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JPNA

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Volume 9 Issue 1

Research Articles

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The *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs (JPNA)* focuses on providing a connection between the practice and research of public affairs. This is accomplished with scholarly research, practical applications of the research, and no fees for publishing or journal access. *JPNA* publishes research from diverse theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary backgrounds that address topics related to the affairs and management of public and nonprofit organizations.

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JPNA Call for Editor-in-Chief Position

Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC) Board of Trustees

Call for Applications

The Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC) Board of Trustees has opened nominations (applications) for Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* for the years 2024–2026.

The *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* (JPNA) is a peer-reviewed, open-source journal that is sponsored by the Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and published by the Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC). The journal is focused on providing a connection between the practice and research of public affairs. This is accomplished with scholarly research, practical applications of the research, and no fees for publishing or journal access. JPNA publishes research from diverse theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary backgrounds that addresses topics related to the affairs and management of public and nonprofit organizations. The content of the journal spans the spectrum from public finance and organizational behavior to health administration and veterans' affairs.

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- Prepare three (or more) issues of JPNA per year,
- Make decisions about the publication of submitted manuscripts across a range of disciplines, taking into account JPNA's stated focus and the recommendations of reviewers and of the relevant Associate Editor(s),
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- Serve as ex-officio member of the MPAC board and implement policy decisions made by the MPAC Board of Trustees regarding matters relating to the publication of JPNA.

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Applicants should submit a curriculum vita and a letter of application describing relevant experience as a researcher of public administration or a related field, editorial work, and managerial aspects of running a journal. Applications should be submitted to Interim MPAC President, Michael Ford, at fordm@uwosh.edu by August 1, 2023. Applicants should be prepared to work with the current Editor-in-Chief, Deborah A. Carroll, on the final 2023 issue to be published December 1, 2023.

Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs

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When Government Is Not the Solution: The Role of Community Organizations in Outreach

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Trust between government entities and the public is critical; without it, communities become paralyzed in their ability to act collectively and for the greater good. Establishing and maintaining this trust, however, can be difficult. The outreach and coproduction performed by the coalition of organizations described in this article provide examples of how to address several interrelated problems of public distrust in the government. When viewed in their proper light, these examples enrich the theoretical understanding of contract failure theory. Rather than take advantage of their advantages in power, governments increasingly leverage the power of reciprocity to accomplish their goals by relying on preexisting community trust in nonprofits. Self-interest well understood is a critical component of this reciprocal relationship: it works best when government secures resources, funding, and access to policy processes, in return for nonprofit resources such as service delivery, political support, buy-in, and legitimacy. In this indirect way, nonprofit coproduction can help to foster perceptions of legitimacy and trust in government.

Keywords: Trust, Contract Failure Theory, Coproduction, Nonprofit, Government

Relationships among the stakeholders who make human service delivery possible on the Texas-Mexico border are complex. These relationships should be viewed through various lenses, each contributing meaningfully to a comprehensive understanding of how service delivery works: the goals of humanitarian service organizations, the policies of federal, state, and local governments, especially as they relate to immigration, and finally, the sentiments of local communities (Glier et al., 2020). All three are essential in understanding and addressing community needs, but they do not always cooperate harmoniously. The interests of human service agencies sometimes conflict with a strict observance of laws on the one hand, or of catering to the best interests of a region on the other. Such conflicts can have the tendency to heighten the perception of inefficient or incompetent government. There are also times, however, when coordination among human services, governmental agencies, and the community works efficiently. Our study describes the benefits of coordinating services in the economically challenged border region of South Texas. At the heart of this coordination is the power of reciprocity, or mutually beneficial exchange, which makes coproduction possible.

Coproduction means government and nonprofit collaboration in the provision of public services. Increasing government reliance on nonprofits for the provision of services has been observed by many scholars in public administration and other fields (Cheng, 2018). Nabatchi et al. (2017) observe that this collaboration takes a variety of forms in practice—so various, in fact, that their definition is an ‘umbrella concept’ capturing all situations in which “state actors and lay actors work together to produce benefits” (p. 769). As such, coproduction has received increasing scholarly attention—indeed, “a global resurgence of interest”—in recent years (Nabatchi et al., 2017, p. 766; Gazley & Guo, 2020). For governments, the appeal of coproduction is the promise of a combination of cost reduction and improved quality of services (Alford, 2014). For proponents of coproduction, the public’s willingness to contribute in efficient and creative ways to human service delivery is itself a public resource. Improved quality services appeal to the public, as does the hope that cost reductions in service provision will lead to a lowering of taxes, an indirect public benefit. The practice of coproduction continues to be promising, and the concept of coproduction helps to explain the value of our examples for contract failure theory.

Contract Failure Theory

Originally introduced as an explanation for the existence and proliferation of nonprofit organizations (Hansmann, 1980), contract failure theory presupposes consumer awareness of nonprofit status as well as, importantly, consumer perception that nonprofits are more trustworthy than for-profits. The theory is straightforward: in environments characterized by information asymmetry—specifically, where consumers of, or contributors to, a good or service are not in a position to judge whether the product or service has been delivered adequately—consumers are more likely to trust nonprofit organizations than for-profit ones. Why? Because nonprofits, unlike for-profits, lack the incentive to increase their profit margin by underdelivering on promises and then keeping that cost savings for themselves. When consumers or contributors cannot confirm whether the recipient of their funds is keeping its promises, they incline towards consuming from or contributing to those organizations that they believe have the least incentive to take advantage of their blind spot. Handy et al. (2010) find that “nonprofits are perceived as more trustworthy than for-profits or government organizations” and that “donors, as indirect consumers, will prefer to donate (time and money) to nonprofits than for-profit or government organizations” (p. 870). Contract failure theory provides an explanation for why governments would rely on the assistance of nonprofits to provide services: nonprofits are perceived as more trustworthy than governments.

Since governments are not for-profit enterprises, it might seem that the argument does not apply. Yet a certain kind of asymmetry—a power asymmetry—characterizes a government’s relationship with residents and citizens. Hansmann (1980) had theorized that contract failure can exist also in the case of public goods. The grounds for consumer distrust in for-profit organizations might be somewhat different than the nature of a population’s distrust in government, but it is nonetheless distrust.

Like other nonprofits, a government does not exist to make money. It does, however, have the option to make its presence or demands compulsory in the lives of those whom it serves; and this option, if exercised, can be defended with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. (Take taxes, for example: above a certain modest level of income, filing taxes is required; should one who owes be caught evading this obligation, there are potential consequences.) Whereas a for-profit enterprise might be inclined to take advantage of an information asymmetry, a government might be tempted to take advantage of its power asymmetry. And yet they often do not. Thus, we theorize that increasing government dependence on nonprofits, despite government’s clear advantages in power and resources, speaks to a growing awareness by government of the advantage in trust that nonprofits are perceived to have among residents and citizens. Government reliance on nonprofit coproduction of public goods, including the

good that is mere compliance with the law, leverages the trust in nonprofits that contract failure theory presupposes. This reliance in turn provides indirect support for contract failure theory.

Our theorizing raises many questions for research. Among those questions are the following, which we believe the case studies described in this article help to answer: under what conditions are governments more likely to seek the help of nonprofits for the sake of coproduction? Which kinds of nonprofits and community organizations are likely to be chosen for the work of coproduction? What factors contribute to the success of the work involved in coproduction? We hope to shed light on answers to these questions in what follows. These questions are raised and answered through case studies in the context of contract failure theory and, as we contend, expand the reach of that theory.

The case studies in this paper describe three initiatives that illustrate successful coproduction in borderlands through cooperation and trust: the 2020 Census outreach, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, and the Juntos for Better Health program. The outreach performed by these coalitions provides examples of how to address several interrelated problems regarding distrust in the government: (a) the problem of nonparticipation in the census arising from the presence of a citizenship question on the census (Kissam et al., 2019), (b) the problem of tax filing compliance arising from distrust in the Internal Revenue Service and their e-filing systems (McLeod & Pippin, 2009), and (c) the problem of distrust—and therefore non-participation—in health care and medical research (Smirnoff et al., 2018).

All three provide models of government and nonprofit coproduction benefitting the local community. Each initiative produces a specific benefit, requires and perpetuates trust in nonprofits, and illustrates government preference for reliance on nonprofits despite its advantage in power. On the basis of the outreach performed by these coalitions during the pandemic, we think that through coordinated teamwork, nonprofit and community organizations can under certain conditions assist in the production of public goods even more effectively than can government itself, especially in borderlands.

Methodology

Because the coproduction under consideration in this paper occurred in natural settings and would have occurred regardless of whether it was written about in an article, researchers were inclined from the first to take a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach. “Qualitative research is the systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings” (Teherani et al., 2015, p. 669). Qualitative research papers generally use words rather than numbers to portray data (Punch, 2014). As such, they tend to be somewhat longer than quantitative ones, especially if they include ‘thick description’ of the phenomena being studied. ‘Thick description’ enables rich, detailed pictures of the mechanisms and relationships at work and provides a fertile soil for theorizing about how those same mechanisms and relationships might work in other contexts.

Of the variety of ways qualitative research may be conducted, we chose a case study approach. Like other qualitative research methods, case studies are flexible ways of exploring phenomena with a view to describing and explaining relationships, individual experiences, and group norms. Stake (1995) divides case studies into three main kinds: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are those presenting a unique phenomenon. Our case studies do not present a phenomenon unique in themselves, as increasing government reliance on nonprofits for the provision of services has been observed now for some time in various contexts (Cheng, 2018). The case studies presented here are, rather, instrumental in that they help to acquire a greater appreciation of a known

phenomenon. And since there are only two, it would be something of a stretch to describe them as collective. Thus, our case studies are instrumental.

Our case studies present examples of government relying on nonprofits for coproduction in the provision of public services. We think this government reliance can be explained by contract failure theory. In the scholarly literature to date, contract failure theory has generally been used to explain the proliferation of nonprofits in free-market societies. It explains this proliferation by observing that the public is often at an information disadvantage regarding whether for-profit corporations have lived up to their end of an exchange. Our goal in this paper is to take this theory and show how it can also help to explain why governments, which have an asymmetrical advantage in power and a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, nevertheless choose to enlist the help of nonprofits to provide public goods.¹ If information asymmetry leads to distrust, why would power asymmetry not also do so? Survey and historical data, as well as perhaps interviews with government officials, would be the ideal instruments to test this assumption empirically, but one must work with what one has.

To make this case, it was necessary to show that trust was an essential component in the cooperation in our examples. Once that was shown, it was reasonable to claim that governments would desire to leverage this trust to assist in providing public goods. To describe the mechanisms of trust involved in coproduction, we used our case studies to answer three related questions: what are the conditions under which coproduction is a useful strategy? What are the characteristics of groups who are likely to be perceived by governments as useful partners in coproduction? And what are the factors that contribute to the success of coproduction? The first case study, wherein a coalition of nonprofits and community organizations combine resources to promote Census 2020, allows us to answer all three questions; the second, wherein a similar coalition combines resources to do healthcare outreach, helps to provide a fuller answer to the third.² The mechanisms of cooperation all reveal the importance of trust, and trust is the link between cooperation and contract failure theory. We believe the application of contract failure theory to explain coproduction expands the reach and usefulness of this theory.

Coproduction in Borderlands

The perception of nonprofit trustworthiness is likely to be more pronounced in borderlands. This is so for a variety of reasons. These reasons suggest that a location in borderlands is one of the conditions under which governments are more likely to perceive the efficacy of, and to choose, strategic coproduction with nonprofits. While we provide no empirical test of this likelihood in this paper, we think our case study provides grounds for reasonable belief that this likelihood obtains and, moreover, that it is especially useful there.

Many non-citizens live in borderlands, as do many first-generation immigrant families, many of whom know or are related to non-citizens. According to Lee (2019), non-citizen engagement with authority is selective: “noncitizens are more comfortable with nonprofits, religious institutions, transnational associations, and using social media to connect for services” (p. 272). This makes sense. Those who are concerned with the potential for abrupt changes in citizenship status for themselves or those who are dear to them might interact differently—or, out of fear, not at all—with government agencies. Aside from this, there are issues of language and convenience: nonprofits specializing in services for those who speak English as a second language may design their programs and initiatives with this population foremost in mind and thus be more ready and able to provide for their needs and concerns. Local nonprofits are usually more familiar with the unique population to be served. Finally, dealing with government or its agents can be intimidating; citizens and noncitizens alike are aware that government and its agents are likely to be on the lookout for noncompliance with the law.

Today, many native-born American citizens report a distrust of the government. And recent polling has shown that Americans generally (not just on the border region) are aware of their fellow citizens' increasing distrust of the government (Rainie et al., 2019). For Latinos in particular, and especially those living in border regions—whose distrust should not be confused with a lack of patriotism³—the racialization of immigration policies is one of several issues that can lead them to be less trusting of governmental services (Cruz et al., 2018; Michelson, 2007). In addition, Rocha et al. (2015) found heavy-handed immigration enforcement, especially among otherwise non-criminal populations, to be associated with more negative political orientations among both native- and foreign-born Latinos.

Research suggests that community and nonprofit organizations may serve as buffers between restrictive or demanding governmental laws and those living in border regions, increasing both levels of knowledge and compliance among residents (Allen & McNeely, 2017). Local nonprofits often perform outreach after having received financial support from government, yet their localized arrangements demonstrate independence from government (Brown & Troutt, 2004). It would not be surprising if the civic footprint of nonprofits was higher in communities with higher immigrant populations. Borderlands provide an especially fertile ground for the growth of nonprofit coproduction in human service delivery.

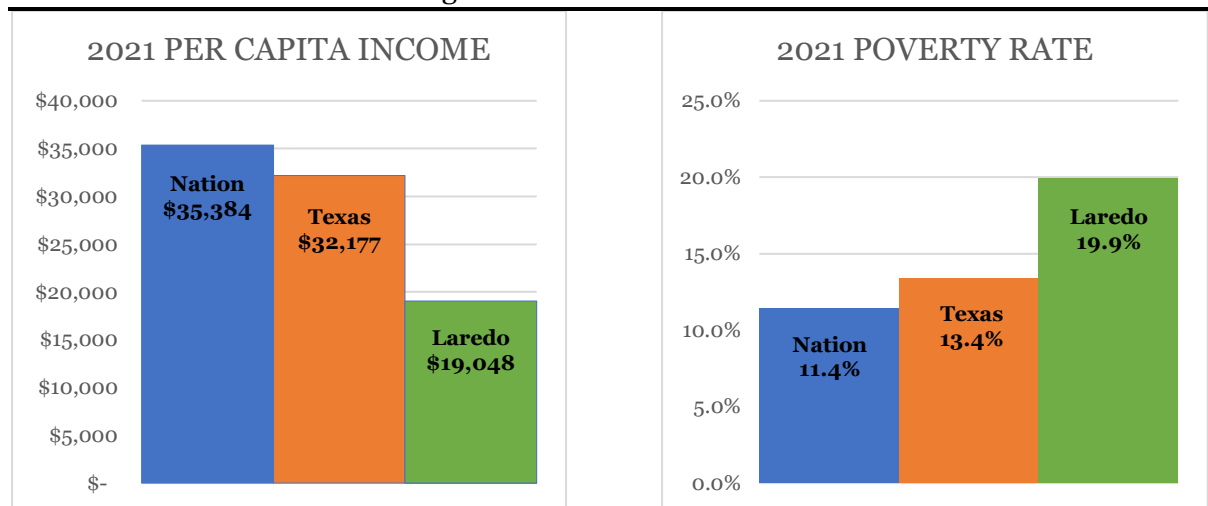
All stakeholders along the border—human service agencies, governments, and residents of communities—exist in a dynamic political environment in which conflicting public perceptions enjoy widespread support. Often these perceptions betray contradictory goals, contrary assumptions, and clashing political rhetoric, especially as it relates to helping undocumented individuals or contributing to human trafficking and smuggling. In such an environment, public trust, “an essential elixir for public life and neighborly relations,” is hard to gain, not only for governments and for nonprofits but also for residents between each other (Rainie et al., 2019, p. 3). In this kind of environment, research has shown that nonprofits are generally more trusted than governments as well as more responsive to circumstances of uncertainty (Witesman & Fernandez, 2012). Governmental agencies often possess financial means to support large-scale projects with the potential for meaningful impact. These resources are well spent in funding nonprofit organizations who are trusted in the community.

Region of South Texas

South Texas has seen enormous population growth since the 1990s. Since growth occurs yearly and the U. S. Census is taken every ten years, areas of frequent population change inevitably create periodic disparities between government funding and representation, on the one hand, and the real political and social needs of area residents and local communities on the other. These disparities can be especially troubling for South Texas, as socioeconomic indicators place it among the poorest areas of the nation. Notwithstanding the significant growth in population and employment over the past two decades, economic indicators show that development in the region continues to lag Texas and the United States. According to 2019 U.S. Census data, roughly one out of four people live below the poverty level. As shown in Table 1, dramatic differences exist in per capita income, poverty levels, and English proficiency between residents of South Texas and residents throughout the State of Texas.

