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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Social Service Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (June 2010), pp. 175-200

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/653457>

Accessed: 07/11/2012 20:58

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Temporary Employment and the Transition from Welfare to Work

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This study analyzes the employment patterns of current and former welfare recipients over a 6-year period to examine who works in temporary jobs, the dynamics of temping, and the training and links to regular jobs that temping provides. It also compares the long-term employment outcomes of temps with those of direct-hire employees. Results suggest recipients who temp and recipients who work only in direct-hire jobs are more alike than different in skill deficits, work barriers, and family constraints. The major difference is recipients who temp are more likely to be African American. Most recipients who temp do so for short periods of time; many report temporary employment provides training and links to regular jobs. At the end of 6 years, the employment rates and employment durations for recipients who temp are similar to those for recipients who work only in direct-hire jobs, but temps have statistically significantly lower hourly wages.

Many current and former welfare recipients work in temporary jobs (hereafter temps) as they transition from the welfare rolls into work. Critics claim this is a problem because temp agencies place welfare recipients in low-paid, unstable jobs that provide no benefits, offer few chances to learn new job skills, and forge few links to regular work (see Nollen 1996; Hudson 1999; Jorgensen and Riemer 2000; U.S. General Accounting Office 2000; Campaign on Contingent Work 2001; Autor and Houseman 2002; Booth, Francesconi, and Frank 2002; Benner, Leete, and Pastor 2007). David Autor and Susan Houseman (2002) use the term “revolving door” to describe the cycle that temporary employment condemns workers to temp jobs and unstable regular jobs.

Another view is that temp work gives welfare recipients the chance to develop the job skills and experiences that can serve as a stepping-

stone to better and permanent jobs (Autor and Houseman 2002; Booth et al. 2002; Andersson, Holzer, and Lane 2005, 2009; Heinrich, Mueser, and Troske 2005; Benner et al. 2007; Heinrich et al. 2007; Kvasnicka 2008). By working in temp agency placements, difficult-to-employ welfare recipients may gain training in appropriate workplace behaviors, appropriate dress, punctuality, and customer relations. Employers may use temp agencies to try out workers who would otherwise have difficulty obtaining work due to their irregular employment records (Houseman 2001). Recipients who could obtain direct-hire jobs may prefer temp jobs if temp jobs provide more opportunities to learn new skills than do direct-hire jobs.

Supporters of temp jobs also point out that temporary employment provides flexibility to move into and out of the labor market without penalty (Andersson et al. 2005, 2009; Heinrich et al. 2005, 2007; Kvasnicka 2008). Such flexibility is potentially useful to workers facing family crises or child care needs (Morris and Vekker 2001). Entering the workforce as a temp may be a good strategy for welfare recipients with high family demands or for recipients who place a high value on balancing family and work.

Both advocates and critics of temp work agree that these jobs pay less, are less stable, and offer fewer benefits than most direct-hire jobs (Hudson 1999; Morris and Vekker 2001; Booth et al. 2002; Benner et al. 2007). They also agree that the long-term goal of welfare reform is to place recipients in stable jobs that provide benefits and an escape from poverty. But advocates and critics differ on four points: (1) who temps, (2) the dynamics of temping, (3) whether temp jobs provide training and links to regular employment, and (4) whether temp jobs improve or harm recipients' long-run economic prospects.

This article analyzes data from a panel study of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients in an urban Michigan county. It tracks their involvement in temp work over a 6-year period following the 1996 welfare reform. The study compares the recipients who temped at some point over the 6 years with those of recipients who worked only in direct-hire jobs (direct hires). It relies on a rich set of measures to capture aspects of participants' human capital, work norms, health, mental health, substance use, domestic violence, family characteristics, and welfare history. The measures also capture respondents' reports concerning the training opportunities and links to regular employment that temporary help agencies and temp jobs provide over the 6-year study period. Analyses compare temps with direct hires on five work outcomes at the end of the 6-year period. These outcomes include employment rates, employment durations, employment stability, wages, and supervisory responsibilities. These estimates control for more detailed measures of job skills, work barriers, family constraints, and welfare histories than have prior studies.

Background

Why would any welfare recipient take a temp job? One reason may be that some recipients work as temps because employment barriers and skill deficits prevent them from obtaining direct-hire jobs. Evidence is inconclusive on the job readiness of recipients who temp. Autor and Houseman (2002) find that new TANF recipients who take temp jobs have lower earnings in the 5 quarters before entering TANF than new TANF recipients who take direct-hire jobs. This finding suggests that recipients who temp may be less employable than those who take direct-hire jobs. However, Carolyn Heinrich, Peter Mueser, and Kenneth Troske (2004, 2005, 2007) compare the attributes of current and former welfare recipients, finding that temps' age, education, and work experience are close to those of direct hires. Most previous studies examine only a few of the factors that could affect recipients' work outcomes, so they are of limited use in testing whether recipients who temp are less work-ready than recipients who work in direct-hire jobs. For example, TANF recipients with learning disabilities, health problems, or skill deficits may be less likely than other recipients to be hired directly by employers. They therefore may be more likely to work as temps.

Another reason that recipients may take temp jobs is to gain skills. Recipients who expect to gain skills are not necessarily only those with skill deficits; temp jobs may be taken by recipients who accept them to get better jobs in the future, regardless of current skill levels. In this case, the relationship between skill deficits and temporary employment may be ambiguous. There may be a lack of prediction of a positive correlation between skill deficits and temping.

Flexibility is yet another reason that welfare recipients may prefer temp jobs to direct-hire jobs. Michael Morris and Alexander Vekker (2001) report that one in three temps prefers a temp arrangement to a traditional job. Some recipients may choose temp work as a way to handle heavy family demands. If so, one might expect the incidence of temp work to be correlated with family responsibilities, such that incidence would be high among single mothers, women with young children, and women whose children have health problems. However, the flexibility provided by temp jobs may attract women who value, rather than need, flexibility; women concerned with work-life balance may choose temp jobs over direct-hire jobs. Previous studies provide little or no information on whether recipients who temp have more family demands or place a higher value on family-work balance than recipients who take direct-hire jobs.

