-housed with family or friends</td>
<td>Homeless / transitional housing</td>
<td>Full subsidy, permanent housing: Paying $200 or less towards rent</td>
<td>Partial subsidy (shallow): Paying $200 or more towards rent</td>
<td>No subsidy, housing costs exceed 1/3 household take-home pay</td>
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#### Dependents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
<th>Column 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently emergent or not yet addressed dependent needs, requiring additional attention</td>
<td>Dependent needs serving as significant obstacle to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Dependent needs serving as intermittent disruption to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Dependent needs serving as minimal disruption to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Dependent needs not serving as no barrier to parent/guardian school or work, or no dependents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Family stability comments:

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### Well-Being

#### HEALTH AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Severely limited engagement in work, school, and/or family due to significant health/behavioral health issues</td>
<td>Regular and recurring disruptions to work, school, and/or family due to health/behavioral health issues</td>
<td>Intermittent disruptions to work, school, and/or family due to health/behavioral health issues</td>
<td>Minimal disruption to work, school, and/or family due to health/behavioral health issues</td>
<td>Fully engaged in work, school, and/or family. Health/behavioral health issues serving as no obstacle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### SOCIAL NETWORKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Isolated or draining network</td>
<td>Limited network: Occasional source of support</td>
<td>Emerging Network: Consistent source of support and occasional leveraging connections</td>
<td>Developed Network: Consistent source of both support and leveraging connections</td>
<td>Advocate / Networker: Uses own and other resources and connections to advance the mobility goals of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Well-Being Comments:**

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## Education and Training

### Educational Attainment

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<th>2</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED)</td>
<td>High school diploma or GED obtained</td>
<td>Attending postsecondary remedial education classes, college preparatory program, or fulfilling prerequisites for job training/ readiness program</td>
<td>Completed postsecondary remedial education classes, college preparatory program, or prerequisites for job training/ readiness program</td>
<td>Attending college or postsecondary job training program</td>
<td>Completed associate’s degree or postsecondary job training or certificate program</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
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</tr>
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**Education and Training Comments:**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

## Financial Management

### Savings

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No savings</td>
<td>Savings of less than one month’s expenses</td>
<td>Savings of at least one month and up to two months’ expenses</td>
<td>Savings of more than two months’ expenses but less than three months’ expenses</td>
<td>Savings of three months’ expenses or more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Debt

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defaults or nonpayment on all or most loans and accounts</td>
<td>Debts in excess of ability to pay, behind in payments</td>
<td>Structured payment plans in place and meeting minimum payments</td>
<td>Current in payments and plans and paying more than minimum payments</td>
<td>Current on all balances and no outstanding debt other than mortgage or educational and/or car loans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Financial Management Comments:**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
252


APPENDIX VII
Data table: Post-survey number of ties results for subset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
<th>LEVERAGE TIES: Career</th>
<th>LEVERAGE TIES: School</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE TIES: Small Favors</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE TIES: Emotional Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean # of ties identified</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>4.133</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>6-18</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who identify 0 ties within identified domain</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of network comprised of CWU brokered ties</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX VIII
Data table: Post-survey tie strength results for subset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
<th>LEVERAGE TIES: Career</th>
<th>LEVERAGE TIES: School</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE TIES: Small Favors</th>
<th>SUPPORTIVE TIES: Emotional Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.016</td>
<td>2.784</td>
<td>3.544</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Weak (1,2)</td>
<td>21% [29/141]</td>
<td>23% [14/62]</td>
<td>31% [16/51]</td>
<td>9% [5/57]</td>
<td>4% [2/50]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Strong (3,4)</td>
<td>79% [112/141]</td>
<td>77% [48/62]</td>
<td>69% [35/51]</td>
<td>91% [52/57]</td>
<td>96% [48/50]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>