The poverty rate in Laredo (25.7%) is significantly higher than the State of Texas (14.9%) and is over twice the national rate (11.8%). The per capita income in Laredo is \$17,326, which is much lower than that of the State of Texas (\$30,143) or the nation (\$32,621).

Variables such as low voter turnout, low rates of self-reporting in the census, and a significant number of people not filing taxes—despite the likelihood that there would be eligible for substantial tax refunds, including the Earned Income Credit—further exacerbate factors leading to high poverty rates. The poverty rate in Laredo (25.7%) and Zapata (19.5%) is

Table 1. Economic Profile of Target Area

Source: 2021 United States Census Bureau QuickFacts.

significantly higher than the State of Texas (14.9%) and is over twice the national rate (11.8%). The per capita income in Laredo (\$17,641) and in Zapata (\$19,157) is much lower than that of the State of Texas (\$30,143) and the nation (\$32,621). Poverty aside, these factors indicate that government is less likely to be present and effective in the region. This reduced presence and effectiveness is exacerbated by comparatively lower levels of broadband access in the area. As a general trend, more and more governmental services were already being advertised, promoted, and delivered online prior to the coronavirus pandemic. The response to COVID-19 pressed this transition into overdrive, exerting enormous pressure on government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations alike to transition into the digital age more fully and immediately and deliver services online wherever possible. Finally, the region is 95.5% Hispanic. Spanish is the household language for 90% of homes. In Webb County, only 66.7% of those 25 and older have a high school diploma or higher, compared to 82.3% in Texas and 87% nationally.

Unique Challenges of Coproduction

Distrust of government is especially acute in the age of e-government and e-services (Morgeson et al., 2011). In South Texas, this distrust is compounded because area residents have one of the lowest levels of access to broadband in the United States. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, 42.5% of households in Webb County, Texas, have broadband internet access, as compared to 85% nationally (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Senior citizens especially lack experience with technology. They are also more likely than other groups to be fearful of scams related to sharing sensitive information over the internet, which is not to say they are also adept at avoiding them (Hilbert, 2018). Low access to and experience with broadband and internet services presented challenges for all three programs.

For census outreach, this challenge was relatively new. It had not been a major factor in census reporting in 2000, as the roll-out of the online census response option in that year—the first year the internet was used to collect census data—was deliberately not well advertised.⁴ In 2020, however, the online response option was advertised widely: video guides were available in 59 languages and most households were urged to submit their census responses online via internet (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Given the low levels of broadband access in South Texas, the hesitancy for making in-person contact due to COVID-19, and the distrust of supplying government or its representatives with highly personal household information—especially

regarding citizenship in borderlands—underserved residents in the area were in danger of being overlooked and undercounted.

For tax filing compliance for the VITA program, the challenge was in a way wholly new. The use of technology other than pen, ink, and paper has long been involved in the work of tax collection in the United States: the IRS has used computers to process tax returns since 1961, and 1986 saw the inception of electronically filed individual tax returns. By 1991, there were at least 15 tax preparation software options available for purchase in the United States (Garber, 2013). Since then, the number of returns filed electronically has increased dramatically.⁵ Pandemic conditions, however, provided strong incentive for VITA programs to provide volunteer tax preparation service in a way that did not require any in-person contact whatsoever. In the process that was developed in this VITA program, volunteers prepared returns in real time while taxpayers watched the preparation of their own returns over the internet on a shared Webex screen. Taxpayers then signed the relevant consent forms using a feature on the Webex interface that allowed them to take control of the screen and type in (print) as well as sign their names—a wholly new process for both VITA volunteers and clients in this program. According to program representatives, volunteers prepared over 500 returns this way during the 2021 filing season.

The IRS approved this contactless service delivery method, which it had not designed, prior to the start of the tax season. That it reviewed and approved this method at all suggests the IRS is open to innovation in terms of the planning and design of its public services. This kind of ‘cogovernance’—codesigning, specifically—between nonprofits and government agencies remains an underexplored area of research. A recent study suggests that nonprofit involvement in the planning and design of public services has become more common, not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of increasing government reliance on nonprofit financing of public services (Cheng, 2018). The program’s wholly contactless tax return preparation and its implementation by community volunteers are examples of popular involvement in the design and delivery of a government service.

Importance of the Census

The decennial census is critically important to numerous aspects of American government, from political representation to economic development, from infrastructure investment to service allocation. The decennial census provides the foundational data from which congressional districts are drawn; it plays a crucial role in ensuring fair and equal national representation for populations in each state. In so doing, it gives added rhetorical and logical force to the idea that national legislation embodies the will of the people. No less importantly, census data also provides the securest foundation available for the allocation of federal funding to states and to areas within states with demonstrated need. Funds for infrastructure, such as roads and highways, and for social programs, such as SNAP, Head Start, Medicare, Medicaid, and scores of others, are divided up according to population data. Social Security, the lynchpin of the U.S. social safety net, plans current and future disbursements according to census data. Lastly, government agencies at all levels (federal, state, county, and city), businesses, nonprofits, researchers, community volunteer organizations, and ordinary citizens use census data to make decisions in both their short- and long-term strategic planning and daily operations.

With an accurate census count so key to the performance of government and the nonprofit sector, it is no exaggeration to claim that inaccuracies—specifically, undercounts—threaten the political and economic wellbeing of a place or region. Politically, undercounts have the potential to undermine the perceived fairness of the legislative process by distorting representation at the national level. An error between half a percent and two percent can translate into lost congressional seats (Seeskin & Spencer, 2018). Supposing the state in which

seats are lost is a swing state, effects are national and more far-reaching. Economically, undercounts mean that infrastructure is overtaxed, programs are underfunded compared to demand, and considerable swaths of the population remain underserved. Over the course of a decade, estimates of lost funding range in the billions of dollars.⁶ An inaccurate and undercounted population also creates the potential for what researchers call misalignments of funding, which is where money, even when allocated, is not accurately directed to correctly targeted demographics or locales (Strane & Griffis, 2018). Census undercounts matter.

Formation of the Coalition for Census Promotion

Despite the power asymmetry between governments and local organizations, governments show discretion in choosing local organizations on which to rely for coproduction. Insofar as the examples in this paper illustrate that discretion, it appears the following factors are especially important to possess: a demonstrated record of past performance in the community, the organizational capacity to reach the population to be served, experienced organizational leadership, proficient and accurate record-keeping, and a willingness to work with government bureaucracies. Though this last characteristic, the fortitude required to work simultaneously with different bureaucracies larger than one's own organization, may seem like an afterthought, it is crucial.⁷

Members of the coalition described in this paper have these characteristics. They are all similarly situated in the local community. They have varying levels of experience, history, and reach, but they pursue their goals by similar means, rely frequently on volunteer effort, and follow a non-business model of operation. Their leaders are familiar with the challenges of running nonprofit and volunteer organizations. As such, they are in a position to recognize each other's unique needs and capacities as well as to cooperate for the sake of coproduction. Perhaps most importantly, those representing the organizations, both those who are present at scenes of daily interaction as well as those who work behind the scenes, possess 'meaningful experiential similarities' with target populations, which, as research as shown, helps to ensure trust and is a singular advantage in coproduction (Sabir & Pillemer, 2014).⁸ Coalition partner organizations have the local know-how and, more importantly, trust of many underrepresented and underserved communities throughout the area.

Aside from the U.S. Census Bureau, which provided physical and electronic forms, promotional material, and guidelines for completion; Texas A&M International University, which obtained and managed the grant; and Methodist Healthcare Ministries, which provided the grant funds; four organizations worked together to promote the Census on this project:

- Azteca Economic Development and Preservation Corporation ("Azteca"), a 501(c)(3);
- Helping to Ensure Laredo's Prosperity ("HELP"), also a 501 (c)(3);
- Laredo Family Economic Success Coalition ("LFESC"), not a 501 (c)(3) but managed like one; LFESC delivers the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in Laredo; and
- Area Health Education Center ("AHEC") of the Mid Rio Grande Border Area of Texas, Inc., an outreach program under the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio that seeks to increase the number of trained health care workers in the region.

Established in 1982 to preserve one of Laredo's oldest historically recognized residential neighborhoods—Barrio Azteca—the Azteca Corporation devotes itself to community development designed to preserve the cultural roots and economic integrity of neighborhoods in Laredo. Specifically, through collaboration with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, and the City of Laredo, Azteca helps to secure affordable housing and financial opportunities for low-income individuals. To provide small loans to those who desire to start a business in Laredo, this

nonprofit works with Accion Texas, the leading micro lender in Texas, and with Business Community Lenders (BCL) of Texas. Their outreach with federal housing programs creates additional opportunities for residents with low-to-moderate income. Importantly, Azteca operates one of only two VITA sites that stay open after the tax filing deadline. For the 2020 Census promotion initiative, Azteca disseminated flyers throughout the community and worked with the U.S. Census staff to set up enumeration sites during the reporting period.

Founded in 2017, HELP is a registered public charity created to promote financial education in the Laredo community. They are experienced at outreach, especially in teaching financial seminars, and they have a strong relationship with El Consulado De México en Laredo—the Mexican embassy in Laredo. Given the volume of trade that crosses the border in both directions at Laredo, the largest land port in the United States,⁹ the ambassadorship in Laredo is an important position in the eyes of the Mexican government. Through their association with the embassy, and because their governing board has long experience in living and working in the community—one of their board members is a Mexican citizen who lives in Laredo and operates the VITA site hosted by El Consulado—HELP’s outreach is becoming one of the most trusted among migrants in the region. In service to the census initiative, HELP performed outreach on social media, in person at advertised census completion events, which they arranged, and served as liaisons for the *colonias*. They also spearheaded Back to School events that led to successful enumeration. HELP is a member of the VITA Coalition, too.

The VITA program in Laredo has over 20 years of experience serving the underserved, low-income, limited English proficient, and mostly Hispanic (95%) population in Webb and Zapata counties. The VITA program is delivered by an association of community stakeholders in Webb and Zapata counties known as the Laredo Family Economic Success Coalition (LFESC), which operates like a 501(c)(3) but does not have official nonprofit status. Its members sign a non-financial Memorandum of Understanding signaling their participation in the LFESC; each member elects to participate in unique ways in accordance with their capacity and intention by providing resources to be used in the service of VITA’s general mission. VITA’s mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of low-to-moderate income families by assisting them in becoming financially stable and self-sufficient.

The primary service provided by the VITA program in service to this mission is free tax preparation by IRS-certified volunteers. Volunteers are recruited from the community, local high schools, Texas A&M International University, and Laredo College. Before they prepare, volunteers must first attain IRS certification, which is provided by the program. In accordance with the guidelines in place by its government sponsor, the U. S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which provides the organizing guidelines for over 9,000 VITA sites across the country,¹⁰ the program is marketed in general towards those who are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit; in Webb and Zapata counties, it is marketed to families and individuals with adjusted gross income (AGI) of \$66,000 or less. To this population especially, then, VITA provides assistance. As may be inferred from the demographic information described above, this target population includes the majority of the population in both counties. In addition, VITA’s member organizations—Azteca and HELP, among many others—provide services that include promoting federal tax benefits and providing classes in financial literacy, asset building, and home ownership, which are recognized ways to fight poverty and promote financial well-being.

Providing free tax preparation in South Texas through VITA provides a unique case study in community involvement. VITA partners engage in working and planning together mainly through voluntary cooperation and coordination. A truly authoritative command structure operating over all members simultaneously is unfeasible due to the variety of organizations and their size, each of which are subject to their own structures of hierarchy and command. During the 2020 season, for example, VITA boasted many for-profit and nonprofit organizations among its members and official supporters. These included Azteca Economic Development & Preservation Corporation, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Laredo, City of

Laredo Public Libraries, Entrevision Communications, Goodwill Industries of San Antonio, H-E-B Grocery Company, the Internal Revenue Service (VITA's government sponsor), International Bank of Commerce, Laredo College, Laredo Independent School District, South Texas Food Bank, Texas A&M International University, Texas Community Bank, Workforce Solutions for South Texas, and Zapata County Independent School District. Given the diversity of interests and organizations represented here, VITA has found it best to let each organization determine whether, how, and how often it wishes to contribute to VITA's mission.

Since 2002, the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) has conducted community health seminars in the area and provided hands-on learning opportunities for future healthcare workers through volunteer programs. Although not a VITA partner, AHEC's local healthcare initiatives have led to strong and extensive ties to community networks throughout the area. It is the only organization of its kind for hundreds of miles. Additionally, they have a considerable and talented corps of college student volunteers, drawn mostly from South Texas, who, given their background—most are bilingual—were nicely positioned to engage area residents to participate in the census. As we shall see, AHEC assisted in maximizing the impact of grant dollars by incentivizing 44 volunteers with stipends to call homes in neighborhoods with a low response rate based on the 2020 Census hard-to-count map data.

Together, this coalition of partners possessed the organizational capacity, experience, and similarities with the target population to provide a concerted effort in the places where the message of census participation needs to be loudest. By lending their networks, training their staff, and modifying their best practices to promote the U.S. Census in 2020, these organizations illustrated the power of cooperation, trust, and successful coproduction in action.

Factors Contributing to the Success of Coproduction

In describing the characteristics of community organizations and nonprofits that make them good candidates for government partnerships, one is inevitably led also to indicate some of the factors that contribute to the success of coproduction. Since one of the factors is working with organizations of a certain kind, there is some conceptual overlap in the answers to the questions of which characteristics make organizations likely choices for coproduction and what factors contribute to its success. But apart from what has already been said above, we would like to emphasize four factors that especially contribute to success: openness to expert opinion, motivation in the form of self-interest well understood, a volunteer base that by and large resembles the target population in demographic characteristics, and willingness to collaborate.¹¹ Of these three, motivation is perhaps the most important, since a job done less well than it might have been done (from failure to incorporate expert opinion or lack of willingness to collaborate) is still almost always better than a job not done at all (due to a complete failure of motivation). We contend that an old but still valuable idea best helps to explain the kind of motivation at the heart of successful coproduction: self-interest well understood.

As for expert opinion, while it is reasonable to believe that the people most engaged with economic development and social advocacy have the most insight on community dynamics, the teams also looked to expert opinion on causal factors for underrepresentation in the areas of interest. In addition to figuring out feasible extant and future alternative modes of engaging the public, the coalition, led by Texas A&M International University (TAMIU), collaborated to extend existing institutional and community networks and to enhance public awareness of services. The vision of researchers at TAMIU provided the overarching goal for the Census Outreach project, and buildings on campus provided a convenient meeting location—in accordance with local and state COVID-19 standards, of course—for planning and strategy sessions. At these meetings, coalition member representatives devised strategies that enabled

meaningful cooperation and therefore maximum impact on the community. Finally, TAMIU researchers also developed and wrote the grant through which Census Outreach teamwork was funded.

Concerning motivation, famed social observer Alexis de Tocqueville described long ago the concept of “self-interest well understood,” which, in his view, Americans used to combat the atomizing and excessive individualism to which modern democratic regimes are prone. The idea of self-interest well understood is that one seeks one’s own benefit in and through elevating or benefitting others instead of alone or at others’ expense. Tocqueville thought that among Americans this “doctrine,” as he called it, was “universally accepted”; acute observers found it “at the foundation of all actions” and “encountered not less in the mouth of the poor man than in that of the rich” (Tocqueville, 2000, pp. 501–502). Its ubiquitous presence in the American psyche was often accompanied, however, by an innocent but salutary self-misunderstanding, which he expressed as follows:

Americans...are pleased to explain almost all the actions of their life with the aid of self-interest well understood; they complacently show how the enlightened love of themselves constantly brings them to aid each other and disposes them willingly to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state. I think that in this it often happens that they do not do themselves justice; for one sometimes sees citizens in the United States as elsewhere abandoning themselves to the disinterested and unreflective sparks that are natural to man; but the Americans scarcely avow that they yield to movements of this kind; they would rather do honor to their philosophy than to themselves (p. 502).

This remarkable insight from a foreign—and for that reason possibly more clear-eyed—visitor suggests that those motivated by this kind of American spirit do not like to admit how often, and to what extent, they are disposed and eager to help others without thinking of their own advantage. Many would sooner hide their susceptibility to self-sacrifice, to those ‘disinterested and unreflective sparks,’ by pointing to the benefits they personally derive from their labors, to avoid any imputation that they sacrifice their self-interest for another’s good, which in truth they are often inclined to do unreflectively. This is a pleasing compliment from Tocqueville, not only because it is nice to be flattered (quite apart from the question of actual merit), but also because it complicates our idea of the American psyche where we are prone to seeing, or to thinking we ought to see, American greed and selfishness. The joint efforts of the coalitions described in this paper suggest that the tradition of associating voluntarily for the public good is alive and well in the United States and elsewhere.