Some advocates highlight the advantages of temp jobs for poorly educated welfare recipients who have few job skills and spotty work records. If this view were correct, then temp work should be short term, temp jobs should provide training and links to permanent work, and

the long-term employment outcomes of a recipient who temps at some point should be better than they would have been if she did not take a temp job. In contrast, critics maintain that temping offers low-paid, unstable jobs that provide little training and few links to permanent jobs. If this criticism is accurate, the incidence of temp work should remain high over time. So too, one would expect that temps will not gain the skills and connections needed to move out of dead-end jobs. One might also expect that a recipient who temps will have worse long-term outcomes than she would if she did not take a temp job.

The existing research does not indicate which of these competing predictions is accurate. Little research examines the dynamics of temping by TANF recipients, but some evidence supports the claim that temp jobs provide training and links to regular jobs. Autor (2001) reports that temporary help agencies provide training in basic computer skills. Houseman (2001) states that roughly one in five private employers who hire temps claims that it does so to screen for candidates for regular jobs. In analyzing hiring practices of auto parts manufacturers and hospitals, Houseman, Arne Kalleberg, and George Erickcek (2003, 105) observe: "In low-skill occupations, temporary help agencies appear to have facilitated the use of more 'risky' workers by lowering their wages and benefits and the costs associated with turnover."

Researchers reach different conclusions about the long-term economic consequences of taking a temp job. Autor and Houseman (2006, forthcoming) use data from a Detroit Work First program that randomly assigns TANF recipients to service providers with differing rates of placements in temporary help jobs. They use different job placement practices across service providers to identify the effects of holding a temp job on subsequent employment outcomes. They find that temp agencies increase the short-term earnings of TANF recipients but that the long-term employment of recipients who temp is characterized by lower earnings, less frequent employment, and higher welfare recidivism than that of direct hires. They caution that their results apply only to "marginal temporary-help job placements induced by the randomization of Work First participants across contractors, and therefore do not preclude the possibility that infra-marginal temporary-help placements generate significant benefits" (Autor and Houseman, forthcoming). Autor and Houseman (forthcoming) conclude that placing low-skilled workers in temporary-help jobs is no more effective than providing no job placements at all.

In contrast, several studies find that temp employment does not harm, and can improve, the subsequent employment outcomes of low-skilled workers (Lane et al. 2003; Andersson et al. 2005, 2009; Heinrich et al. 2005, 2007). Fredrik Andersson, Harry Holzer, and Julia Lane (2009) analyze longitudinal matched data on workers and firms, controlling

for fixed personal characteristics. They report that, compared with the earnings of other low earners, temp workers' subsequent earnings are often higher if they manage to obtain stable work with other employers. They also find that these positive effects persist for up to 6 years after the period of temping. These analysts, unlike Autor and Houseman (2006, forthcoming), do not use random assignments to deal with heterogeneity, and the findings may suffer from the selection bias that characterizes any nonexperimental design.

Four factors limit the usefulness of existing studies on TANF recipients' temporary employment. First, there is not enough data on the characteristics of recipients to enable comparisons of temps and direct hires on work readiness and family situations. The data set analyzed here has detailed data on skills, work norms, health problems, alcohol or drug dependence, experiences of domestic violence, family situations, and welfare records. These data enable the study to go beyond previous research by more fully assessing whether temps have more skill deficits, work barriers, and family constraints than do direct hires. Second, few studies track TANF recipients' temp employment over multiple years, and so little is known about the long-term dynamics of temping. This study's data set tracks temp employment over 6 years. Third, many estimates of the extent to which temp jobs provide training and links to regular jobs are based on data from temporary agencies or employers, both of which may exaggerate these advantages. The data analyzed here detail respondents' own reports of the extent to which temp work provided them with training and links to regular jobs. Fourth, most previous studies on temping's associations with recipients' economic prospects are unable to fully control for selection bias (i.e., factors that affect selection into temping).¹ The question of interest is not whether employment outcomes are worse for those recipients who temp than for recipients who do not temp, but whether recipients who temp would be better off if they themselves did not temp. There are likely unobserved differences between recipients who temp and recipients who do not temp. Estimates of associations between temping and long-term work outcomes will pick up effects of any unobserved differences that also affect work outcomes.

This study analyzes rich data on skills, barriers, and family constraints hypothesized in prior studies to affect entry into temp work. As a result, if analyses control for observed heterogeneity, the study can estimate associations between temping and subsequent work outcomes more precisely than has prior research. Like most prior research, however, this study cannot control for unobserved heterogeneity that affects selection into temp work.

Research Questions

This study addresses several questions. First, it attempts to ascertain who temps. Are current and former TANF recipients who temp less work-ready than recipients who take direct-hire jobs? Do temps have more skill deficits, more work barriers, more family constraints, and longer welfare histories than direct hires?

Second, the study investigates the extent to which current and former TANF recipients use temp agencies over the 6-year period. How many recipients are repeat users? Does the use of temp agencies decline over time (supporting the stepping-stone view) or remain high (as the revolving-door argument would suggest)?

Third, the study examines recipients' reports about the training received and job skills learned while temping. What kinds of training do they receive? How many are offered a regular job by an employer after temping?

Fourth, if analyses control for detailed measures of skills deficits, physical and mental health problems, alcohol or drug dependence, domestic violence, family constraints, and welfare records, how do the employment rate, employment duration, employment stability, wages, and supervisory responsibility of recipients who temp at some point during the 6 years compare with those of recipients who work only in direct-hire jobs?

Data Set, Sample, and Measures

In five interviews conducted with a representative sample of white and African American welfare recipients, the Women's Employment Study (WES) collected data on personal and family characteristics as well as on work outcomes. Respondents were selected with equal probability from the universe of the February 1997 caseload of female cash welfare recipients with children who resided in one urban Michigan county. Macroeconomic conditions in this county were similar to national conditions in the first years of WES, but unemployment rose more rapidly in this county than in the United States starting in 2001.² Michigan's quick labor force attachment model and administrative structure are typical of welfare systems across the country. Michigan's benefit levels and earnings disregards are typical of those in the 10 states that made up 70 percent of the federal TANF caseload in 1999 (Danziger and Seefeldt 2000; Johnson and Corcoran 2003; Turner, Danziger, and Seefeldt 2006).