None of the observable cooperation we describe in this paper would have occurred without the funding each of the organizations involved received in a grant from Methodist Healthcare Ministries. These funds were used to promote the census, of course, but also, in small part, to further the organizations’ broader goals and missions and pay for salary support and labor costs. Since the organizations were attempting to get more money and services for the region through census promotion, and since their promotion efforts were themselves motivated at least in part by the promise and delivery of monies for their programs, this parallel alignment helps to illustrate Tocqueville’s doctrine of self-interest well understood in action. That this cooperative and, to use Tocqueville’s word, ‘enlightened’ self-interest occurred along the Texas-Mexico border, was delivered by Mexican as well as American citizens, and enlisted the volunteer efforts of first-generation Mexican Americans suggests that Tocqueville’s insight is

more generalizable and transferable than commonly thought. Although few worked for free and some worked for nothing, all worked for the common good.

Success in Promoting Census Participation

The VITA program provided the key operational link between these organizations in action. This made sense for a few reasons. First, the VITA program has accumulated substantial trust from the community over the past two decades. Its presence in Webb and Zapata counties grows steadily. VITA's services are free, and no resident is compelled to use or seek out VITA for assistance in complying with tax law. In fact, in seeking assistance with their tax returns area residents have many choices, including paid tax preparers, like H&R Block or Liberty Tax Service, and free or cheap tax preparation software online, which is made available each tax season to all willing to pay the fee and prepare their taxes themselves. Despite the variety of for-profit tax preparation options in the region, however, client lists at VITA sites continue to expand. According to program representatives, the program prepared over 4,400 tax returns in 2017; in 2018, over 4,800; in 2019, over 5,700; and in 2020, over 6,200. Given the voluntary nature of a client's choice to use VITA, area residents demonstrate their increasing trust in VITA by taking advantage of its services. Increasing public use betokens increasing public trust.

This growing trust is even more remarkable given the nature of tax return preparation, which is a personal and deeply revealing window into the lives of others in several respects. This is especially so in borderlands, as tax return preparers are required by law to broach the question of citizenship during return preparation. In 2020, this was a political sore spot for participation in the census—though not for VITA—even though the actual question never made it onto the census completion forms. As part of the process of having their taxes prepared by the VITA program each year, taxpayers are required to indicate on VITA's intake sheet—the first component required by the IRS to be completed as part of the preparation process—whether they, their spouse, and their dependents, are U.S. citizens. Citizenship status is also required to be indicated on the tax return itself; the answer has tax implications. For example, if either taxpayer or spouse has an ITIN (instead of a Social Security number) the couple is not eligible to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit when filing jointly.

Although persons who have a filing requirement are legally obliged to file their taxes, whereas participation in the census is, by contrast, optional, and although the one is done every year and the other once every ten, we believe increasing and willing participation in the VITA program, when contrasted with the likely resistance to participating in the census from the local population due to the threat of the citizenship question, provides support for our contention that community and nonprofit organizations can under certain conditions be more effective in accomplishing government objectives than government itself. What would only be given with unwilling hesitation—or, in some cases, simply refused to be given—to a government worker with a federal ID badge is given willingly and routinely every year to a volunteer from the community. Since the information on both tax returns and the census is highly sensitive, VITA makes a natural bridge from one to other, especially among persons who are likely to have trust issues: if they pay their taxes—and it is likely they do unless they are paid under the table—they already provide this sensitive information to the government through VITA to get back all or a portion of the federal taxes they paid throughout the calendar year; in many cases—most cases, in fact—they receive much more. VITA's success with outreach in hard-to-reach areas made them an outstanding partner for encouraging people to complete the census.

Despite much resistance from Covid-19 sweeping the South Texas region as well as serious concerns with the local population about responding to the census questionnaire, our team made significant inroads to getting a higher-than-expected census response rate in Webb

County. Because only U.S. Census employees were allowed to offer direct assistance in helping respondents complete their census questionnaire, local agencies were contracted to perform direct outreach and support for official census workers. The primary benefit VITA provided to census outreach was their existing network of ties within the community. Almost all VITA staff, coordinators, and volunteers are bilingual. While these partners are not directly affiliated with this project, their work through the VITA program would have allowed for information related to the census to be shared at the tax sites, which it was. Taxpayers were made aware of the opportunity to complete the census at VITA tax sites because VITA promoted the opportunity along with its free tax preparation services through social media campaigns. It commissioned commercials for posting online, to which were appended brief pitches for completing the census. VITA's paid support staff created dozens of flyers for print distribution as well as posts for Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, posts that received over 10,000 views.

VITA also promoted the opportunity to complete the census at its tax sites during their hours of operation. Tax sites operate with the permission of the owner or manager of the brick-and-mortar location. The sites are always managed by a Site Coordinator, who is employed either by the VITA program or by the partner organization itself. Site Coordinators are assisted in their turn by volunteers, who work for free, preparing and reviewing the prepared returns in accordance with IRS guidelines. At certain tax sites, taxpayers who were present were reminded about the opportunity to complete the census and were provided access to a laptop set aside for the sole purpose of completing the census. If they had arrived early for their appointment, they had the opportunity to complete it while they waited; they could also complete it after their appointment if they so wished. VITA Site Coordinators were authorized to set aside a space at their tax site for the completion of the census.

The volunteers at AHEC, whose task was to call homes in neighborhoods with low census response rates, were trained to do the following while on the call: (a) remind members of households to complete the 2020 census, (b) offer options for completing the 2020 census, such as over the phone (in English or in Spanish), online at www.2020Census.gov, or by in person attendance at the AHEC Drive-In 2020 Census event held each Saturday during the month of August in the City of Laredo, and (c) express appreciation for their time and support of the 2020 census. Over the course of seven weeks, the volunteer team made 9,466 phone calls to residents of the region.

Azteca coordinated the mail outs and social media to regions that had lowest response rates. Using their logo as the source of this information was helpful, as this organization has a long history of providing support to area residents. Employees of Azteca called clients to stress the importance of completing the census and discussed locations where individuals could receive assistance. HELP served as the trusted liaison with the 'Back to School' efforts and food banks. We found that having census enumerators at the food banks appeared to be one of the most successful events in increasing individual participation in the 2020 census.

In sum, the collection of organizations worked in unison to provide a message to the community that census participation is necessary and an accurate, complete count benefits the region. Each of these agencies has a history of supporting specific geographic regions and providing various services that many see as difficult to deliver. Additionally, all put their reputation on the line by stating that the census would be confidential and would benefit the community. The agencies have a long history of acting to benefit public health and welfare in local communities, a history that contributed to their success in this region.

Health Care Outreach

We turn now to the other prong of our study of cooperation and trust through the lens of contract failure theory, which involves health care outreach. Given the high rates of poverty

and low levels of education that persist in the region, it may come as no surprise that significant education, economic, and language disparities restrict access to healthcare and healthcare-related social services. This side of our case study allows us to add to the factors that contribute to the success of the work involved in coproduction. It shows, in particular, that one of the things that contributes to that success is collaboration: when nonprofits seek out other groups that are trusted in the community in order to share in the work, they are more likely to succeed. Nonprofits, like governments, can leverage existing trust in other nonprofits and community organizations to accomplish the work of coproduction. As we shall see, this requires convincing the leaders of such organizations to obtain buy-in.

It is almost impossible to overlook the general importance as well as the increased politicization of the idea of universal healthcare in the United States in recent years. This trend has been fostered by, and has helped to increase, distrust of government, too. Increasing politicization may also be a contributing cause of distrust among underserved populations in South Texas. While a recent study provided more confirmation of what many observers often note, namely that persons with lower income vote significantly less often than do those with higher incomes, one of its key findings was that the main reasons for not voting reported by those with lower incomes were similar to the reasons given by their more well-off counterparts: “lack of interest in campaign issues or feeling their vote will not matter” (Hartley, 2020, p. 9). Thus, being from the poor part of town is not necessarily an indication that the political winds do not blow in one’s neighbourhood: poverty alone does not make one immune to the distrust in government that arises from the politicization of healthcare.

Poverty does, however, create barriers for low-income persons that do not exist for the sons and daughters of more fortunate circumstances. Recent Laredo and Webb County Community Needs and Workforce Assessments (CNAs) indicate the use of preventive health care services is low in general among the Mexican American population; both South Texas in general and Webb County in particular, which are heavily Hispanic, illustrate this disparity. There is also an evident increase of uninsured and underinsured individuals—especially women, children, and the elderly—since the last CNA in 2013. Clearly, poverty, which is pervasive along the state’s southern border with Mexico, places border residents at high risk for poor health status.

In addition to having thirty-one percent (31.8) of residents living below the federal poverty level, Webb County is home to more than 60 *colonias*, which are unincorporated settlements of land along the Texas-Mexico border. According to one report, many *colonias* “lack some of the most basic living necessities such as drinking water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing. Over 25,000 *colonias* residents rely on an episodic system of care depending on funding and strained social programs with limited capacity” (Health Resources in Action, Inc., 2019, p. 1). The disparity of healthcare services is especially pronounced in the *colonias*, where the need to provide quality, efficient preventive health care information and services is more than evident. If the demand for it is to be realized, a preventive health care model must meet people where they live, work, and play—ideally by obtaining information from community leaders they trust.

Distrust of Health Care Outreach

Many residents of South Texas, especially those in the *colonias*, would seem to lack the luxury of ideological objections to the provision of healthcare services. This may not, however, prevent them from feeling them. Some political objections are hard to capture in survey data. On the face of it, healthcare is supposed to be advantageous for the health of those to whom it is provided; yet as recent political experience in the United States revealed, many Americans object in principle to the government’s push for universal health coverage. Why? Here, political philosophers John Locke and Alexis de Tocqueville provide clues to the American psyche. The more private nature of health care suggests that here, even more than in the case

of the census, the government's power asymmetry should be handled with care by those who administer it.

Compared to citizenship, taxes, and the census, healthcare involves matters that are even more personal; it involves the human body. Bodies are the property of their owners in a more profound and individual way than membership in a political community and the use of its money. As both this membership and this money—citizenship and standardized currency—are created by government, citizens may be said to have and use them by consent; in requiring taxes to be paid and in regulating citizenship, it may plausibly be said that a government controls resources and distinctions it already owns. Our bodies, however, are ours prior to our consent; “every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself” (Locke, 2003, p. 111). Accordingly, in legislating matters pertaining to healthcare, government concerns itself with resources that individuals are more likely to understand as uniquely theirs (or perhaps God's—at any rate not the government's). This is especially so in America, where John Locke's philosophy of natural rights, a source of inspiration for Jefferson and others in writing the Declaration of Independence, still infuses national discourse concerning the limits of political legitimacy. Locke is one of many theorists whose ideas and rhetoric inform our national discussion or ‘rights talk,’ which is pervasive in America if not always clear-headed (Glendon, 1993). Thus, although perhaps counterintuitive, it is nonetheless true that laws pertaining to the regulation of the health of human bodies, however benevolent and well-intentioned, are likely to be viewed in the United States with more suspicion and distrust than elsewhere.

This elevated sense of personal ownership in oneself cannot help but make residents sensitive to the boundaries of their personal freedoms. Since freedom in America means “the limited license for an individual to do as he or she pleases” (Koritansky, 1999, p. viii), the question of a law's intent may be, psychologically speaking, less salient than the fact that a law exists in the first place. According to those whose objections in the name of liberty we highlight here (as a possible cause of distrust of those who would attempt healthcare outreach), that such laws exist at all is one more step towards the “subjection in small affairs” that, for Alexis de Tocqueville, characterized the kind of despotism democratic nations have to fear, should it arise in the future—as it might, Tocqueville warned, from within the bosom of a democratic nation (Tocqueville, 2000, p. 665). The problem, not always easy to express for those who feel it, is the feeling of being thwarted in the use of one's own will by being forced to accept legal regulations, and penalties for noncompliance, in matters deeply personal and, in a word, ‘small’—feelings not likely to be lessened, but even perhaps heightened, by the rhetoric of advocates who pitch such regulations as best for the common good, or as improved access to that which we already have a right as well as a need, or finally, as simply more rational, equitable, and fair.¹² It is plausible that this feeling, however expressed, is a contributing factor to distrust of healthcare outreach in South Texas and elsewhere. But the model for healthcare outreach described below is, we think, effective in beginning to overcome this and other kinds of distrust of healthcare outreach, and this is part of its strategic value. Choosing to leverage existing trust between providers and clientele, and not to rely solely on its advantage in coercive power, is a surer way for governments to succeed.

Juntos for Better Health: Mission, Challenges, Strategies

Providing substantial access to health care in the region by meeting people where they are in need requires collaboration between multiple organizations to break down the barriers of distrust (Martinez-Gomez et al., 2019). Research indicates healthcare disparities are also related to social determinants such as educational and social-economic levels, lack of insurance, irregular use of care, legal barriers, language, and cultural barriers, among many others. Community distrust plays a major role in how service providers are viewed, which in turn has an impact on their receptiveness towards services. For nonprofits, community

organizations, and government alike to be successful in reaching disenfranchised populations, a community-based participatory approach must be taken, wherein organizations make the effort to go out into the community and meet people where they live, work, and play (Martinez-Gomez et al., 2019). There must be a mindset on the part of advocates and providers of going to the people—as distinguished from their going to the providers—to eliminate many of the barriers that currently impede service delivery. In this strategy, and because of the greater touchiness of this subject matter, the importance of volunteers who by and large resemble the target population in demographic characteristics is even more important than in census promotion.

As an organization, the Juntos for Better Health [Juntos] possesses the mindset described above. According to Health Resources in Action, Inc., which provided a comprehensive evaluation in April 2019 of the program's effectiveness, Juntos is:

a partnership of four community service providers that developed a coordinated health care delivery system among multiple partners in Laredo, Texas and surrounding Webb, Zapata, and Jim Hogg counties to address the lack of centralized and comprehensive services in the region. Using a continuum of care approach to address obesity, diabetes, and depression, TAMIU and its partners implemented the Dartmouth Prevention Care Model to increase treatment compliance (Dietrich et al., 2006), traveling teams to provide screenings and referrals, supported additional personnel to increase health care capacity, created a shared system of resources, and improved patient knowledge of these three illnesses (Health Resources in Action, Inc., 2019, p. i).

Juntos succeeded by adopting a back-to-basics community approach requiring outreach personnel to hit the streets. Outreach team members knocked on the doors of hundreds of local organizations to reach as many as possible of the local population. In particular, the Juntos approach leveraged the trust participants had with participating community organizations. As a result, Juntos service providers—medical, behavioral, and case management teams—worked alongside local nonprofit community organizations to meet the need for preventive health care and continuity of care in the community. Juntos teamed up with almost 300 local organizations such as schools, community centers, soup kitchens, shelters, faith-based organizations, clubs, support groups, including the warehouse industry (a major infrastructure in Laredo) among many other organizations.

Gaining the support of local organizations did not come easily. The process involved a great investment of time and many face-to-face meetings. The Juntos outreach team usually took the first steps to go to out to the local organizations for introductions. Local organizations are often small and lacking in resources, including especially adequate personnel; the time available to administrators and service personnel was often quite limited. By being the first to reach out and remaining flexible with their meeting schedules, the team eliminated the time constraint barrier placed on many local organizations. The Juntos team then worked to obtain leader buy-in to host the services and to promote and recruit participants. This was, in some respects, the hardest challenge of all—harder even than overcoming participant distrust of government at the grassroots level.

The outreach team met with major hesitation from many organization leaders as well as a palpable sense of guardedness. Leaders and administrators wondered what benefit, if any,

there would be for participants, but most importantly they asked about all harm that might come from their involvement or promotion of the service. The nature of their questions revealed their familiarity with a discouraging phenomenon: underserved and disenfranchised populations are often sought out for their sheer size and demographic qualities as a ‘golden ticket’ for funding requests, since they check off all the right boxes (underserved, uninsured, poor, undereducated, chronically ill, ethnic minority, etc.). Unfortunately, too often they do not see many of the benefits they are promised. There appeared to be a consensus among local organizations that projects geared towards special populations are ‘fly by night’ kinds of projects: here today, gone tomorrow, using the target population for their own personal gain and agendas. This would be an example of self-interest *not* well understood. This perception revealed a sincere desire on the part of local organization leadership to assist real people in meaningful ways, but it also showed that there were very real barriers for Juntos to overcome.

The Juntos community outreach team worked to gain the trust of site administrators and their willingness to host the team and promote the services. They understood and respected the trusting relationship these administrators had built with their existing clients—most of whom formed a part of our target population—and sought to be a resource instead of a burden. The Juntos team was able to build rapport and trust with site administrators, allowing a true community-participatory approach to develop. Juntos relied on local organizations to host the traveling team as well as for the site personnel to promote, recruit, and remind participants of their appointment. This was a calculated move, as the intention was not to give site personnel more work, but rather leverage the already existing relationship between site personnel and their clients or consumers to eliminate barriers resulting from lack of trust towards the project team. In turn, the health care team provided the actual service, including health screenings, referrals, patient navigation into medical homes, patient education, and follow-up calls to non-compliant individuals. By working towards breaking down barriers of distrust through a community-based outreach participatory approach, Juntos gained close to 300 community partnerships serving over 60,000 individuals. The Juntos team gained great acceptance within community organizations and among residents.

This type of success can only come from building relationships with local community organizations who have acquired a reputation for caring for those in need. Local organizations which have been integrated and accepted in the community are the key to successful implementation of services as well as to the acquisition of knowledge of the community’s needs and resources. Appropriate personnel for the teams were selected with care and with a view to cultural sensitivity. Once selected, the team succeeded in changing the mindset of healthcare providers and leadership of what a healthcare setting is. It is vital to the community that public health policy and systems recognize the importance of remaining focused on the target population and the context in which they live, work, and play to guide public health policy and providers in developing strategies and programs aimed at improving community health.

Special Challenge of COVID-19

Because of their dependence on cooperation, community and nonprofit organizations always face a great deal of uncertainty, and this is especially so in the era of Covid-19 (Maher et al., 2020). Since their everyday work is typically in-person, tangible, and constant, the conditions brought about by the coronavirus pandemic threaten nonprofit budgets and the success of their respective missions for a variety of reasons. Limited assessments have been conducted on COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among the American adult population. The reasons for why people do not vaccinate are complex, but among the issues are distrust—especially from movements perceived to be politically inclined—and lack of awareness of what the vaccine-preventable disease can do, not to mention a barrage of targeted misinformation about vaccines. Despite this complexity, vaccine hesitancy may be addressed with simple health education efforts. Patient education campaigns delivered by trusted messengers might

succeed at ensuring a robust vaccination information effort. Surveys related to Hispanic trust in health messengers reveal that approximately two-thirds of Hispanic adults say they trust their local public health department, local organizations, their own doctors, and the CDC (Kearney et al., 2021). Hispanic individuals living in rural areas, however, with typically lower household incomes and lower levels of education, are more likely to be hesitant about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine (Khubchandani et al., 2021). Rural populations have proven to be a difficult to reach sector population and have a history of being among the hardest to count for the U.S. Census, due to language issues, distrust of the government, and other reasons.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unique challenges in regard to vaccine hesitancy and the inability of providers to reach disenfranchised populations, such as the elderly and Hispanic in rural areas. Vaccine mandates are hard to enforce in such areas. They are also an example of the government's use of its asymmetrical balance of coercive power. As such, it would neither be surprising if they foster and exacerbate distrust nor, in a polarized political climate, give rise to unnecessary and ideological resistance. Based on the case studies described in this article, we think adopting a community-based participatory outreach model would be preferable for organizations, including governments, seeking to promote and deliver the vaccine.

Conclusion

Trust between public and government entities is critical; without it, communities become paralyzed in their ability to act collectively and for the greater good. Government entities can rely on public organizations, specifically nonprofit organizations (NPOs), to meet diverse public needs and demands. AbouAssi et al. (2019) indicate governments and nonprofits have developed an interdependent and collaborative relationship to meet public demands. The case studies here also suggest that this relationship is likely to be especially effective under conditions where distrust is already high or likely to be so. Distrust is likely to be high in borderlands, where poverty is more pronounced and access to the infrastructure and resources that make e-government possible are scarcer. Distrust is also likely to be high when the compliance demanded by the law concerns sensitive personal issues, like health care, in a time characterized by ideological polarization and hyper partisanship. Under such conditions, coproduction may become a prudent and effective strategy for making headway in delivering public goods and increasing compliance with the law.

In coproducing public goods some groups will prove more effective than others. Our case studies suggest that a demonstrated record of past performance in the community, the organizational capacity to reach the population to be served, and experienced organizational leadership are key characteristics of successful nonprofit and community organizations. There is also the mundane but essential business of proficient and accurate record-keeping and a willingness to work with government bureaucracies, activities which are not for the faint of heart. In working together with government, such groups augment their potential for success when they are open to expert opinion, willing to collaborate, and can claim a volunteer base that by and large resembles the target population in demographic characteristics. And perhaps above all, self-interest well understood contributes to their being effective over the long term.

The success of the coalitions in both case studies illustrates the power of the idea of self-interest well understood in action. In these cases, the cooperation made possible by self-interest well understood suggests that the government was wise to pursue a strategy of coproduction in a borderland, as distinguished from relying for results on the asymmetrical balance of its coercive power. Recognizing that the trust it placed in nonprofit and community organizations was not misplaced will likely increase the desirability of coproduction as a strategy for producing public goods in future years. As a result, trust in nonprofits—on the part

of governments, citizens, and residents—will likely grow, making them even more appealing as government partners.

The mechanisms at work in our case studies suggest a reciprocal and positive correlation between levels of trust and strategies of coproduction. This correlation, in turn, while predicted by and supportive of contract failure theory, expands the reach of that theory by suggesting that citizen trust in governments compared to nonprofits operates in much the same way as does consumer trust in for-profits compared to nonprofits, but for different reasons. It is reasonable to assume that power asymmetries give rise to distrust, that certain factors aggravate that distrust, and that government administrators give thought to how best to achieve their goals. Working with trusted community organizations to produce public goods softens the harsher side of government without sacrificing any of the sovereignty with which it is invested to procure the public good.

Notes

1. Were it not for difficulties in face-to-face communication raised by the COVID-19 pandemic, we might have had more data showing the real-world results of the coalition's success in cooperation. But while a limiting factor, we decided this need not be a deficiency preventing us from sharing our results. In each case the researchers were able to observe up close the overcoming of the challenges of cooperation that made coproduction possible, and this cooperation itself constitutes much of the data we wished to share. For Census 2000, if those from Puerto Rico and other predominantly Spanish speakers wished to complete the census online, they had to do so in English (Whitworth, 2002). By 2020, however, Spanish versions of both the online and paper census forms were readily available.
2. In this paper, the answers to the questions are based only on our case studies; other studies may answer the questions in different and yet useful ways.
3. In an empirical study of survey data, which compared the patriotism of immigrants with that of native-born citizens, Nowrasteh and Forrester (2019) found that immigrants often had a more positive view of American government and history than did native-born citizens.
4. For Census 2000, if those from Puerto Rico and other predominantly Spanish speakers wished to complete the census online, they had to do so in English (Whitworth, 2002). By 2020, however, Spanish versions of both the online and paper census forms were readily available.
5. In 1986, 25,000 tax returns were filed electronically ('e-filed'); by 2011, over 100 million were e-filed (Internal Revenue Service, 2011). By 2020, the number rose to over 190 million, nearly 150 million of which were individual returns (Internal Revenue Service, 2021).
6. Reamer (2018) estimates that Texas loses over \$1,000 per year for every resident who is not counted in the census. With a population of almost 30 million, a 1% undercount in Texas means an estimated 300,000 persons not counted and \$300 million in lost funding per year.
7. The leadership challenges involved in navigating the bureaucratic requirements and guidelines created and enforced by various levels of government with which local organizations are required to cooperate, and from which they obtain the resources that make coproduction possible, would merit a paper all its own. Sometimes these requirements conflict. In many cases, these requirements have the unintended effect of dampening idealism by simultaneously limiting the strategic options available to nonprofit leaders while increasing their burden of accurate record-keeping and reliable performance measurement.
8. To cite a different example that illustrates the same insight, high rates of foreign-born nativity, especially from Latin America, are related to distrust in the safety of drinking

water (Pierce & Gonzalez, 2017). In South Texas, there have been specific incidents where water quality that was approved by governmental entities was indeed considered unsafe after facing further scrutiny (Satija & Ura, 2015). Though eventually there was compliance with water safety regulations after restructured analysis, incidents like this harm public trust in those on government payroll, and they show how informed members of the community, as distinguished from government officials, can become comparatively more trusted sources of information (Wallace, 2017).

9. In 2019, Laredo was also dubbed the largest of all ports in the United States, not including illegal drug traffic (Wallace, 2019).
10. According to the IRS, there were over 9,000 individual VITA sites operating in the nation in 2020. In 2021, due to the pandemic, a few thousand fewer were active—roughly 5,500 (M. Coombs, personal communication, July 29, 2021).
11. Willingness to collaborate is discussed in the section on health care outreach below.
12. During and after the political struggle to launch the Affordable Care Act in 2010, reasons like these were colored by the act's political opponents as attempts to whitewash a 'government takeover' of healthcare (Adair & Holan, 2010).

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Competition and Sensegiving: Nonprofit Markets and Organizational Signaling

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In this paper, we investigate how an organization's position within its nonprofit marketplace influences how nonprofits convey images about themselves to their stakeholders. We discuss the nature of competition in the nonprofit sector and explore the different competitive positions that nonprofits find themselves in. We assess how this positionality affects the ways that nonprofits attempt to convey images, or senses, of themselves to external audiences. We find that these sensegiving approaches are affected by competition, particularly when considered together with the stage of the organization's lifecycle.

Keywords: Nonprofit Competition, Sensegiving, Nonprofit Markets

Introduction

The nonprofit sector is competitive and as the sector continues to grow, competition, particularly for resources, is only likely to increase further. Although nonprofits may not acknowledge the idea that they must compete to survive (Curley et al., 2021), cognition of the nature of their competitive environment is essential for identifying ways to thrive in the resource acquisition market (Chetkovich & Frumkin, 2003; Tuckman, 1998; Walk et al., 2022.). In this setting, nonprofits tend to focus on external signaling to potential donors regarding their financial stewardship and reputation as a provider of efficient, quality services (Barman, 2002; Weisbrod, 1998).

Although the reality of competition in the nonprofit sector, and the ways in which that competition affects organizational strategy has been noted often in the literature (Harrison & Thornton, 2022), this reality has not necessarily translated into nonprofit leaders acknowledging competition (Curley et al., 2021; Sharp, 2018). Nonprofits are unique in that they obviously do compete for resources against one another, while they also appear to negate this behavior (Sharp, 2018). This negation may occur, in part, because of the need to manage organizational identity across a diverse set of stakeholders. One way to do this is through the deployment of deliberate organizational sensegiving images that convey to stakeholders who the organization is/what it does in such a way the organization remains recognizable to donors, clients, collaborators, and competitors alike (Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019). That is, the organization needs to convey its image of itself to a wide variety of different stakeholders including funders, donors, clients, governments, and the public generally.

The trick for nonprofits is to recognize and act upon the reality that they are in competition, that they play a particular role within their competitive environment, but doing so with the knowledge that their stakeholders often perceive them not to be operating competitively. They must chart a path of communicating ‘who they are,’ often in comparison to other organizations, while taking care to not disparage these competitors, who are also quite often collaborators (Curley et al., 2021). In this research, we explore how nonprofits provide a sense of who they would like be perceived as in a competitive resource marketplace, and investigate the relationship between the images that they use to convey their organizational identity and the nature of the competitive environment in which they operate and their status within that marketplace.

Sensegiving and the Competitive Environment

Organizational identity comprises that which is central or core to the organization’s character, is unique to the organization, and endures over time (Albert & Whetten, 1985). While adhering to these key criteria, organizational identity is also dynamic (Gioia et al., 2000), responsive, and/or specialized or fractured, with specific signals set to match distinct audiences (Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019). In order to acquire the resources they need to survive, all organizations have to convey who they are, i.e., their identity, to various stakeholders, in ways that appeal to those stakeholders. They do this through sensegiving (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Organizations engage in sensegiving in the form of intentional branding and marketing campaigns but also send signals through general communication and interaction with stakeholders. (Liu et al., 2015; Wymer et al., 2006). Sensegiving is different from branding and marketing in that the relational component of communication encompasses more than monetary resource acquisition. Marketing and branding would be part of a sensegiving strategy, but sensegiving extends to a broader set of communication strategies that the organization employs. Every donor management conversation is an exercise in sensegiving, but so is every interaction between a volunteer and a client, and even with an employee.

Nonprofits can, and do, tailor their signals based both on what the organization wants from its intended audiences and also what those audiences’ preferences are. A sensegiving strategy is an attempt to speak the language of a stakeholder being spoken to. How nonprofits frame efficiency (Eckerd, 2015), earned revenue (Levine Daniel & Galasso, 2019), and overhead (Qu & Levine Daniel, 2021) are all examples of sensegiving, i.e., organizations attempting to send messages to various stakeholders that will resonate and ultimately yield access to resources. We expect that the nature of the competitive environment, and an organization’s standing within that environment, is yet another factor that influences nonprofit sensegiving approaches.

In the nonprofit sector, there are some markets that are competitive with multiple organizations roughly balanced in their share of resources, and other markets that are characterized by one or a few large dominant organizations that possess the bulk of that market’s resources (Harrison & Thornton, 2022). In the former setting, all organizations are on roughly similar footing, actively competing against one another. In the latter setting, organizations may be in a dominant position or challenging that domination. The acquisition of scarce resources, which is necessarily relative to other organizations in the market, is the paramount goal, even for mission-oriented organizations.

For those organizations that have either a clear niche or sit in a dominant position relative to other organizations, resource acquisition may be relatively consistent and different from settings where organizational niches are less clear, at least provided that the composition of the market is relatively stable (Paarlberg & Hwang, 2017). In the settings where competitive pressures may be minimal, an organization in a dominant position may not need to focus much

on differentiating itself from other organizations but rather on maintaining its dominant position (Gayle et al., 2017). These organizations may focus on achieving a sufficient level of status and legitimacy with organizational stakeholders to enable the organization to thrive, building a strong reputation over time; seeking stability, and limiting potential competition (Oliver, 1991).

Conversely, as the market for resources becomes more competitive, stability may be more difficult to attain (Van Puyvelde & Brown, 2016). When markets are competitive with many organizations competing for resources, organizations must find some way to differentiate themselves from their resource competitors (Barman, 2002). This can be done through a variety of different methods, such as focusing on revenue diversification (Tuckman, 1998), cultivating relationships with foundations and other grantors (Waters, 2009), by adhering to external standards of financial accountability (Sloan, 2009), or by making a personal connection with its stakeholders.

In other words, nonprofits likely adopt different management strategies depending upon the nature of the competitive environment and their position therein. It has been demonstrated that organizational factors play a role in the extent to which organizations follow more of a customer-orientation and offer more tangible and individual level services, or more of a donor-orientation and offer services that are collective or public in nature (Chetkovich & Frumkin, 2003). External factors likely play a role as well (Paarlberg et al., 2018). Competition has been assessed in a variety of different settings, such as monopsonistic situations, like competing for government funding (Lecy & Van Slyke, 2013; Nikolova, 2015) and the implications of competition on fiscal outcomes for organizations (Paarlberg et al., 2018).

As noted by Harrison and Thornton (2022), nonprofit competition has typically been assessed in one of two main ways in the literature. First is a focus on the nature of the market itself, typically in consideration of how broad community characteristics affect the population of nonprofits and the nature of the markets that they work within (Gronbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Koch et al., 2015). Secondly, there are studies that assess how market competition affects outcomes like grant acquisition or financial stability (Faulk et al., 2016; Paarlberg & Hwang, 2017). Our interest is similar, but rather than focus on outcomes we are more interested in the interplay between competition and strategy—or more generally speaking, we are interested in the moderating effect that strategy plays on both organizational outcomes and the competitive environment itself (Harrison & Thornton, 2022).

Part of the reason that distribution of nonprofits in a community matters is because those nonprofits are competing against one another for resources. For example, nonprofits that focus on serving customers may behave differently depending upon how their competitors frame themselves. Barman (2002) compared organizational behavior in a competitive and a monopolistic environment, finding that in crowded markets nonprofits felt pressure to differentiate, relative to organizations in more concentrated markets. Barman (2002) notes that "...[I]n order to differentiate themselves, nonprofit organizations must assert uniqueness based on a particular measure. Differentiation entails the construction of a hierarchical relationship between nonprofits and their rivals..." (Barman, 2002, p. 1194).

Organizations may be able to dictate the terms of this hierarchical relationship, particularly if they are already a market leader, but other nonprofits are often forced to conform to institutional expectations of important measures, leaving organizations vulnerable to the whims of market leaders and donor expectations (Eckerd & Moulton, 2011). However, nonprofit environments are not dichotomously either competitive or monopolistic (Castaneda et al., 2007). There is thus likely variability across different competitive environments regarding the images that nonprofits try to convey in order to acquire resources.

Sensegiving Strategies

Most nonprofits cannot compete in the comparatively straightforward modes of price or quality that for-profits do—both price and quality are difficult for nonprofits to define or for stakeholders to perceive. As such, nonprofits likely need to communicate some image about who they are to their stakeholders—sometimes in a specific way to specific stakeholders, like in a donation solicitation, but also sometimes in a general way that can simplify the message that is received by a diverse set of stakeholders. Although literature that is specifically about nonprofit sensegiving is at a relatively early stage, it is evident that nonprofits do engage in a process like sensegiving in ways that seem related to competition.

Young nonprofits have been shown to convey an image of being more efficient when entering existing service areas (Castaneda et al., 2007). Older nonprofits have been shown to focus on building brand reputation (Podolny, 1993). As noted previously, Chetkovich and Frumkin (2003) suggested that nonprofits convey different images depending upon whether they are communicating with primarily a donor or client audience. Levine Daniel and Eckerd (2019) specifically looked at sensegiving approaches that nonprofits use to communicate with donor audiences, finding that nonprofits conveyed three types of images: a professional image, characterized by conveying an impression of an organization that follows *professional* management practices; an output orientation that conveys an image of being *results-oriented*; and a *symbolic* image, characterized by demonstrating conformance with external expectations of high program and low fundraising spending.