Eligible respondents were between the ages of 18 and 54 in 1997. They are either white or African American, and all are U.S. citizens. The 1997 caseload in this county included too few members of other racial and ethnic groups to study their experiences. These women were

interviewed in their homes in five waves: fall 1997, fall 1998, fall 1999 and winter 2000, fall 2001 and winter 2002, and fall 2003. The duration of interviews averaged about 1 hour at the initial interview and about 85 minutes for subsequent waves. The initial sample included 875 women, and the response rate at wave 1 was 86 percent ($n = 753$); the cumulative response rate at wave 5 was 62 percent ($n = 536$).³ Interviews for the fifth wave were conducted between 78 and 82 months after the sample was drawn. This is approximately 6 to 6 and a half years after the first wave.

The characteristics of the women in the WES sample are similar to those of nationally representative samples of welfare recipients. The welfare reforms to which the WES sample were exposed are similar to those in other states whose recipients account for a majority of the national TANF caseload. So too, trends in welfare receipt and employment among these respondents are comparable to those found in nationally representative samples.⁴

The sample for this study consists of women who were present at all five waves. The authors dropped from the analyses 43 women who reported receiving supplemental security income at any wave, because these women were not subject to TANF work requirements. The sample also excludes 10 women who reported they never worked between the first and fifth interviews. The final sample for the analyses consists of 483 respondents, all of whom were employed at some point over the 6-year period of the study. Fifty-six percent of the women were African American. The average age was 30 years in 1997; about half of the women were between 25 and 34 years old. On average, the respondents in this sample spent 7.3 years on welfare between age 18 and the wave 1 interview.

In waves 2, 3, 4, and 5, women were asked whether they worked for a temporary help agency between the prior wave's interview and that interview (and, if so, to specify the number of weeks), whether a temp job ever led to a regular job, and whether they received training or learned new skills when working as a temp. Respondents were not asked whether they applied to temporary help agencies directly or were referred to the agencies by Work First providers. In fall 1998, the respondents answered a series of questions about the kinds of training provided by temporary help agencies. This can include training in computers, business and industrial skills, safety, interview protocols, workplace rules, and general job conduct.

For the purposes of this study, a temp is defined as a woman who reported in at least one interview that she worked for a temp agency. This measure picks up both temping that occurred soon after respondents are observed on the TANF rolls in fall 1997 and temping that occurs several years after respondents leave TANF. Analyses further differentiate women who temp during only one wave from women who

temp for two or more waves. This differentiation allows the study to compare the characteristics and experiences of women who have short-term involvement in temp work with those of women who have longer term involvement. This study defines a direct hire as a woman who worked only in direct-hire jobs between waves 1 and 5.

The current temp measures differ from those used in prior studies. Previous measures typically define temping over a shorter time period at a critical juncture when individuals are experiencing poor employment outlooks.⁵ For example, Autor and Houseman (forthcoming) study clients who were assigned to various job placement services. They focus on the effects of temp positions on individuals seeking (or required to seek) employment. Similarly, Heinrich and colleagues (2007) examine individuals who joined TANF or sought services from a job training or employment search service.

Respondents at wave 1 were asked about their age, prior work experience, and prior welfare use. The work experience question was, "How many years altogether have you worked for pay since you were 18?" The welfare use question was, "For how many years total have you received ADC [Aid to Dependent Children] or FIP [Family Independence Program, Michigan's TANF program] since you turned 18?"

At each wave, WES asked about schooling, job skills, work experiences, physical health problems, mental health problems (post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], major depression, and generalized anxiety disorder), alcohol and drug use, experience of domestic violence, access to transportation, marital status, pregnancies, number of children, children's health problems, and welfare records. Respondents were asked about nine workplace norms at wave 1. They completed a literacy test at wave 3 and were asked a set of questions about learning disabilities at wave 4.

This study employs two measures of demographic characteristics, one measure of prior welfare use, seven measures of work barriers, and four measures of family characteristics. The measures of skill deficits and work barriers are designed to be comparable to measures that are used in prior studies of WES respondents' employment outcomes and that are found to be strong predictors of such employment outcomes as labor market disconnection, employment rate, employment duration, wages, and wage growth (Corcoran, Heflin, and Siefert 1999; Danziger et al. 2000, 2002; Jayakody, Danziger, and Pollack 2000; Danziger, Carlson, and Henly 2001; Johnson and Corcoran 2003; Corcoran, Danziger, and Tolman 2004; Turner et al. 2006).

Race is measured by a dummy variable that indicates whether the respondent is African American. Age is measured as of the wave 1 interview. Welfare history is measured by the number of years in which a woman received welfare between age 18 and the wave 1 interview.

Schooling is measured by a categorical variable that characterizes respondents' highest level of educational attainment as less than high

school, general equivalency diploma (GED), high school graduate, or more than a high school graduate. Literacy is assessed using the Wide Range Achievement Test-3 (WRAT-3). A raw score of 36 or below on the WRAT-3 reading test is equivalent to a fifth-grade reading ability. In assessing literacy, WES did not assess letter identification (15 points), so a respondent is considered to have a literacy deficiency if her score is 21 or lower. Learning disabilities are assessed using the Washington State Learning Needs Screening Tool. Positive responses to the 13-item screening instrument are weighed and then summed. A total score of 12 represents a high risk for a learning disability and is here considered to indicate the presence of such a disability.

This study assesses job skills with a list adapted from a study by Harry Holzer (1996). A respondent is coded as having low job skills if she performed fewer than four of 10 listed tasks in the jobs she held prior to wave 1. These tasks include writing letters or memos, filling out forms, using math, working with electronic machines, talking with customers, working on computers, and supervising others (see Danziger et al. [2000] for more details on this job skills measure). Knowledge of work norms is measured at wave 1 by a dummy variable that indicates whether a respondent reported knowing about each of nine behavioral norms. A respondent is classified as lacking knowledge of work norms if she does not know about at least five of the nine norms. These norms include calling in if absent from work, correcting problems pointed out by supervisors, being on time, refraining from making personal calls at work, not leaving early without prior approval, not taking longer breaks than scheduled, not arguing with customers, not refusing tasks outside the job description, and not arguing with supervisors (Berg, Olson, and Conrad 1991). Work experience is measured as the number of years in which the respondent worked between age 18 and the wave 1 interview. The cutoffs for the job skills and work norms measures are the same as those used in prior analyses of WES data (Corcoran et al. 1999, 2004; Danziger et al. 2000, 2001, 2002; Jayakody et al. 2000; Johnson and Corcoran 2003; Turner et al. 2006). Job skills, work norms, and work experiences are measured in wave 1 because temp work is hypothesized to provide recipients who are not work-ready with the opportunities to acquire skills, knowledge of work norms, and experience.