The literature on both sensegiving and its relationship to competition is nascent enough that theoretical development is needed. Despite having a substantial literature base to draw tangential insights from, we believe that exploratory studies that can build towards theories of nonprofit competition are most relevant at this stage. To that end, we do not pose specific expectations about the relationship between a nonprofits competitive position and the sensegiving approaches it employs but rather frame our study as an exploration into this relationship for the purposes of developing a proof of concept and to build more of an empirical base from which to theorize. As such in the following sections, we describe our exploratory study, our data and approach, and conclude with some insights into how we think that nonprofit competition affects the sensegiving approaches that organizations use.

Data and Methods

Our data are from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS). The NCCS Core file data include the information provided from all of the 990 forms filed with the IRS, and we utilized a panel of tax data from 2008-2012 for a sample of roughly 5,500 nonprofits. We say roughly because we did not have complete information for each organization for each year. Given that these data are from tax purposes, there were years that organizations had nothing to report in certain sections of their tax returns and those fields return empty, and also given that we are using some data from survey files and not all organizations are surveyed each year.

We are limited to these years, because we use data from the SOI NCCS survey, which includes questions on the functional expenditures of individual organizations to supplement the larger dataset and was consistently collected during this time span. For example, organizations need only report basic designations of expenses on a regular tax form, whereas the survey requests a full breakdown of functional expenses, akin to what one might find in an audit report. Problems with the NCCS data, and in the reporting of information on the 990 are well documented (Froelich et al., 2000). However, our focus here is less on the accuracy of the information provided in the 990 and more on the sense of the organization that it is trying to convey about itself. That is, while we acknowledge that 990 data may contain misinformation or inaccuracies, our considerations are with how the nature of the competitive environment

alters the way that organizations appeal to their market through what they report in their financial information.

From this perspective, we view the 990 more as a means through which the organization can convey a sense of who it is, than as an accurate depiction of their financial records. We also note that the 990 data are limited to more formalized organizations and thus is not representative of small, very young, or church-based organizations. Again, however, our main goal is to assess how nonprofits strategize to acquire resources in the marketplace, and we note the universe of organization that fill out 990s are the relevant sample for considering the nature of competition—in short, if an organization does not fill out a 990, its competitors may not even know it exists, or the organization might be operating at such a localized level that they do not really exist in a market as we have conceived it here. Nevertheless, our results should be interpreted with this potential selection bias issue.

The benefit of using these data is that thousands of organizations are included, over a panel of several years. We can look at a wide range of organizations and the markets of organizations within different community environments and draw comparisons across a diverse range of settings. The downside of using these data, in addition to the previously noted accuracy issues, is the limitations on the types of data that are collected. Given that the data are mostly related to tax filings, we are limited to considering only basic financial and organizational demographic characteristics, supplemented as best we can with the survey data. To that end, we cannot directly observe the specific sensegiving strategies that individual organizations used, as for example in Levine Daniel and Eckerd (2019), but rather just a broad set of images that we can discern through general trends of financial reporting. We see this tradeoff of generality for specificity as reasonable, particularly when coupled with more specific studies like the aforementioned Levine Daniel and Eckerd (2019) study. Drawing from the literature described in the previous sections and our own arguments, we collected key variables based upon the data that were available to us. These variables are described below.

Age

As we noted above, we are interested in not just an organization's competitive market, but also its position within that market. Perhaps the most straightforward way to assess an organization's standing in a market is by its age. While age itself is not necessarily indicative of success in a market, an organization that has been around for a long time has at least demonstrated the ability to survive. Further, as organizations evolve, not only do they alter according to a market, a market evolves based upon the organizations that operate within. This mutual adaptive process helps explain aspects of both the organization and its strategy as well as the market. We measure age straightforwardly as the number of years between the organization's reported incorporation date and the 990 tax year. We do note some limitations with this approach, and indeed with any approach of measuring the true age of nonprofit organizations (Levine Daniel & Andersson, 2021). The actual 'birth' of nonprofits has been notoriously difficult to identify and so we utilize the incorporation date under the assumption that this date should be relatively proximate to the point at which a young organization recognized the need to appeal to a broad stakeholder base. Owing to the overall skewness of the distribution of ages in our data (i.e., there tend to be many more younger organizations than older ones), all results discussed below report the natural log of the organizational age.

Competitive Environment

Although there are a variety of different ways that we could conceive of nonprofit environments for purposes of measuring competition, we opted for a relatively straightforward operationalization, based on a review of the donation market literature (Thornton, 2006). We define market segments by organizations being located in and operating within a Core-Based Statistical Area (CBSA) and serving similar clients as defined by National

Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) categories, defined at the major alpha code level (i.e., the first digit of each code consisting of the alphabetical major level), leaving us with 25 unique categories in our data, not all of which are represented in each geographic region that we assess. We define market segments geographically to account for the fact that, while the best-known nonprofits are national or international in scope, the vast majority of nonprofits are local in nature, are generally small, serving clients and seeking donors within a single geographic area.

We acknowledge that there are many other ways we could have defined competitive environments, including based on organizational tasks (Moulton & Eckerd, 2012), but we opt for a convention that is common in the field, particularly when using 990 data (Harrison & Thornton, 2014; Seaman et al., 2014). NTEE codes have, rightfully in our mind, fallen out of favor as indicators of nonprofit categories, but during the time of the data we use (2008–2012), nonprofits would have been very familiar with the NTEE codes and we believe it to be a reasonable assumption that organizations would have identified with these categories as market segments.

We also believe that this modeling choice is reasonable considering that our argument is about how stakeholders perceive an organization, and while a general donor may not know what an NTEE code is, it is reasonable to assume that they may well begin their search for a nonprofit based on geographic proximity and search terms quite consistent with the major-level code of the NTEE. A key challenge with this approach is the level of detail to use within the NTEE categories. The NTEE contains nested categories of organizations; at the highest level, these categories are very broad and are not sufficiently granular to describe realistic nonprofit markets, while at lowest levels, the categories can get so narrow that there might be only one or two organizations in a CBSA that fit within.

We opted for the major alpha code level as a reasonable balance between sufficient narrowness, but still broad enough to give us reasonable depictions of realistic markets. We also note that, since our interest is investigating markets at the CBSA level, we eliminated organizations from our analysis that served as headquarters organizations that clearly operate on the national or international level. We retained all subsidiaries, however, as they operate at the local level.

Within those market segments, we define competition in several different ways. First, as has been done before in nonprofit research, we consider the carrying capacity or density of a market by tabulating the number of nonprofits in each market per 1,000 people (Gronbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Harrison & Thornton, 2014). This number gives us an overall picture of how prevalent the number of organizations is in each CBSA but is limited because it does not provide information about the relative level of competition or concentration in those markets. Therefore, we also tabulate several Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) variables. The HHI is a well-established measure that is used in the industrial organization literature to assess the competitiveness of markets (Rhoades, 1993), and was also shown to be a relevant way to consider competition in the nonprofit sector by Seaman et al. (2014).

We assess the distribution of the following financial variables in each nonprofit market: total end-of-year assets; total contributions; direct public support; total gross receipts; total expenses; and total revenue. We assessed several initially in order to conceive of competition from both demand and supply perspectives, and ultimately present a narrower set given high correlations between these different HHI calculations. In our models we include measures of HHIs of public contributions and of gross receipts, and also use organizational density (number of organizations in each market, per 1,000 population in the CBSA) as a measure of competition, which as noted above, has also been used in the literature. We provide more detail about these calculations in the Appendix.

Sensegiving Images

We observe the strategies/sensegiving signals that organizations convey indirectly via an exploratory factor analysis. The variables we used for this procedure can be broken down into four general categories, derived from previous literature (Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019) and with consideration of metrics that are commonly used by charity watchdog groups like Charity Navigator. Our assumption is that these variables provide an opportunity for nonprofits to engage in sensegiving because they are the sorts of measures that the public is likely as least passingly familiar with, even if they tend to misinterpret them (Charles & Kim, 2016), and because these financial figures inform the watchdog reporting that donors rely upon (Eckerd, 2015). Stated simply, while these financial indicators do not represent the totality of information that an organization can use to convey a sense about who they are, these indicators likely fit into a broader strategy that organizations use to convey certain images (Krishnan et al., 2006).

As noted, we viewed this factor analysis as exploratory in nature, and followed the procedure recommended by O'Rourke and Hatcher (2013). We began by assessing simple correlations between a large number of indicators, eliminating those indicators that were uncorrelated with other indicators (i.e., no correlations greater than $|0.3|$). We then ran the factor analysis procedure iteratively until we extracted components that we could meaningfully interpret as indicative of the most theoretically sound model. Next, we discuss the variables used and the factors extracted. First, we look at the proportional amounts of revenue from different sources. We expect this to help identify when organizations seek to acquire resources from the general public, the government, program fees, or membership dues. Second, we look at several different expense proportion allocations. We include the standard expense ratios (program, fundraising, and administrative) but also several further breakdowns of program spending (such as spending on salaries and benefits, advertising, and technology resources). Third, we include several indicators of commercialization and professionalization, such as the utilization of a professional auditor, use of conflict of interest and whistleblower policies, and the remuneration of workers (the proportion of employees that earn at least 6 figures) to account for labor market considerations. We provide more details about the factor analysis approach we used in the Appendix.

We describe our extraction process in full detail in the Appendix, and demonstrate the four factors we extracted in Table A2. To interpret these factors, we relied on related literature, finding the roles described by Moulton and Eckerd (2012) and subsequent research fit the results of the factor analysis well (Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019; Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019; Mitchell, 2014; Shier & Handy, 2015). These roles are seen as the different strategic choices that nonprofits use to reflect their priorities and communicate who they are as an organization; an idea quite similar to sensegiving generally. We do not find complete overlap with the roles identified in this work, but we find conceptual overlap with several of the roles that have been observed previously and thus we use language consistent with the literature. We extracted the following factors, representing our measurement of sensegiving images from the factor analysis, which describe below: a *capacity building* approach that seems to reflect an image of commitment to human resources and capacity building; an image of *professionalism* in organizational operations; an *individual expression* or values representation image; and a *ratio management* approach that creates an image of efficiency.

Organizations scoring high on the capacity building factor had higher administrative spending rates and spent more of their program expenses on things like salaries and benefits, advertising and technology. In other words, these organizations illustrated investment in themselves, and in particular in their employees and collaborators. This makes sense—drawing on the literature, we had conceived as competition existing in the domains of donated resources and outputs, but nonprofits must also compete in labor markets. We believe this factor demonstrates an image of an organization that is committed to its capacity to provide

services. The second factor scores high on professionalism indicators, with high levels of assets, use of professional policies like whistleblower protections and conflict of interest procedures, and a high level of program revenue relative to public support, representing an organization that invested in itself and diversified its resource base. The third factor showed organizations that were professionalized in nature, but in contrast to the second factor, tended to rely on public support rather than program revenue, and consistent with this, also tended to report higher fundraising expense ratios. We see this factor as consistent with an organization that is demonstrating its commitment to providing donors with an outlet to express their views. Finally, the fourth factor is a relatively clear indicator of an organization that spends proportionally more on programs than on overhead and is potentially concerned about how the proportions of expense choices are perceived which is consistent with the symbolic image observed by Levine Daniel and Eckerd (2019), but we view it as more specifically about ratio management in our case. We do note that higher fundraising expenses, which are part of our professionalism factor have been seen as problematic historically, but recent literature and trends in the nonprofit sector have noted that the fundraising ratio has tended to be misrepresented as a 'bad' thing and that some amount of fundraising is obviously necessary (Eckerd, 2015); thus a higher ratio is consistent with professionalism while a lower one is consistent with a ratio management image. We discuss these unobserved factors in more detail in the Appendix.

To account for the likelihood that organizations of different size may respond to competition differently, we consider two additional variables at the organization level: functional expenses for each year and the number of employees for each year, both logged to account for wide distributions in our data. Although our focus here is not on how aspects of the geographic area, such as need for services or the culture of the region, affect the competition response, we recognize that these issues could have an effect and therefore also include variables for: the logged total population of the metro area, the median household income of the metro area, the proportion of residents that have earned a high school diploma or equivalency, and a Gini coefficient to measure the extent of economic inequality in the metro area. Lastly, we control for the region of the county in which the metro area is located, both to account for labor market considerations and potential cultural distinctiveness.

Our final analytical data set is a panel dataset with the organization-year as the unit of analysis. All independent variables are lagged for one year from the dependent variables to account for endogeneity concerns. We do note, however, that this will not completely eliminate endogeneity concerns, as it is probably that organizations' and their competitive environments' evolution over time are interdependent, particularly for those organizations that dominate local markets. Nevertheless, a one-year lag should ensure that this is more of a conceptual consideration when interpreting our results rather a technical endogeneity problem with our analysis.

Given our use of dependent variables that are not mutually exclusive (i.e., an organization could be conveying more than one image at a time), we must account for potential dependence amongst our dependent variables. Indeed, correlations are significant amongst each of our factor/dependent variables, such that a ratio management approach and an individual expression image are not likely to be used in tandem ($r=-0.51$), nor are a capacity building focus and a professionalism stance ($r=-0.40$). Individual expression and professionalism signals are also unlikely to be used in tandem ($r=-0.58$), with ratio management and professionalism strategies somewhat likely to be used together ($r=0.23$). Breusch-Pagan tests (minimum $\chi^2=6,664.40$) for each of our models indicated such correlations were present and thus we run each of our models below as a system of equations via seemingly unrelated regressions (SURs) (Zellner, 1962). A SUR model is used to consecutively estimate multiple regression models in order to account for the correlations between the dependent variables used in each separate model. A SUR model estimates a system of maximum likelihood regression models, weighting each model to eliminate the correlated error terms associated

with each dependent variable. This process makes sure that any dependence between the individual regressions is accounted for separate from the relationships between the left and right sides of each of the individual regressions.

In addition to our dependent variables being correlated, because we are using a panel of organizations over a period of years, we are able to use a fixed-effect estimation to control for any unobserved variables that exist within our groups of organizational-years. Our final models, presented in Tables 1 through 4 are each fixed effect seemingly unrelated regressions, with standard errors clustered by organization. We standardized each of the factor variables for ease of interpretability, such that each coefficient can be read as the rate of change in standard deviations of the factor scores. Finally, given the likely presence of heteroskedastic errors, all models were estimated with bootstrapped robust standard errors. We ran a total of four models, one each using our three different measures of competition (HHIs for public contributions and gross receipts, and organizational density), and a final model that includes all three of these variables. As we noted above, the markets for input and output resources can be different for some organizations depending upon the types of services they provide, and organizational density is fundamentally more about the number of competitors rather than the distribution of certain resources. This final model accounts for this variability in market types. We provide much more detail about our modeling strategy in the Appendix.

Results

In the tables below, we show the results of our analyses. In this section, we describe the trends that we identify in the relationships. We provide more detailed discussion of the results in the Appendix, including a discussion about interpretation of our coefficients, which can be a bit confusing given our use of standardized factor scores as dependent variables. In terms of our result trends, we first find that age is associated with the sensegiving stance that an organization takes, but age is not always associated in ways that might be expected. In each model, older organizations are more likely to use ratio management and professional signaling, while younger organizations are more likely to send signals of individual expression and with a capacity building focus. Competition results are a bit more mixed, but when measured according to the distribution of contributions (or the input/donation market) within a market, the results are clear. As contribution competition increases, organizations are more likely to use ratio management and professionalism images. In less competitive markets, organizations are more likely to follow individual expression and service delivery approaches. These results are robust to the inclusion of the other competition measures.

When competition is measured via gross receipts (or the output side), a capacity building focus is associated with less competitive environments, perhaps accounting for a relatively settled market in which each organization serves a particular service niche. Similarly, a professionalism approach is associated with less competitive environments as measured via gross receipts but this approach is more likely in more competitive environments as measured via contributions (i.e., the input side). This demonstrates how input and output markets may be different and suggests that sending a signal of professionalism may be important when competing for resources but might be less important in providing outputs/services. These results (shown in Table 2) are also robust to the full model (in Table 4). When we measured competition via the density of organizations, there were no meaningful associations with any of the sensegiving images.