Work barriers are also measured at wave 1. For this study, a work barrier is any condition (other than family pressures and skills) that could potentially limit a woman's ability to work regularly. Women's physical health is assessed using items from the Physical Functioning subscale of SF-36 (Ware et al. 1993). Respondents who scored in the lowest age-specific quartile (based on population norms) at wave 1 are defined as having a physical limitation (see Danziger et al. 2000). Measures of mental health diagnoses (PTSD, major depression, and generalized anxiety disorder) and substance use are based on diagnostic

screening batteries for 12-month prevalence using the Composite International Diagnostic Interview derived from the National Comorbidity Survey (Kessler et al. 1994). The measure of alcohol or drug dependence is more restrictive than a simple use or abuse measure; the respondent had to report that she suffers from clinically significant impairment or distress due to her alcohol or drug abuse. Domestic violence is assessed using a modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus 1979). Severe domestic violence is measured by a dummy variable that indicates whether the respondent reported experiencing one or more of the following by a partner in the 12 months prior to the wave 1 interview: being hit with a fist, being hit with an object that could hurt, being beaten, being choked, being threatened with or hurt by a weapon, and being forced into sexual activity against her will. The cutoffs for the mental health, alcohol or drug dependence, and severe domestic violence measures are standardized ones (see Danziger et al. 2000). A woman is defined as having a transportation problem at wave 1 if she reported that she does not have a valid driver's license, does not own a car, or does not have regular use of a car.

Four measures examine family characteristics that might influence work choices. A dummy variable indicates whether the respondent reported at wave 1 that she was married or cohabitating, and another dummy variable indicates whether the respondent reported at the wave 1 interview that she was pregnant. Respondents in the first wave also reported the number of dependent children who were 2 years or younger. A respondent is defined as having a child with a health problem if she reported at wave 1 that one of her children has a physical, emotional, or learning problem.

At wave 5, respondents reported on their employment between waves 4 and 5. They also reported on characteristics and skill content of the current or most recent job held between waves 4 and 5. These data are used to construct five employment measures. Employment rate is measured by a dummy variable that indicates whether the respondent reported that she was employed at the wave 5 interview. Employment duration is measured as the reported percentage of months in which the respondent worked between waves 4 and 5. Employment stability is measured by the reported number of job losses that occurred in the 12 months prior to the wave 5 interview and that were followed by a month or more of nonwork. Hourly wage is defined as the reported hourly earnings from a woman's current or most recent primary job (measured at wave 5 in 2003 dollars). Supervisory responsibility is measured at wave 5 by asking the respondent if she supervises others on a daily basis in her current or most recent job.

The extensive data from WES on personal attributes allow the analyses to control for a wide range of skill deficits, work barriers, and family characteristics in comparing the long-term work outcomes of temps and

direct hires. These controls allow the analyses to adjust for measured heterogeneity that may affect both the decision to temp and long-run work outcomes. Respondents in WES, however, chose whether or not to work at temp jobs; they were not randomly assigned to temp work. Thus, the analyses cannot fully control for self-selection into temporary employment. This study presumes that recipients choose temp jobs rather than direct-hire jobs because they expect to benefit from that choice in the future. These benefits are forward looking, not backward looking, and a woman's calculation of future benefits depends on her motivations as well as on the job opportunities available to her. Neither of these is observed in the WES data. For instance, women who are work-ready may choose temp jobs over direct-hire jobs if the available temp jobs provide opportunities to learn new skills that available direct-hire jobs do not. Similarly, a mother may choose temp work over direct-hire work because she places a high value on family commitments, not because she has unusually high family demands.⁶ The WES data allow the analyses to precisely estimate associations between work outcomes and temping, as well as to control for observed heterogeneity; however, they do not allow a comparison of temping's causal effects on work outcomes with the causal effects of not temping; it is not possible to control for unobserved heterogeneity.

Results

Who Temps? Are Temps Less Work-Ready than Direct Hires? Do Temps Have More Family Constraints than Direct Hires?

Table 1 shows the results of a comparison of temps and direct hires. The table's two rightmost columns report estimates of the marginal effects of the measures on the likelihood of temping. These estimates are based on results from a multinomial logistic regression model that predicts who temps in each group (at only one wave; at two or more waves) as a function of the measured factors.

First, results in table 1 suggest that, as expected, the rates of skill deficits and work barriers are high. Approximately 19 percent of both temps and direct hires are found to have literacy deficiencies (indicating that they read at or below the fifth-grade level). At wave 1, 43 percent of temps and 46 percent of direct hires reported that they have a physical limitation; 25 percent of temps and 26 percent of direct hires are found to meet the diagnostic screening criteria for major depression.

Second, African Americans are more likely to temp than whites (68 percent compared to 48 percent). Race is strongly and statistically significantly associated with temping even among women with similar job skills, work barriers, family situations, and welfare histories. Heinrich

Table 1
INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AT WAVE 1 AND MARGINAL EFFECTS PREDICTING WHO TEMPS

	Direct Hires (Do Not Temp)	SAMPLE MEANS		MARGINAL EFFECTS ^a	
		Temp at Only One Wave	Temp at Two or More Waves	Temp at Only One Wave	Temp at Two or More Waves
Demographic characteristics:					
African American (%)	48.1	67.6**	67.5**	14.9**	8.6*
Age (% who are):					
18-24 years old	24.7	30.6	28.8		-5.2
25-34 years old	48.5	45.4	53.8	1.1	-14.4**
35+ years old	26.8	24.1	17.5	4.0	
Skill deficits:					
Education (%):					
Less than high school	28.5	29.6	30.0		
GED	8.1	8.3	3.8	.6	-7.7
High school graduate	28.1	29.6	40.0	-2.5	6.7
More than high school graduate	35.3	32.4	26.3	-3.2	-3.9
Literacy deficiency (%)	19.7	15.7	22.5	-9.4*	-3.7
Learning disability (%)	9.5	12.0	15.0	8.7	3.3
Fewer than four job skills (%)	15.9	19.4	20.0	3.5	3.0
Fewer than five work norms (%)	10.5	5.6 ⁺	7.5	-10.0 ⁺	-4.1
Years worked (age 18 to wave 1)	6.79	6.25	6.68	.0	.6 ⁺
Barriers to work (%):					
Physical limitation	45.4	45.8	42.5	1.4	-5.6
PTSD	15.3	13.9	20.0	-2.2	4.0