Our organizational level variables also exhibit some consistent trends. Organizations with higher functional expenses (i.e., larger organizations by monetary resources) are associated with the professionalism image. Organizations with a large number of employees (i.e., larger organizations by number of employees and volunteers) have a negative association with the use of individual expression images. Finally, although we did not include these results in our

Table 1. Competition Measured via Contributions

	Ratio Management	Individual Expression	Professionalism	Capacity Building
Age	0.136*** (0.017)	-0.050*** (0.012)	0.117*** (0.008)	-0.038*** (0.015)
Competition— Contributions	0.195*** (0.071)	-0.218*** (0.054)	0.063* (0.038)	-0.193*** (0.065)
Functional Expenses (logged)	-0.140*** (0.007)	-0.036*** (0.007)	0.260*** (0.006)	-0.349*** (0.013)
Total Size (logged employees)	0.172*** (0.007)	-0.206*** (0.005)	0.110*** (0.004)	0.136*** (0.006)
Metro Gini Coefficient	0.369 (0.499)	0.733** (0.370)	-0.351 (0.259)	0.422 (0.571)
Metro Population (logged)	-0.014 (0.004)	0.019** (0.009)	0.003 (0.007)	0.019 (0.016)
Metro Prop Without High School Dip.	-0.009** (0.004)	0.012*** (0.003)	-0.007*** (0.002)	0.004 (0.004)
Metro Median Household Income	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)

Notes: United States regional dummy variable results not shown. All models run with fixed effects for organization and year. *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

tables (to save space), nonprofits in the Mountain West and on the West Coast were more associated with using individual expression images, a capacity building focus was more associated with the mid-Atlantic region than anywhere else, and organizations in the Midwest were associated with the use of professionalism images.

Discussion

We see two key conclusions from our work. First, considering the concentration of resources in terms of both contributions and spending can provide us with important information about the market contexts in which nonprofits work. Secondly, there appears to be a relationship between the level of competition in an environment and the types of signals that nonprofits choose to convey about themselves. Young organizations may tend to present themselves as a vehicle for individuals to express themselves and their individual values through an appeal to a set of resources providers that may not have their values otherwise represented. This is in line with the supply-side argument about the formation of nonprofits (Salamon & Anheier, 1998).

Generally speaking, older organizations were associated with sending images of professionalism, also in line with what we might expect from the literature (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). When competition is measured on the output side via concentration of gross receipts, we might infer a picture of older organizations becoming more dominant players in their environment, reducing the competition they face and enabling them to professionalize, instituting a set of policies to ensure consistency and even shifting towards more program service revenue as a way to further diversify their funding base. In contrast, when competition is measured as an input via concentration of public contributions, competitive pressures may foster a measure of conformance around professional norms as organizations competing for scarce donated resources may feel the need to send efficiency images via expense ratios to donors that they are worthy stewards of donated resources. When there is more competition over donated resources, organizations signal ‘better’ expense ratios, and older organizations are more likely to report ‘better’ expense ratios. This may indicate that, as previous scholarship has emphasized (Eckerd, 2015), the expense ratios are not actual measures of efficiency and

Table 2. Competition Measured via Gross Receipts

	Ratio Management	Individual Expression	Professionalism	Capacity Building
Age	0.136*** (0.017)	-0.050*** (0.012)	0.117*** (0.008)	-0.039** (0.015)
Competition—Gross Receipts	0.037 (0.064)	-0.035 (0.042)	-0.068** (0.033)	-0.110* (0.058)
Functional Expenses (logged)	-0.141*** (0.009)	-0.035*** (0.007)	0.259*** (0.006)	-0.349*** (0.013)
Total Size (logged employees)	0.172*** (0.007)	-0.206*** (0.005)	0.110*** (0.004)	0.136*** (0.006)
Metro Gini Coefficient	0.336 (0.500)	0.759** (0.372)	-0.406 (0.260)	0.413 (0.568)
Metro Population (logged)	-0.005 (0.013)	0.011 (0.010)	0.013* (0.007)	0.017 (0.015)
Metro Prop Without High School Dip.	-0.010** (0.004)	0.012*** (0.003)	-0.008*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.004)
Metro Median Household Income	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)

Notes: United States regional dummy variable results not shown. All models run with fixed effects for organization and year. *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

therefore, older organizations have the capacity and/or expertise to be able to signal more socially acceptable ratios. New entrants may actually be more efficient, but that efficiency is not actually reflected in ratios.

It may also indicate that new nonprofits are less likely to enter highly competitive markets. The more competitive markets appear to be occupied by older organizations, while newer nonprofits appear to operate in less competitive markets. With the limitations of our data, we do not know if these less competitive markets are truly low competition or if they are emerging markets, but it would make sense for newer organizations to be operating in either type.

Emerging markets may be an ideal place for young organizations to find their competitive advantage, but they may also enter markets with low competition, i.e., those markets in which one or a few organizations account for most of the resources, in order to compete with those established organizations by offering quality or efficiency advantages. The capacity building focus that we observed tends to be employed by younger organizations in less competitive markets. While the individual expression signal appears to indicate an entry point for socially entrepreneurial organizations, the capacity building focus image appears to be the other common approach by young organizations. New organizations may focus on building capacity, including higher administrative expenses, in particular on things like employees and information technology, perhaps as a demonstration of their interest in being perceived as legitimate within the environment (or indeed just a reflection of the reality that new organizations lack, and therefore need to build, capacity).

Our findings suggest something of a chronological approach to sending sensegiving cues, perhaps moderated by the nature of the competitive environment. In our sample, young organizations tended to be found in less competitive environments suggesting that social entrepreneurs see openings in either creating new markets that may have been underserved or by taking on dominant players by attempting to offer something different. In the for-profit literature, we typically find that companies respond to pressure either via a price/efficiency or quality strategy, typically with older firms offering higher quality (or perceived quality) and newer firms taking advantage of the size to offer lower prices. Nonprofits may present themselves differently. This may be because the ability to actually demonstrate either their

Table 3. Competition Measured via Organization Density

	Ratio Management	Individual Expression	Professionalism	Capacity Building
Age	0.140*** (0.017)	-0.050*** (0.012)	0.117*** (0.008)	-0.038** (0.015)
Competition— Organizations by Category per 1,000 in Population	0.049 (0.180)	-0.170 (0.145)	0.126 (0.097)	-0.134 (0.155)
Functional Expenses (logged)	-0.141*** (0.009)	-0.035*** (0.007)	0.264*** (0.005)	-0.348*** (0.012)
Total Size (logged employees)	0.172*** (0.007)	-0.206*** (0.005)	0.108*** (0.004)	0.135*** (0.006)
Metro Gini Coefficient	0.296 (0.506)	0.861** (0.382)	-0.465 (0.268)	0.529 (0.577)
Metro Population (logged)	-0.001 (0.012)	0.004 (0.008)	0.007 (0.006)	0.006 (0.014)
Metro Prop Without High School Dip.	-0.009** (0.004)	0.011*** (0.003)	-0.006*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.004)
Metro Median Household Income	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)

Notes: United States regional dummy variable results not shown. All models run with fixed effects for organization and year. *p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01

value or quality is a challenge and newer nonprofits need to build capacity, thus making it difficult to symbolically signal efficiency in the way a more established organization can. In contrast, a new nonprofit may believe it is important to demonstrate an effort to build capacity early on to build legitimacy with their stakeholders, in particular, with donors.

As organizations age, those that survive seem to find themselves in one of two environments in our sample. Concentrated environments where they are one of the dominant players, or competitive environments where competitive pressures may push them towards sending certain symbolic images of either perceived efficiency (via program expense ratios) or professionalism. The latter trend towards professionalism and more market-oriented behavior has been noted in previous literature (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004), while the pressure to manage expense ratios has been noted across the organizational life cycle (Eckerd, 2015). Nevertheless, the age of an organization seems to more consistently affect sensegiving approaches than competition in our sample, and we can infer two relatively distinct organizational life cycle sensegiving trends. First is an organization that enters a concentrated field, attempting to invest in internal capacity, perhaps to ramp up their ability to challenge a dominant player, or to demonstrate legitimacy to donors. As time goes on, that new entrant fosters a more competitive market (by effectively challenging the dominant player), which spurs the organizations in the environment to send signals highlighting their efficiency and good financial stewardship. Second is an organization that creates a distinct niche, attempting to represent the values of a set of donors whose values may not be represented, effectively opening up a new market for its services. As this organization ages, it retains some level of dominance in its market, building capacity and professionalizing over time.

Examples and Limitations

To illustrate how this may work, we identified a couple of examples of organizations that fit the profiles that we discussed above. Give Directly¹ is an example of the first type of organization noted above. In 2011, Give Directly entered into the crowded international development and microfinance market, competing with well-established organizations like Children International, Cooperative Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), International

Table 4. All Competition Variables Included

	Ratio Management	Individual Expression	Professionalism	Capacity Building
Age	0.136*** (0.017)	-0.050*** (0.012)	0.117*** (0.008)	-0.039** (0.015)
Competition— Contributions	0.226** (0.082)	-0.233*** (0.062)	0.126*** (0.042)	-0.164** (0.072)
Competition—Gross Receipts	-0.052 (0.073)	0.035 (0.047)	-0.121*** (0.036)	-0.043 (0.064)
Competition— Organizations by Category per 1,000 in Population	-0.015 (0.182)	-0.101 (0.146)	0.127 (0.095)	-0.043 (0.065)
Functional Expenses (logged)	-0.141*** (0.009)	-0.036*** (0.007)	0.259*** (0.006)	-0.350*** (0.013)
Total Size (logged employees)	0.172*** (0.007)	-0.206*** (0.005)	0.110*** (0.004)	0.136*** (0.006)
Metro Gini Coefficient	0.354 (0.505)	0.789** (0.380)	-0.453* (0.264)	0.434 (0.576)
Metro Population (logged)	-0.011 (0.013)	0.016* (0.010)	0.010 (0.007)	0.021 (0.015)
Metro Prop Without High School Dip.	-0.010** (0.004)	0.011*** (0.003)	-0.007*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.004)
Metro Median Household Income	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)

Notes: United States regional dummy variable results not shown. All models run with fixed effects for organization and year. *p< .10; **p< .05; ***p< .01

Rescue Committee, Heifer International and MAP International. Give Directly entered this crowded market with a new conceit that differed from the standard way of providing international aid, and an ethos intended to appeal to a certain subset of donors and philanthropists. Standard practice in international development had theretofore been to provide aid indirectly to needy families in other countries, either via established governmental or community networks that would distribute needed items, or via giving material goods directly. For example, Heifer International historically worked with governments and communities providing access to agricultural support for subsistence farmers, initially providing livestock as an investment, and subsequently working to create a community of agricultural development.

Give Directly challenged this indirect model by providing money directly to people in need. Its sensegiving approach was predicated on appealing to a certain type of potential donor, combining aspects of the professionalism and individual expression sensegiving signals. Illustrative of professionalism, Give Directly situated itself as being professionally managed, and perhaps most importantly, evidence-based in its assessment of its work. Since its founding, it has used professional evaluation methods such as randomized trials to assess the effectiveness of its programs, reporting the results of these assessments prominent on its website and in relevant media. This professionalism approach carries through to the core of the organization's messaging which is intended to convey an implicit (or at times explicit) critique of previous models of providing aid as paternalistic. Give Directly appeals to donors who want to provide support for poverty internationally, but with minimal overhead and with an inherent trust in the recipients to determine how to spend the money. In its communications materials, Give Directly often mentions its low overhead, its rigorous approach to evaluation and assessment, and its partnerships with prominent corporate and philanthropic funders. It is not an international development organization that will tug at one's heart strings, like several of the others noted above. It is the evidence-based,

rationalistic, and corporate minded international development nonprofit. And this approach has been successful, with the organization going from revenues of about \$17 million in 2014, to about \$70 million in 2018, to over \$270 million in 2021, making it larger than Heifer International² which was founded in 1944.

In contrast to the crowded field that Give Directly entered into, B Lab³ created a new market in which it remains the only entrant. Whereas Give Directly has framed itself as doing something in a different way, B Lab frames itself as a movement that is doing something completely different. B Lab offers an independent certification program for for-profit companies that have a social mission beyond profit. Companies can opt in for the certification and undergo a process that identifies how their internal systems and practices support the social mission. While B Lab is not the first certification organization, it is perhaps the most comprehensive. Other certification organizations, like the International Organization for Standardization which provides the ISO 14001 certification for environmental management, have more narrow certification programs while B Lab considers all aspects of a company's operations to ensure that the social mission is germane to the business' day-to-day processes. B Lab's sensegiving approach is based on representation, arguing that it is heading a movement to make the capitalist economy more inclusive and supportive of social missions. B Lab actually says rather little about the organization itself, focusing instead on conveying a sense to consumers that they should feel good doing business with the companies that B Lab certifies. Similar to Give Directly, B Lab situates itself as operating with professional business practices but speaks less about its own operations than about the practices of its certification holders. In a way, B Lab is tugging on the heart strings, but doing so from a position of professionalism.

Although these are obviously just two examples, we believe our results illustrate the importance of considering the nature of the competition in the market in which a nonprofit organization resides. Although we only infer these trends, they provide a helpful illustration of what nonprofit competition looks like and how organizations respond. We do note this as a limitation of our study: with a large-scale quantitative approach, we do not actually observe nonprofits responding to competition. We can only infer their sensegiving approaches, and while we believe these to be well derived from theory and previous literature, they may not be completely indicative of the images that nonprofits actually send. We also note that nonprofits likely do not survey their competitive landscapes quite as explicitly as we do here, particularly given their cognitive dissonance with respect to competition (Curley et al., 2021). While organizations may have an intuitive understanding of their environment, they surely consider many other pieces of information when choosing what signals they send.

We also note some limitations of the data and approach that we used in this study. While the NCCS and IRS data are very commonly used in nonprofit scholarship, there are several notable problems with the data. We noted several above, so our results should be understood to be more reflective of more mature organizations. We also do not capture very new organizations at all, and likely also miss important competitors in many of these local environments by not having access to full data about religious organizations (which may well operate in many of these different environments). Lastly, we note that competitive environments can be defined via other means than NTEE classification. While we believe that the NTEE classification is likely a good proxy for how the general public intuitively classifies organizations, it may not be the most reflective of what nonprofits actually do. In terms of future research, there is clearly an opening here for more research on both sensegiving approaches that organizations use and how competition affects the choice of signals to send. We were not able to identify any publicly available information that would enable us to observe these sensegiving strategies more directly, which we take as an opportunity to suggest qualitative or small-N observational studies that can help us understand both the sensegiving strategies themselves as well as the rationales that organizational leaders used to determine which approach(es) to use.

Conclusion

Nonprofits operate in competitive environments, and the manner of competition that they face and their standing within that environment affects the signals that they choose to send to their stakeholders. Although this point seems evident, it has been underdeveloped in studies of nonprofit organizations, likely owing to the difficulty in characterizing and assessing how nonprofits signal images to their stakeholders. In this work, we argue that competition can be conceived as the extent to which contributed resources and functional expenses are more or less concentrated within a geographically defined area of service. By doing so, we observed different sensegiving approaches and the ways that an organization's lifecycle and competitive environment shape the way they communicate who they are.

Notes

1. All information for Give Directly was obtained from their website <https://www.givedirectly.org/>. In this paper, the answers to the questions are based only on our case studies; other studies may answer the questions in different and yet useful ways.
2. <https://www.heifer.org/about-us/inside-heifer/financial-information.html>
3. All information for B Lab was obtained from their website <https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us> or their Guidestar profile.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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Appendix. Data and Method Elaboration

Data Setup

As noted in the main body of the paper, we utilized the NCCS Core dataset. We first limited our data to the 2008–2012 timeframe to account for changes in the way that NCCS collected data after 2012; some of what we believed to be key variables were consistently available during this time frame but not in other years. Since the NCCS data are derived primarily from IRS Form 990 data, our data for each year-organization observation relate to the tax year for a particular organization. As noted, we define competitive environments as located within CBSAs, and after matching organizations with census data, we dropped any organizations that were not located in the defined CBSAs. We then defined our markets at this point, and calculated our competition measures, specifically the HHI measures.

We adopted the measure to look at the relative distribution of resources controlled by each firm. Specifically, we construct our measure as:

$$HHI_{cg} = \sum_{i=1}^I p_{cgi}^2, \text{ where}$$

$$p_{cgi} = \frac{R_{cgi}}{R_{cg}}$$

where c indexes individual CBSAs, g indexes the NTEE groups, and i indexes the individual nonprofit organizations. R is a variable measuring financial resources, so the proportion P captures the proportion of the total resources (within a CBSA and NTEE group) controlled by each individual organization. This measure of concentration is bounded by 0, representing a complete absence of competition (i.e., there is only one nonprofit organization providing services in this environment) to 1 (or rather $1-1/n$), representing an even distribution of resources among numerous organizations. Here, drawing on the data available in the NCCS dataset, we create two HHIs drawing on two measures of financial resources: total contributions and gross annual receipts.¹ These two HHIs, along with the measure of organizations per capita, comprise our key competition variables.

If we were missing key data for any organization for any year in the data, we dropped all observations of that organization from further analysis; we retained these observations to calculate our HHI measures in order to ensure that these measures were as accurate as possible, but opted to remove these observations from our final analysis in order to ensure consistency across the panel. We recognized the potential for more nationally-oriented organizations to skew what the competitive environment looked like at a more local level, but opted to retain these organizations within their respective CBSAs because there was really no way to discern how each organization defined their service areas, and we believed it was a safer assumption that these large organizations do have an influence on the local market than that they do not. We assumed that any affiliates of larger national organizations could effectively be treated as competitors with local organizations within their competitive environment.