Major depression	26.2	25.0	26.3	2.1	1.9
Generalized anxiety disorder	8.6	4.7	6.3	-12.2*	-4.2
Alcohol or drug dependence	6.1	7.4	2.5	15.7	-9.3 ⁺
Severe domestic violence	16.6	14.8	22.5	-6.6	3.1
Transportation problem	39.7	41.7	50.0	-3.7	3.9
Family characteristics:					
Married or cohabited (%)	24.7	17.6	31.3	-4.6	9.3 ⁺
Pregnant at wave 1 (%)	4.7	6.5	8.8	-8	16.7
No. dependent children ages 0-2	.46	.57	.55	4.2	2.0
Child health problem (%)	21.8	18.7	23.8	-3.2	3.0
Welfare histories prior to wave 1:					
Years on welfare (age 18 to wave 1)	7.23	6.93	8.10	-.5	1.0*
Sample <i>n</i>	295	108	80		468 ^b

NOTE.—GED = general equivalency diploma; PTSD = post-traumatic stress disorder. Sample includes women who were present at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; did not receive supplemental security income for themselves at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; and ever worked between waves 1 and 5.

^a Multinomial logit regression controlling for race, age, six measures of skill deficits, seven measures of job barriers, four measures of family characteristics, and welfare histories prior to wave 1. The mean predicted probability of temping at only one wave is 21.0%; the mean predicted probability of temping at two or more waves is 14.5%.

^b Sample size is smaller than the total sample *n* because of missing data on some predictor measures at wave 1.

+ $p < .10$ (differences between direct hires and respondents who temp at only one wave, as well as those between direct hires and respondents who temp at two or more waves).

* $p < .05$ (differences between direct hires and respondents who temp at only one wave, as well as those between direct hires and respondents who temp at two or more waves).

** $p < .01$ (differences between direct hires and respondents who temp at only one wave, as well as those between direct hires and respondents who temp at two or more waves).

and colleagues (2005, 2007) also find that race strongly predicts who works in temporary jobs.

Third, women who reported that they temp at multiple waves are found to spend more years on welfare between age 18 and wave 1 (8.1 years), on average, than direct hires do (7.2 years). The mean difference is not statistically significant; the predicted marginal effect of this welfare history measure on the probability of temping at two or more waves is statistically significant in analyses that control for race, age, job skills, work barriers, and family characteristics.

Fourth, temps and direct hires seem to be more alike than different. Some analysts argue that temp jobs provide an employment option for hard-to-employ recipients (Autor and Houseman 2002; Booth et al. 2002; Benner et al. 2007). This assertion leads the current authors to speculate that women who temp might have higher rates of skill deficits and work barriers than those who work only in direct-hire jobs. Contrary to this speculation, the mean rates of skill deficits and work barriers for direct hires do not respectively differ to a statistically significant degree from those for either group of temps. None of the coefficients for the skill deficits or work barrier measures is found in the multinomial logistic regression to be statistically significantly predictive of who temps.

Because the sample is not large, analyses also compare direct hires and temps on the point estimates for skills deficits and work barriers. Differences in these point estimates are typically small and statistically nonsignificant in the comparison of direct hires with respondents who temped at only one wave. In the comparison of direct hires with respondents who temped at two or more waves, the differences are also statistically nonsignificant. However, those differences are large for four of the 13 skill deficit and work barrier measures. Women who temp at two or more waves have higher rates of learning disabilities (15 percent compared to 10 percent), PTSD (20 percent compared to 15 percent), severe domestic violence (23 percent compared to 17 percent), and transportation problems (50 percent compared to 40 percent), than do direct hires. Statistically significant differences might emerge in analyses with a larger sample.⁷

Fifth, the estimates indicate that family characteristics for temps do not differ to a statistically significant degree from those for direct hires, but there is one exception. If analyses control for race, age, job skills, work barriers, and welfare histories, mothers who reported that they were married or cohabiting at wave 1 are more likely to temp at two or more waves than are single mothers. This association is marginally significant.

Table 2

DISTRIBUTION OF WEEKS TEMPED BETWEEN WAVE 1 (FEBRUARY 1997)
AND WAVE 5 (FALL 2003)

	All Women (<i>n</i> = 483) ^a	Women Who Ever Temped (<i>n</i> = 188) ^b
Never temped	61.3	.0
Temped 1 day to 6 weeks	13.3	34.4
Temped 7–13 weeks	9.1	23.7
Temped 14–26 weeks	7.1	18.3
Temped 27–52 weeks	6.7	17.2
Temped >1 year	2.5	6.5

NOTE.—Sample includes women who were present at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; did not receive supplemental security income for themselves at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; and worked at any time between waves 1 and 5.

^a There are two missing cases on weeks temped (*n* = 481).

^b There are two missing cases on weeks temped (*n* = 186).

Do Recipients Persistently Use Temporary Help Agencies? Do Temp Jobs Provide Training and Links to Direct-Hire Jobs?

Critics of temp work assert that temping is a revolving door. They argue that recipients who temp will continuously cycle in and out of temp jobs. Advocates, by contrast, maintain that temp jobs provide training and links to regular jobs.

The results of analyses on the use of temporary help agencies among current and former welfare recipients do not support the assertion that recipients who temp become trapped in a revolving door. The percentage of women working as temps is found to decline over time, from 21 percent between waves 1 and 2, 18 percent between waves 2 and 3, 15 percent between waves 3 and 4, to 8 percent between waves 4 and 5. Although temp work is common (39 percent of single mothers temped at some point between February 1997 and the fall of 2003), long-term work in temp jobs is not. As shown in table 2, almost 60 percent of the women who ever temp reported that they do so for 13 or fewer weeks. Only 24 percent of women who ever temp do so for more than 26 weeks, and only 6.5 percent of women who ever temp do so for more than 1 year.