Variables

A limitation of the NCCS dataset is that inclusion of variables has more to do with tax filing purposes than with research. The trade-off is a large and comprehensive dataset that allows for as robust a measurement of competitive environments as possible. The data do create limitations for more fully observing sensegiving approaches that organizations use. We are limited to variables that have something to do with financial reporting. Our choice of what variables to include in our analysis of sensegiving approaches was to use the most relevant

previous study of sensemaking (Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019) and metrics that are tracked by one of the major nonprofit watchdog groups, (i.e., Charity Navigator, the Better Business Bureau, Charity Watch) as likely representing metrics that would be familiar to the general public and therefore offer nonprofits an opportunity to engage in sensegiving.

In Table A1, we include summary statistics for all variables used in the analysis. In Table A2, we provide summary statistic for the key variables used in the factor analysis and final analysis broken down by 26 major NTEE codes.

Table A1. Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Factor Analysis Variables</i>				
Program ratio	0.82	0.16	0	1
Fundraising ratio	0.03	0.07	0	1
Administrative ratio	0.15	0.14	0	1
Assets (logged)	17.17	2.21	0	25.01
Use of an auditor	0.86	0.35	0	1
Whistleblower policy	0.78	0.42	0	1
Document retention policy	0.79	0.41	0	1
Conflict of interest policy	0.90	0.30	0	1
Proportion of revenue from public support	0.33	0.37	0	1
Proportion of revenue from program fees	0.54	0.41	0	1
Proportions of program expenses on:				
Officer compensation	0.03	0.12	0	1
Contractor compensation	0.02	0.01	0	1
Employee salaries	0.29	0.22	0	1
Employee pensions/retirement	0.02	0.10	0	1
Employee benefits	0.05	0.11	0	1
Advertising	0.02	0.11	0	1
Information technology	0.02	0.10	0	1
Affiliates	0.02	0.11	0	1
Other expenses	0.15	0.21	0	1
<i>Factor scores (dependent variables)</i>				
Ratio management	-0.58	0.17	-1.06	0.51
Individual expression	1.64	0.34	0.85	2.64
Professionalism	7.42	0.86	2.81	9.96
Capacity building	-1.35	0.13	-1.68	0.26
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Age (logged)	3.82	0.70	2.08	5.93
Organization density (organizations per 1000 in population)	0.18	0.12	0.01	0.88
HHI – contributions	0.86	0.16	0	1
HHI – gross receipts	0.83	0.21	0	0.99
Functional expenses (logged)	16.13	2.24	0.69	24.40
Total employees (logged)	4.10	2.79	0	11.15
Metro population (logged)	14.50	1.52	11.00	16.76
Metro Gini coefficient	0.46	0.03	0.36	0.55
Metro pct without high school dip.	12.24	3.12	3.20	34.30
Metro median HH income	56,175	8,994	28,293	88,444
Arts, Culture & Humanities	0.07	0.26	0	1
Educational	0.23	0.42	0	1
Environmental Quality Protection, Beautification	0.02	0.12	0	1

Animal Related	0.01	0.10	0	1
Health-General & Rehabilitative	0.25	0.43	0	1
Mental Health, Crisis Intervention	0.03	0.16	0	1
Disease, Disorders, Medical Disciplines	0.01	0.10	0	1
Medical Research	0.01	0.10	0	1
Crime, Legal Related	0.01	0.08	0	1
Employment, Job Related	0.01	0.10	0	1
Agriculture, Food, Nutrition	0.01	0.06	0	1
Housing, Shelter	0.06	0.24	0	1
Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness and Relief	0.01	0.08	0	1
Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Athletics	0.02	0.12	0	1
Youth Development	0.01	0.09	0	1
Human Services	0.14	0.34	0	1
International, Foreign Affairs, and National Security	0.02	0.13	0	1
Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy	0.01	0.05	0	1
Community Improvement, Capacity Building	0.02	0.15	0	1
Philanthropy, Volunteerism, and Grantmaking	0.05	0.22	0	1
Science and Technology Research Institutes	0.01	0.09	0	1
Social Science Research Institutes	0.01	0.04	0	1
Public, Society Benefit	0.01	0.08	0	1
Religion, Spiritual Development	0.02	0.13	0	1
Mutual/Membership Benefit	0.01	0.07	0	1
Region – New England	0.13	0.34	0	1
Region – Mid Atlantic	0.33	0.47	0	1
Region – Great Lakes	0.10	0.30	0	1
Region – Great Plains	0.10	0.30	0	1
Region – Atlantic South	0.15	0.36	0	1
Region – South Central	0.06	0.24	0	1
Region – Deep South	0.03	0.17	0	1
Region – Mountain West	0.04	0.20	0	1
Region – West Coast	0.05	0.22	0	1
N = 28,694				

Table A2. Summary Statistics by Organization Category

	Ratio Management	Capacity Building	Individual Expression	Prof.	Orgs/ 1,000	HHI Cont.	HHI Recpt	Age	Total Workers	Total Revenue
Arts, Culture & Humanities (N=2,021)	0.22	0.21	0.45	-0.26	0.13	0.90	0.87	61	451	17M
Educational (N=6,526)	0.18	-0.16	-0.19	0.15	0.17	0.81	0.77	80	1,200	71M
Environmental Quality Protection, Beautification (431)	-0.26	0.20	0.89	-0.30	0.06	0.82	0.80	47	1,000	12M
Animal Related (N=282)	0.03	0.41	0.42	-0.20	0.04	0.80	0.79	65	650	18M
Health-General & Rehabilitative (N=7,190)	0.22	-0.15	-0.57	0.47	0.13	0.86	0.79	56	2,500	223M
Mental Health, Crisis Intervention (N=764)	-0.09	0.20	-0.04	-0.07	0.14	0.86	0.82	51	500	29M
Disease, Disorders, Medical Disciplines (N=293)	-0.12	0.40	0.41	-0.34	0.13	0.91	0.88	39	10K	26M
Medical Research (N=305)	-0.33	-0.27	0.88	-0.05	0.14	0.89	0.88	39	418	45M
Crime, Legal Related (N=160)	-0.22	0.49	0.78	-0.45	0.33	0.95	0.96	49	463	13M
Employment, Job Related (N=280)	-0.01	0.34	-0.12	-0.03	0.37	0.93	0.94	57	1,100	25M
Agriculture, Food, Nutrition (N=100)	-0.80	0.73	0.85	-0.41	0.34	0.92	0.95	32	5,600	18M
Housing, Shelter (N=1,684)	-0.56	0.01	0.31	-0.73	0.35	0.94	0.95	30	230	8M
Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness and Relief (N=191)	-0.66	0.50	0.83	-1.3	0.35	0.90	0.93	56	1500	4M

Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Athletics (N=430)	-0.11	0.60	0.10	-0.85	0.33	0.93	0.94	46	644	11M
Youth Development (N=256)	-0.05	0.45	0.46	-0.40	0.32	0.91	0.92	55	2,400	8M
Human Services (N=3,862)	0.01	0.20	-0.16	-0.02	0.34	0.93	0.95	59	1,050	19M
International, Foreign Affairs, and National Security (N=483)	-0.40	-0.09	0.90	-0.01	0.04	0.73	0.74	46	4,800	96M
Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy (N=61)	-0.55	0.65	1.40	-0.70	0.12	0.92	0.89	35	104	10M
Community Improvement, Capacity Building (N=687)	-0.41	0.15	0.75	-0.59	0.12	0.83	0.80	33	418	16M
Philanthropy, Volunteerism, and Grantmaking (N=1,413)	-0.64	-0.22	1.10	-0.18	0.11	0.80	0.78	45	1,200	33M
Science and Technology Research Institutes (N=228)	-0.08	-0.22	0.34	0.16	0.12	0.81	0.71	52	1,500	110M
Social Science Research Institutes (N=46)	0.12	-0.16	0.90	-0.24	0.14	0.82	0.71	79	181	18M
Public, Society Benefit (N=187)	-0.44	-0.26	0.35	0.32	0.12	0.84	0.80	34	372	71M
Religion, Spiritual Development (N=493)	-0.19	0.36	0.77	-1.00	0.07	0.86	0.83	38	326	8M
Mutual/Membership Benefit (N=126)	-0.68	-0.40	0.40	-0.56	0.01	0.49	0.38	56	95	28M

Factor Analysis

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis. Principle components factor analysis (varimax rotation, orthogonal solution) was used to extract core factor scores, uncorrelated linear combinations of the weighted observed variables using Stata ($\chi^2=655.29$, $p<0.01$).

Four factors are extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1 as described in the body of the paper.

Table A3. Extracted Factors and Factor Loadings

Variable	Factor 1: Capacity Building	Factor 2: Professionalism	Factor 3: Individual Expression	Factor 4: Ratio Management
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	7.24	2.97	1.84	1.21
<i>Variables:</i>		<i>Factor loadings</i>		
Program ratio	-0.68			0.69
Fundraising ratio			0.60	
Administrative ratio	0.63			-0.70
Assets (logged)		0.55		
Use of an auditor		0.33		
Whistleblower policy		0.62	0.44	
Document retention policy		0.55	0.41	
Conflict of interest policy		0.54	0.41	
Proportion of revenue from public support		-0.59	0.59	
Proportion of revenue from program fees		0.64	-0.53	
Proportions of program expenses on:				
Officer compensation	0.86			
Contractor compensation	0.91			
Employee salaries	0.35	0.48		
Employee pensions/retirement	0.97			
Employee benefits	0.93			
Advertising	0.96			
Information technology	0.97			
Affiliates	0.87			
Other expenses	0.39			

Modeling Strategy and Interpretation

Owing to the complexity of our final data structure, a panel set up with multiple, potentially interdependent dependent variables, we utilized a modeling approach that had to account for these complexities. As noted in the main body, after testing our data structure to determine the appropriate technique, our final approach was to utilize a fixed-effect, seemingly unrelated system of regression equations. The procedure we followed is that prescribed by Blackwell (2005). To ease interpretation of the coefficients, we standardized all factor scores for the final models, however interpretation remains challenging as the models are a system of equations, predicting coefficients on factor scores that are already difficult to interpret. For example, if we interpret two of the coefficients on competition as measured by contributions in Table 1, a coefficient of 0.195 on the ratio management approach can be interpreted as a move from 0–1 on the HHI on the spread of contributions in the market (i.e., moving from a perfectly competitive to a perfectly monopolistic environment) increases the utilization of the ratio management approach by about 0.2 standard deviations. A similar increase in the HHI is associated with about a 0.2 standard deviation decrease (–0.218 precisely) in use of the donor expression approach.

Note

1. We considered other financial measures here as well, including assets, expenses, etc. Each of these approaches were highly correlated with one another and demonstrated substantively equivalent final results.

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Extending Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Managing Dissent in Public Lands Agencies

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This paper examines employee responses to dissatisfaction and dissent in four federal public lands agencies as they react to controversial policies. Guided by data from semi-structured interviews, it suggests new theoretical categories for describing dissenting behaviors along the dimensions of work engagement (e.g., high and low) and intent (e.g., destructive, neutral, or constructive). These dimensions combine to describe the specific behaviors of sabotage, neglect, high engaged duty, low engaged duty, passive helpfulness, and overachievement. This research also confirms and adds nuance to past work on employee dissent.

Keywords: Employee Dissent, Work Engagement, Public Lands Agencies

This paper examines employee dissatisfaction and dissent in four public lands agencies (i.e., U.S. Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) as they react to controversial policies, taking into account their professional obligations as well as their personal beliefs. Inspired by Herbert Kaufman's (1960) landmark study of administrative behavior in the Forest Service and Rosemary O'Leary's (2006; 2014; 2020) examination of dissent among public administrators in the EPA, the Forest Service, and Nevada State Parks, we had two main research questions: 1) how do employees at federal public lands agencies respond when they disagree with top-down policy decisions?, and 2) how can employee dissent be managed in a positive¹ way?

To answer these questions, we performed 12 semi-structured interviews with employees of four federal public lands agencies. We used a grounded theory approach to build understanding of the range of employee behaviors when they are dissatisfied with top-down decisions. As sensitizing topics, we began with Albert Hirschman's (1970) typology of mechanisms of employee dissatisfaction, which includes: 1) exit—they leave their job, 2) voice—they make their dissatisfaction known, 3) loyalty—they remain loyal until a new regime is in place; and later, Dan Farrell's (1983) fourth response: neglect—employees do the bare minimum in performing job duties, among other strategies. Additional mechanisms emerged through the course of the interviews that provide insights into positive directions for managing employee dissent. With the addition of these new mechanisms, and in order to better understand this dynamic in public lands, we reorganized dissatisfied/dissenting employee behavior into a new framework with three clusters of behavior: 1) Employment/Work Status Changes, 2) Inward and Outward Communication Behaviors, and 3) Work Engagement Behaviors.

In addition to this new framework for describing employee dissent, our interviews provided rich insights into the existing mechanisms. For example, we heard instances of sabotage where dissatisfied and dissenting employees actively thwarted implementation of disagreeable policies. We also heard of positive engagement and overachievement that went beyond the call of duty. This richness and the new mechanisms provide a deeper understanding of the interactions among the mechanisms in the Hirschman/Farrell typology. Another unique finding that we realized through the course of our interviews is that employees who were higher in the hierarchy described more mechanisms of dissent than employees lower in the hierarchy. Finally, this paper also contributes to Hirschman's theory in a unique setting—public lands agencies in the United States. While there is much research on the politics of the environment, sustainability, and natural resources (see Rosenbaum, 2016), there is much less research specifically on those at the ground level implementing policies that directly affect the environment. Thus, a final contribution of this paper is in its focus on federal public lands employees.

Setting

The concept of attraction-selection-bias grounds the setting for this research. Attraction-selection-bias occurs when people with a certain value set are motivated to apply at organizations that also espouse these values. Organizations also understand that hiring people who align with these espoused values will lead to positive benefits (Wright, 2007). This combination of forces results in an organization that both espouses specific values and reinforces those values through the people within and entering the organization. Like many public organizations, people are attracted to working at U.S. federal public lands agencies because of their attraction to the various missions of these agencies. While the missions of the federal public lands agencies differ (more on this later), they all deal in the stewardship of public lands, a core value that attracts many people to these organizations.

This attraction-selection process, along with other tangible and intangible factors such as, a recognized societal need met by these missions, a distinctive reputation based on achievement, agency culture, and a venerable history combine with mission and purpose to create an aura or mystique that is attached to some select public agencies (Goodsell, 2010). In public lands agencies, this mystique is epitomized at the National Park Service where the magnificence, sanctity, romance, and cultural meaning of the lands in national parks adds to the overall aura of this organization. Mystique-laden agencies have been curtailed by elected officials in the past, and the National Park Service has not been immune to these run-ins in its history (Goodsell, 2010).

Recent run-ins between the public lands agencies with the national executive regime and the national policy environment in 2018–2020 contribute to the setting that is highly relevant to our research questions. The federal administration at this time was enacting policies that many (but not all) in the public lands agencies view as opposed to the stewardship of public lands (Popovich et al., 2019). The result of attraction-selection bias, mystique at public lands agencies, and disagreement over policy decisions leads to dissatisfaction and dissent among the rank and file of these organizations. Perhaps the most revealing example of this dissatisfaction and dissent are the underground #ALT Twitter accounts by anonymous employees of these organizations (see Alt National Park Service, n.d.) who resort to using Twitter to air their grievances.

Background on Agency Differences

In addition to the current national policy context at the time of this data collection, each of the four public lands agencies have different histories and missions. We include a brief summary of each agency to provide further background to this study.

The Transfer Act of 1905 established the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) as a bureau of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission of the USFS is, “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations” (USFS, 2019, p. 1). As of 2019, the agency employed 35,855 full time equivalents (USFS, 2019). These staff members were divided among nine regions, spanning 193 million acres (USFS, 2019). This includes 154 national forests, 20 national grasslands, 277,000 heritage sites, 122 ski areas, and 4,300 campgrounds (USFS, 2019).

Congress established the National Park Service in 1916 (NPS, 2019). The National Park Service mission states, “The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (NPS, n.d.). In 2019, this Department of the Interior agency employed over 18,688 full time equivalents in 61 national parks in 7 regions (NPS, 2019). The NPS is regarded as the preservation-oriented public lands agency, as their mission entails leaving land untouched, whereas the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and USFS have missions of multiple use. While the organization is centralized in some ways, the management of parks is more comprehensively broken down into 61 small regions, one for each park. National parks span 85 million acres (NPS, 2019).

In an effort to enhance the mission of the U.S. Department of Interior, Congress created the Fish & Wildlife Services (FWS) on June 30, 1940 (FWS, 2019). The mission is, “Working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people” (FWS, n.d.). In 2019, the agency employed 8,370 full time equivalents in 8 regions (FWS, 2019). These regions encompass more than 560 National Wildlife Refuges, including wetlands and special management areas, covering just over 150 million acres (FWS, 2019).

Finally, The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) positions itself as the most multiple use public lands agency. When the General Land Office and the U.S. Grazing Service merged in 1946, Congress established the BLM. With a mission, “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations,” the agency manages 245 million surface acres and 700 million acres of mineral rights over 12 regions (BLM, n.d.). The BLM is in a bureau of the Department of the Interior and employed 9,227 full time equivalents in 2019 (BLM, 2019). It is the most directly impacted by high level administration change due to its multiple use policies surrounding energy development, resulting in deep ideological divides that affect the autonomy of this agency (Malay & Fairholm, 2020).