Moreover, the temp dynamics of short-term welfare recipients do not differ to a statistically significant degree from those of their long-term counterparts. The analyses compare short- and long-term welfare recipients on the percentages of women working as temps between waves as well as on the duration of weeks temped between waves 1 and 5 (results not shown). Long-term welfare recipients are those who reported that they received welfare for 7 or more years between age 18 and the wave 1 interview or for more than 50 percent of the years between age 18 and that interview. The results suggest that the two groups follow the

Table 3

LINKS TO REGULAR WORK AND TRAINING PROVIDED BY TEMPORARY AGENCIES
AND TEMPORARY JOBS

	Percentage
Women who ever temped ($n = 188$):	
Received training or learned new job skills while temping	76.6
Reported temp job led to regular job	30.3
Women who worked for or applied to a temp agency at wave 3 ($n = 108$):	
Skill-based training:	
Computer skills (e.g., data entry, word processing)	3.7
Business skills (e.g., telemarketing, customer service, writing)	7.4
Industrial skills or safety training	38.9
Behavior training:	
How to dress for a job interview	23.2
Workplace rules and general job conduct	46.3
Any of the above	66.7

same pattern of declination in temping between waves and temp for approximately the same durations between waves 1 and 5.

Assumptions of the revolving door perspective are also contradicted by respondents' reports about skills learned on the job and links that temping provides to regular jobs. Table 3 shows temps' responses to questions about the job training and links to regular work provided by temp jobs and agencies. About 77 percent of women who temp reported that they receive training or learn new skills while temping, and 30 percent reported that a temp job led to a regular job. The training received is typically basic. Almost half of the respondents who temp reported receiving training in workplace rules and general conduct, 23 percent reported receiving training in how to dress for a job interview, and 39 percent reported receiving training in industrial skills or safety. In contrast, only 4 percent reported receiving training in computer skills, and only 7 percent reported receiving training in other business skills.

How Do Temps' Long-Term Work Outcomes Compare to Those of Direct Hires?

Table 4 compares the work outcomes of temps with those of direct hires. The first three columns of table 4 report the means of the five work outcome measures at wave 5 (roughly 6 years after the first wave interview). The fourth column reports the predicted mean for each outcome measure, and the two rightmost columns report the estimated marginal effects of temping on each outcome. For each outcome, the predicted means and marginal effects are calculated using coefficients from regressions of that outcome as a function of whether a recipient temped between waves 1 and 5. Models were also estimated with alternative

Table 4

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AT WAVE 5 AND PREDICTED EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AS OF WAVE 5

	SAMPLE MEANS			MARGINAL EFFECTS		
	Direct Hires (Do Not Temp)	Temp at Only One Wave	Temp at Two or More Waves	Predicted Mean Outcomes	Temp at Only One Wave	Temp at Two or More Waves
% employed at wave 5 ($n = 468$) ^a	70.5	64.8	63.8	69.8	-5.7	-4.3 ^b
% months employed between waves 4 and 5 ($n = 468$) ^a	75.2	70.1	71.4	73.7	-4.5	-2.6 ^c
No. job losses in 12 months prior to wave 5 ($n = 424$) ^d	.22	.30	.40*	.21	.08	.11 ^c
Hourly wage (2003 dollars) on current or most recent job ($n = 384$) ^d	9.14	8.02**	8.23 ⁺	8.74	-1.30**	-.86 ^{+,c}
% current or most recent job with supervisory responsibility ($n = 424$) ^d	40.2	30.6 ⁺	25.3*	32.9	-4.4	-8.1 ^b

^a Sample includes women who were present at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; did not receive supplemental security income for themselves at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; and ever worked between waves 1 and 5.

^b Logit regression controlling for race, age, six measures of skill deficits, seven measures of job barriers, four measures of family characteristics, and welfare histories prior to wave 1.

^c Multivariate regression controlling for race, age, six measures of skill deficits, seven measures of job barriers, four measures of family characteristics, and welfare histories prior to wave 1.

^d Sample includes women who were present at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; did not receive supplemental security income for themselves at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; and ever worked between waves 4 and 5.

^e Poisson regression controlling for race, age, six measures of skill deficits, seven measures of job barriers, four measures of family characteristics, and welfare histories prior to wave 1.

⁺ Sample size is smaller because of missing data on hourly wage.

* $p < .10$ (differences between direct hires and respondents who temp at only one wave, as well as those between direct hires and respondents who temp at two or more waves).

** $p < .05$ (differences between direct hires and respondents who temp at only one wave, as well as those between direct hires and respondents who temp at two or more waves).

*** $p < .01$ (differences between direct hires and respondents who temp at only one wave, as well as those between direct hires and respondents who temp at two or more waves).

temping categories. In particular, temping was defined as only temping between waves 1 and 2, only temping between waves 2 and 5, and temping between waves 1 and 2 as well as between waves 2 and 5. These models were estimated to capture the potential differences between temping for a short period at a time of economic distress and long-term involvement in temping. The regression results are essentially the same as those reported in table 4. The analyses reported in table 4 do not include measures of skills and experience acquired between waves 1 and 5. These measures are excluded because temping is predicted to influence work outcomes via its effects on skills and experience. Details of the model specifications and of the calculated marginal effects of other predictors are included in table A1.

At wave 5, the differences between direct hires and temps are found to be small and statistically nonsignificant on rates of employment at wave 5 and on employment durations (the percentage of months employed between waves 4 and 5). The majority of direct hires (71 percent) and temps (64 percent) were employed at wave 5. Respondents in each group worked in nearly three-quarters of the months between the wave 4 and 5 interviews. The results for rates of employment at wave 5 and employment durations (percentages of months employed between waves 4 and 5) are similar to the predicted sample means. These findings suggest that temps who share with comparable demographic characteristics, job skills, work barriers, family situations, and welfare records with direct hires do not differ to a statistically significant degree on these two employment outcome measures. Nonetheless, education level (except having a GED), literacy deficiency, and physical limitation are respectively and statistically significantly associated with the rates of employment at wave 5; learning disability, physical limitation, and transportation problems statistically significantly reduce the employment durations.

The results in table 4 show that direct hires reported statistically significantly fewer job losses over the 12 months prior to wave 5 than did women who temp at two or more waves (0.22 vs. 0.40), but this difference drops in size (from 0.18 to 0.11) and becomes statistically nonsignificant if the model controls for other variables. This reduction is not driven by controlling for any particular set of skills, barriers, or family measures, however. Estimates for this model (see table A1) suggest that age, education level (except having a GED), and number of dependent children under age 2 are respectively and statistically significantly associated with number of job losses in the 12 months prior to wave 5.

Women who reported temping at some point are less likely than direct hires to report that their current or most recent job includes supervisory responsibilities. Between direct hires and women who temp at two or more waves, there is a statistically significant difference in the likelihood of reporting that the position entails supervisory authority. The difference between direct hires and recipients who temp at one wave is mar-

ginally significant. The differences on the likelihood of having a position with supervisory authority drop in size and become statistically nonsignificant in the regressions that control for race. Age, education level (more than high school graduate), number of job skills, and years worked (age 18 to wave 1) are respectively and statistically significantly related to the likelihood of having a job supervisory responsibility; having a pregnancy at wave 1 is found to statistically significantly reduce the probability of holding a job with supervisory responsibility (see table A1).

Women who work only at direct-hire jobs reported higher hourly wages (\$9.14) at wave 5 than did either recipients who temp at only one wave (\$8.02) or those who temp at two or more waves (\$8.23). The gap in wages between direct hires and women who temp at only one wave is statistically significant. The wage gap between direct hires and women who temp at multiple waves is marginally significant. The hourly wage gaps between direct hires and temps are essentially unchanged if estimates control for race, age, skill deficits, work barriers, family characteristics, and welfare histories. Hourly wages also are found to be statistically significantly related to having more education than a high school diploma and to the number of years on welfare between the recipients' eighteenth birthday and the wave 1 interview. Women who have more than a high school education reported an hourly wage that is, on average, \$1.50 higher than the wage reported by recipients who lack a high school education. Receipt of welfare for 1 year is found to reduce the hourly wage by \$0.12.

One possible explanation for the wage gap might be that the current jobs held by temps require fewer hard skills (such as reading, writing, using computers, and doing math) than do the jobs held by direct hires. However, if the daily skill requirements of jobs held by temps at the end of the 6-year period are compared with those of jobs held by direct hires, the differences are small and statistically nonsignificant (results not shown). Respondents reported that more than two-thirds of the jobs require reading and writing (69 percent for both temps and direct hires); about one-third of the jobs require using computers (31 percent for temps and 38 percent for direct hires); and more than half involve doing math (51 percent for temps and 60 percent for direct hires).

Conclusion and Discussion

Like previous research, this study finds that temp work is an integral component of many TANF recipients' employment trajectories as they transition off welfare. Almost 40 percent of women who received TANF benefits in 1997 reported holding a temp job over the subsequent 6 years.

Although temping is a common experience for women who move off of TANF, little is known about the characteristics of recipients who temp. The current study fills that gap. It compares women who temp with

women who only work at direct-hire jobs in the 6 years following the implementation of welfare reform. These women are compared on an unusually rich set of measures of skill deficits, work barriers, family characteristics, and welfare histories. The skill measures include literacy deficiency, learning disabilities, knowledge of work norms, and job skills. The barriers include physical limitations as well as such mental health problems as depression, PTSD, alcohol or drug dependence, and severe domestic violence. An indicator of family pressure measures whether the respondent has a child with a health problem. These attributes are hypothesized in prior research to affect entry into temp work, and many of the attributes are found to be statistically significantly associated with employment, job stability, wages, and wage growth. But these attributes are not statistically significantly associated with entry into temp work in the current study. Contrary to the assumption that recipients who temp do so because they cannot obtain direct-hire jobs, temps and direct hires are found in this study to be remarkably similar in terms of age, skills, qualifications, work barriers, and family situations. The main statistically significant difference found here is that temps are more likely than direct hires to be African American.

Critics express concerns that temp jobs provide little training and few links to regular jobs. They also assert that women who take temp jobs become stuck in a revolving door, repeatedly cycling in and out of temporary employment. The current results provide little support for these predictions. Most of the TANF recipients who temp do not persistently cycle in and out of temporary employment. The majority of women who temped over a 6-year period did so for 13 or fewer weeks, and the percentage of women who temp dropped sharply from 21 percent between waves 1 and 2 to only 8 percent between waves 4 and 5. Respondents' own accounts contradict the assumption that temp jobs provide neither training nor links to regular work. The vast majority of women who temp reported learning job skills either while working as a temp or from agency-provided training. Three in 10 reported that the temping led to a regular job.

This study also compares temps' employment outcomes with those of direct hires at the end of the 6-year period, and the analyses control for measures of respondents' job skills, work barriers, and family situations at the start of that period, as well as for race, age, and prior welfare use. Outcomes of direct hires and temps are more alike than different. At wave 5, direct hires, women who temp at only one wave, and women who temp at two or more waves have similar employment rates and similar employment durations. Gaps between direct hires and respondents who temp at one wave are found to be small and statistically nonsignificant in the results for employment stability (number of job losses in the 12 months prior to wave 5) and supervisory authority. The gaps between direct hires and women who temp at two or more waves

are modest in size and statistically nonsignificant. Direct hires and temps differ on hourly wages, however. Respondents who temp reported statistically significantly lower average wages than did women who work only in direct-hire jobs.

To summarize, the current analyses provide clear answers to the four research questions posed at the beginning of this article. First, who temps? The results indicate the majority of recipients who temp have the same degree of measured work readiness as recipients who work only in direct-hire jobs, and both sets of recipients have similar family characteristics. Second, do recipients persistently use temporary help agencies? The results suggest that most recipients who take temp jobs are not trapped in temp work. Third, do temp jobs provide training and links to direct-hire jobs? The results show that most recipients who temp receive training; three in 10 reported that they were offered a regular job after temping. Fourth, how do temps' long-term work outcomes compare to those of direct hires? The comparisons of work outcomes between temps and direct hires are descriptive not causal, because of self-selection. In the analyses that control for observed heterogeneity, the associations between temping and subsequent work outcomes are only statistically significant on hourly wages.

Several issues are raised by these results. First, although most respondents who temp do so only briefly, a very small minority temped for over a year. Because of self-selection, the analyses could not ascertain why some temps are slow to move into direct-hire jobs. The recipients who temp at multiple waves have longer prior welfare histories; perhaps some long-term temp workers are affected by work barriers not measured in these analyses. Perhaps long-term temp workers choose temp work over direct-hire jobs because they value family-work balance. Or perhaps, for a subset of recipients, temp jobs do become a revolving door.

Second, although more than three-quarters of the women who temp reported that they receive training or learn new skills while temping, the training received is usually basic. Agencies are more likely to provide behavioral training (workplace rules and general conduct, how to dress for a job interview) or training in blue-collar skills (industrial skills or safety) than in white-collar skills (computer skills, business skills).

Third, African American recipients are more likely to temp and less likely to be in jobs with supervisory responsibility than similarly qualified and situated white recipients. This may reflect racial discrimination in access to direct-hire and supervisory jobs.

Appendix

Table A1
MARGINAL EFFECTS ON EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AS OF WAVE 5

	% Employed at Wave 5 (<i>n</i> = 468) ^{a,b}	% Months Employed between Waves 4 and 5 (<i>n</i> = 468) ^{a,c}	No. Job Losses in 12 Months Prior to Wave 5 (<i>n</i> = 424) ^{d,e}	Hourly Wage (2003 dollars) on Current or Most Recent Job (<i>n</i> = 384) ^{e,d,f}	% Current or Most Recent Job with Supervisory Responsibility (<i>n</i> = 424) ^{b,d}
Temp categories:					
Direct hires (do not temp)	-5.7	-4.5	.08	-1.30 ^{***}	-4.4
Temp at only one wave	-4.3	-2.6	.11	-.86 ⁺	-8.1
Temp at two or more waves					
Demographic characteristics:					
African American	-3.1	-1.3	.05	.73 ⁺	-18.8 ^{**}
Age:					
18-24 years old	.4	-.3	-.20 ^{**}	.21	-15.5 [*]
25-34 years old	-1.1	-4.2	-.20 ^{**}	.48	-27.2 ^{**}
35+ years old					
Skill deficits:					
Education:					
Less than high school					
GED	7.2	8.2	-.07	.77	20.1 ⁺
High school graduate	12.0 [*]	8.1 ⁺	-.12 [*]	.79	1.1
More than high school graduate	21.1 ^{**}	10.7 [*]	-.14 ^{**}	1.50 ^{**}	21.1 ^{**}
Literacy deficiency	12.7 [*]	4.8	-.09 ⁺	-.63	7.0
Learning disability	-13.8	-18.2 ^{**}	-.07	.33	-7.1
Fewer than four job skills	1.6	-1.8	-.07	-.72	-14.0 [*]
Fewer than five work norms	-2.5	4.6	-.02	-.58	10.9
Years worked (age 18 to wave 1)	.6	.5	.00	.04	1.6 [*]

Barriers to work:								
Physical limitation	-11.7*	-9.5**	-.01	-.55	6.1			
PTSD	-2.0	2.5	.03	-.06	-2.9			
Major depression	-.8	2.1	.03	-.72	6.4			
Generalized anxiety disorder	-2.4	.8	.12	.48	-10.9			
Alcohol or drug dependence	-1.8	-8.5	-.01	-.26	-12.7			
Severe domestic violence	7.3	-1.2	.11	.65	12.2			
Transportation problem	-6.9	-7.0*	.05	-.73 ⁺	-5.0			
Family characteristics:								
Married or cohabited	-1.0	-1.6	.09	.41	-.1			
Pregnant at wave 1	-8.8	9.6	.02	.21	-19.7**			
No. dependent children ages 0-2	.5	-1.3	-.09*	-.24	-5.9			
Child health problem	-6.0	-3.9	.08	-.58	-2.6			
Welfare histories prior to wave 1:								
Years on welfare (age 18 to wave 1)	-.3	.4	.01	-.12*	1.1			
R ² or pseudo-R ²	.09	.13	.10	.17	.12			
Wald F-statistics or LR χ^2	LR $\chi^2(25) = 50.72$	F(25, 442) = 2.53	LR $\chi^2(25) = 54.90$	F(25, 358) = 2.85	LR $\chi^2(25) = 64.96$			

NOTE.—GED = general equivalency diploma; PTSD = post-traumatic stress disorder; SSI = supplemental security income; LR = likelihood ratio.
^a Sample includes women who were present at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; did not receive SSI for themselves at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; and ever worked between waves 1 and 5.

^b Logit regression.

^c Multivariate regression.

^d Sample includes women who were present at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; did not receive SSI for themselves at waves 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; and ever worked between waves 4 and 5.

^e Poisson regression.

^f Sample size is smaller because of missing data on hourly wage.

⁺ $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

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Notes

This research was supported by a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Women's Employment Study was supported by grants from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the National Institute of Mental Health (R24-MH51363). The authors thank Sheldon Danziger, David Autor, and Susan Houseman for comments on a previous version of this article; Andrea Perkins, Joshua Keyes, and Allison Wachter for manuscript preparation; and the several anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback.

1. Autor and Houseman (2006, forthcoming) are important exceptions.
2. Between 1997 and 2000, annual unemployment rates were low in both the county and the nation; county and national rates also were relatively similar. In 2000, the county unemployment rate was within one-half of a percentage point of the national rates. Be-

tween 2000 and 2003, annual unemployment rates rose by about 2 percentage points nationally and by around 4 percentage points in the county.

3. Cadena and Pape (2006) explore the potential cumulative effects of attrition in WES. They conclude that women who stayed in the sample through 2003 do not differ substantially from women who left earlier.

4. Turner et al. (2006) compare WES respondents with a similar sample from the 1996 wave of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). At the start of both panels, 100 percent received cash welfare; by February 2000, 21.5 percent of WES participants and 31 percent of SIPP respondents were still receiving cash assistance. At the start of the panel, 42 percent of WES respondents and 35 percent of SIPP respondents were employed. Fifty-one months later, 71 percent of WES respondents and 51 percent of SIPP respondents reported working. Turner and associates further report that if they restrict the SIPP panel to African Americans and whites, SIPP sample means on age, household size, and high school dropout rates are similar to those for WES respondents. However, African Americans comprise a higher proportion of the WES sample than of the SIPP.

5. As a result, the current estimates of temping's relations to employment outcomes will not be comparable with most previous estimates. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

6. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

7. Models were also estimated with alternative codings for several variables. The codings included respondents' actual scores for literacy deficiency, number of job skills, number of work norms, and actual scores on physical limitation. These estimates identified no statistically significant differences in temping's relations to the respective measures of skills and barriers. Changing measures does not affect the results of these estimates.