Literature Review

One scholarly influence on this research is Kaufman’s (1960) landmark study of the forest service. Kaufman (1960) observed how the Forest Service socialized its employees by developing commitment and shared values among its employees. These shared values enabled this large national organization with widely dispersed and sometimes isolated employees to accept rules and procedures. Kaufman’s (1960) work has been revisited across the decades, including: an observation of the increasing complexity of environmental legislation and public involvement (Tipple & Wellman, 1991), the context of women forest rangers (Carroll et al., 1996), and in the context of state forest rangers (Koontz, 2007). Kaufman (1960) was also influential in our understanding of bureaucratic discretion, which has also been expanded over the years (see Lipsky, 1980; Vinzant et al., 1998).

Hirschman’s (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* was an economic analysis of reactions to decline in firms, organizations, and nation-states but has been a useful theoretical lens for other applications, including employee responses to dissatisfaction by suggesting an organization of

behaviors into the categories of exit, voice, and loyalty. Later, Farrell (1983) engaged with neglect as a fourth mechanism and described how more specific behaviors, such as turnover, absenteeism, lateness, and talking to a supervisor fit within one of the four categories. Brehm and Gates (1997) extended and applied this literature to the work of subordinates in bureaucracies, breaking down their differing responses to dissatisfaction into: working, leisure-shirking, dissent-shirking, and sabotage. Brehm and Gates' (1997) work is particularly insightful given our research questions; however, we expand the focus to all employees at public lands agencies, not just subordinates. In a similar vein, Marissa Golden's (1992) article and later book (Golden, 2000) examined bureaucratic resistance and motivation in federal agencies during the Reagan years. Golden (1992) argued that the existing models of the relationship between bureaucrats and elected officials, specifically cooperation and resistance, were not enough and that bureaucratic response depends on context. Five contextual organizational features were then identified that affect bureaucratic behavior in relation to elected officials: ideology, dominant agency profession, agency esprit, agency history, and careerist confidence. Golden (1992) then went on to use exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect to better understand bureaucratic behavior.

More recently in the public administration literature, the Hirschman (1970) typology has been tested in the context of the public work force by examining the effects of loyalty and voice on intention to leave (Lee & Whitford, 2008), and later, how pay interacts with the other mechanisms (Whitford & Lee, 2015). Finally, exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect have also been used to critique public choice theory and neoliberalism's focus on markets that puts too heavy an emphasis on exit as a means for citizens to vote with their feet and move when dissatisfied (Witt, 2011). For example, when states perform crimes against democracy (i.e., expansion of government secrecy during and after the cold war) exit alone is not enough; citizens must also be able to raise their voice (Witt, 2011).

Furthering the examination of dissent in public agencies, O'Leary's (2006; 2014; 2020) case studies provide rich examples of public employees engaged in dissent, or even becoming guerillas that actively and deliberately undermine policy. Perhaps the largest benefit from O'Leary (2006; 2014; 2020) is the discussion of ethical frameworks and managerial techniques that attempt to unleash the creativity implicit in dissent and not just as a problem to be eliminated. These techniques include, cultivating organizational culture, listening, understanding the formal and informal organization, separating people from the problem, creating multiple channels for dissent, and creating dissent boundaries and knowing when to stop. It is in this spirit that this current research is undertaken and many of our findings add texture to these techniques.

Methods and Data

This research is exploratory due to the nature of the main research questions, which are: 1) How do employees at federal public lands agencies respond when they disagree with top-down policy decisions?, and 2) How can employee dissent be managed in a positive way? We use interpretive analysis of interview data and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) to develop understanding for employees' options of dissent as well as how dissent can be better managed. We are interested in the context in which the policies are implemented and in obtaining a deep, rich understanding of the varied experiences of public lands employees. Semi-structured interviews offer an ideal way to examine how people interpret their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

As mentioned, this research is sensitized and driven by previous theory (Hirschman, 1970) and inspired by previous research (Kaufman, 1960; O'Leary, 2006; 2014; 2020). We seek to build theory and discover new strategies and mechanisms for dealing with disagreement. Interviews allow us to access experiences and insights that may not have been considered or

to unearth information or to challenge assumptions about how employees balance their personal values with their duty to their positions. In-depth interviews allow us to understand morally ambiguous choices and are the ideal method for understanding how individuals navigate policy constraints (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was semi-structured and relatively open with broad questions aimed at understanding how employees respond when they disagree with policy decisions. Semi-structured interviews provide structure while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions if participants offer unique insights. Our plan was to ask the protocol questions and any other relevant questions to the project that arise naturally during the course of the interviews. We found it acceptable if we did not ask every question in the protocol. Our interviewing evolved over the course of the interviews to the point where we would warm up with a question about the participant's position and career, then follow with the first research question: how do you respond when you disagree with policies? Because employees had so much to say in response to this question, it and the relevant follow up questions usually lasted through the entire interview. We allowed for personal experiences from our interviewees but also found early on that interviewees were recounting observations of other employees, which we determined to be relevant for this study especially for unearthing extreme or sensitive responses to dissent. That is, we found that interviewees were more likely to recount instances of rule-breaking or questionable behavior if they were describing the experiences of other people.

While we began with the Hirschman/Ferrell typology we did not give specific categories to the participants but rather encouraged broad context from their responses. We were also hesitant about defining what a controversial or unpopular policy was or what disagreement or dissent meant for the interviewees, but rather generally allowed participants to define those for themselves when responding in order to allow them freedom to remember their most salient experiences but also because we were still learning for ourselves what was possible and what to be looking for. We found that participants understood the general idea of our research, largely because we were clear about our main research question in recruiting participants. In fact, our sample likely includes high levels of selection bias as many who participated told us that they resonated with the research question. Many described the interview as cathartic in giving them the opportunity to voice their experience and have someone listen. During the interviews and when necessary (i.e., a participant asked for clarification), we did prompt a few of the participants with Hirschman/Ferrell examples, which usually encouraged a lot of responses. Responsive interviewing emphasizes rich exploration and deep understanding of the ambiguity of personal experience while also understanding the role of an interviewer's knowledge, personality, and bias (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). With this in mind, we aimed to conduct all interviews in teams to weaken bias. Of the 12 interviews, nine were conducted in teams and three individually.

Our initial target population was employees at federal public lands agencies (Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and Fish & Wildlife Service) in the Western U.S. with initial emphasis on Wyoming and Colorado, and secondary emphasis on Oregon, Arizona, and Utah. Interview participants were recruited using a two-pronged strategy. The first strategy included referrals from personal and professional networks and snowball sampling. Members of the research team contacted people in their networks who fall within the target population and asked for referrals for others who also fall within the target population and who might be willing to be interviewed.

The second strategy was random sampling. As much as possible, we wanted to have a balanced response from each of the four agencies as well as spread across location, hierarchical position, and demographics. To augment our sample, we randomly selected employees among the agencies with different strategies for each given the different website designs for each. Interview participants were invited by email. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour

Table 1. Clusters of Behavior in Response to Dissatisfaction and Dissent

Cluster 1: Employment/Project Status Changes
Cluster 2: Inward and Outward Communication Behaviors
Cluster 3: Work Engagement Behaviors

and 15 minutes. Two more team members conducted most interviews and interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and recording software.

We emailed invitations to 107 people and interviewed 12 people for a simple response rate of 11%. Of the 12 interviewees, five were from the Fish & Wildlife Service, two were from the Parks Service, one was from the Bureau of Land Management and four were from the Forest Service. Interviews occurred from August 2019 until July of 2020. Six of the participants were men and six were women. Interviewees were spread across hierarchical positions with people having worked at the regional executive level overseeing hundreds of employees, to middle managers, to entry-level field workers. Workers came from the states of Wyoming, Colorado, Oregon, and Utah. Three interviews took place in person, seven on the phone, and two were on Zoom.

Findings

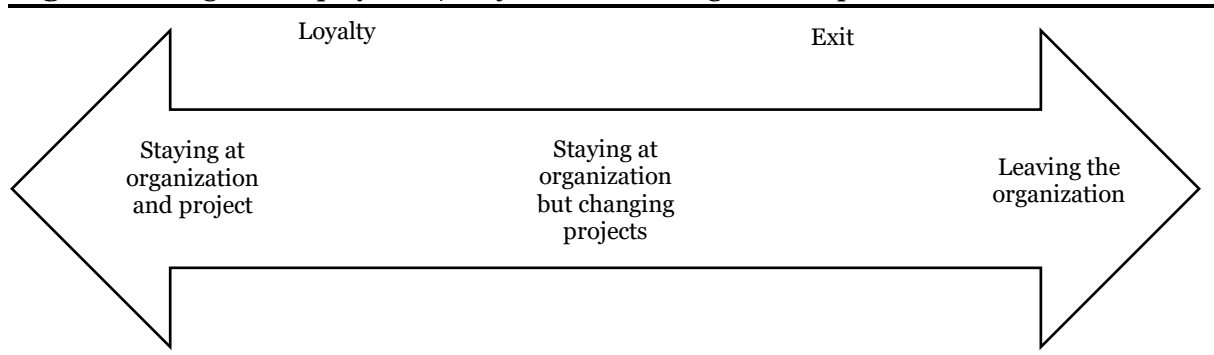
Our interviews confirmed the Hirschman/Ferrell typology as mechanisms for dissatisfaction, confirmed much of the work of O’Leary (2006; 2014; 2020), suggested new mechanisms, and later analysis of this data led us to reorganize the mechanisms to fall within three clusters of behaviors. Table 1 displays these three clusters, which are: Cluster 1) Employment/Project Status Changes: employees choose to leave their job / specific projects, or remain loyal to the organization / project; Cluster 2) Inward and Outward Communication Behaviors: employees actively listen and learn about controversial policies in addition to raising their voice in dissent and teaching others; and Cluster 3) Work Engagement Behaviors: employees offer a range of engagement behaviors in response to dissatisfaction and dissent, sometimes striving to overachieve rather than doing a baseline of duty, or neglecting their duties when dealing with controversial policies.

Finally, the behaviors within and across these spectrums can complement and/or substitute each other depending on the nature of the behavior. For example, within spectrum behaviors like exit and loyalty are more likely to act as substitutes than voice and active listening, which may act as complements to each other. Across spectrum behaviors such as active listening and overachieving mutually may reinforce each other.

Cluster 1: Employment/Project Status Changes

Employees described changes (or lack thereof) to their employment or project status as a means of dealing with dissatisfaction and dissent. In Figure 1, we represent the range of employment / project status changes we found in our interviews. On one end of the spectrum is extreme loyalty to both the organization and the specific project that may be causing dissatisfaction and dissent. Moving to the right, an employee may remain loyal to the organization but request to be moved to a different project or assignment as a means of dealing with their own dissatisfaction and dissent. Continuing to the right, an employee may leave the organization if their dissatisfaction and/or dissent is strong enough. We will also note that one interviewee mentioned that employees may resort to suicide or suicidal thoughts as a means of exiting their dissatisfaction. Suicide is an extreme example of exit and hearing about suicide is revealing of how powerful the dissatisfaction and dissent can be for some employees.

Figure 1. Range of Employment/Project Status Changes in Response to Dissatisfaction



More experienced and tenured employees described loyalty to both the mission of the organization as well as loyalty to the organization when describing how they dealt with dissent. Employees described knowing they could wait out certain policies and regimes as an administrative agency. Because we were mostly talking to current employees, we expected to hear less about the use of exit as a mechanism for dissent, as those who had used exit as a mechanism may have already left employment at these agencies. Nevertheless, participants described knowing coworkers who became so dissatisfied with the prospect of implementing certain policies that they chose to leave the organization to work either in industry or in nonprofit organizations. For environmentally focused workers, nonprofit organizations were a common place to express those values. In addition to leaving their jobs, the mechanism of exit was used when employees asked to be removed from certain projects and moved to another project when faced with disagreement over policy.

Finally, as mentioned, we heard stories of some employees resorting to suicidal thoughts. One interviewee confided:

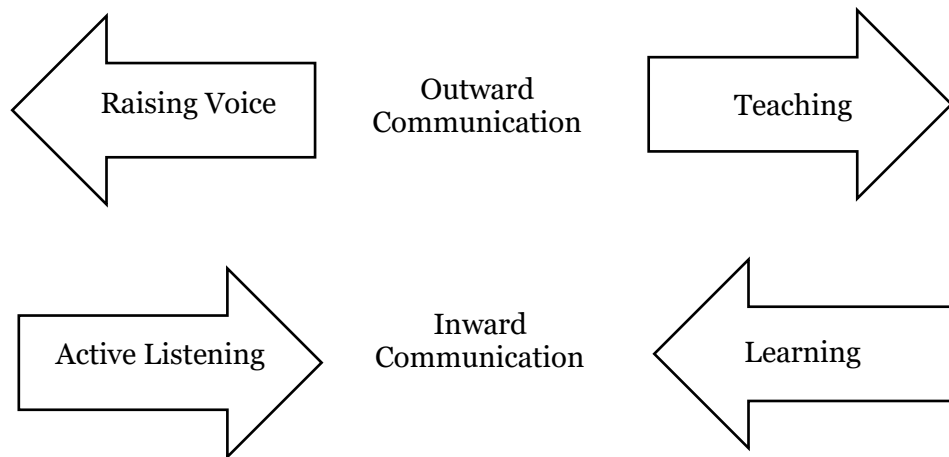
One of my key staff, several months after I moved to the [blank] had been so berated and disrespected that he began drinking and my previous admin assistant called me and told me he was locked up in his house and was going to kill himself—‘please help him’. I called and listened to him explain why he was where he was, I explained that I wanted him to open the door and listen to the local interventionist because he was too important to kill himself and there was a whole world out there for him. We managed to talk him through the immediate crisis, then I got him reassigned out of [blank] and he worked through his problems. One on a BLM area we worked committed suicide because of the pressure to get out the cut.²

We only heard about suicide from one interviewee, but the interviewee mentions two suicide attempts (one successful and one unsuccessful). Such a finding raises questions about the existence and extent of suicide and its causes among employees of public lands agencies. We further probe these issues with ideas for future research in the discussion section.

Cluster 2: Inward and Outward Communication Behaviors

Our findings confirm prior literature about the importance of listening and the importance of creating multiple channels for dissent by allowing employee voice through various means (O’Leary, 2006; 2014; 2020). Our research adds nuance to the mechanisms of voice and

Figure 2. Inward and Outward Communication Behaviors for dealing with Dissatisfaction and Dissent



listening in the literature, such as describing voice instead as ‘raising voice’ and describing listening as ‘active listening’ both of which we describe in more depth below. In addition, we also use pedagogical terms like ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ to add another element to inward and outward communication behaviors. Figure 2 shows how the communication behaviors of dissenting employees can be characterized as outward *and* inward communication.

Outward Communication. While we did hear accounts of inward communication and learning, voice was still the first response described and first instinct as a mechanism for dissent when we posed the question, confirming the work of O’Leary (2006; 2014; 2020). We add slight nuance to the literature on voice by using the term ‘raising voice’ because in addition to the definition of raising voice as being to yell, another definition of raising voice means to make one’s opinion known as in protest. With this second definition of raising voice in mind, our data took on a different texture as employees at all levels, including regional executives, mid-level managers, and field-level employees described raising their voice to make their opinion known. Respondents also described outward communication in pedagogical terms, describing how they would teach others about the details of policies or the related science. One regional executive described that they spent a lot of their time educating legislators and high-level appointees about what is possible within existing laws. In these cases, the high-level appointees would come to the regional executive with policy ideas for implementation. The regional leader would then compare that policy to existing statute and educate the regime on what was allowable within existing laws. Such a situation may end up in the courts with the court making a ruling on interpretation. This situation was not unique to executive level employees. Another participant, while working in a field-level position, described being asked to implement a policy that contradicted both the science and the laws governing that resource. This participant educated their superiors about the science and laws of the situation (i.e., voice) and recused themselves from that project and asked to be assigned to another project (i.e., exit).

Inward Communication. As mentioned, many respondents described listening to other viewpoints and learning about policies as a means of dealing with their own dissent, which are quite distinct from raising one’s voice in dissent. In these cases, employees are learning about policies as means of expressing dissent. Many described that disagreement over policy was often about misunderstanding and that learning more about policies was often successful in assuaging concerns. One mid-level manager said that they spend much of their time in staff

meetings teaching and learning about policies, specifically as a means of dealing with dissent among their team.

Many described the ability to listen as one of the most important factors in working with others to get things done, confirming the work of O’Leary (2006; 2014; 2020). Listening is one piece of ‘advice from the pros’ that O’Leary (2006; 2014; 2020) suggests as one of the most important ways to manage dissent. One of our respondents used the term ‘active listening’ when talking about listening. Not only does the adjective ‘active’ modify how listening should be done when managing dissent, it also hearkens to the literature on active listening and negotiations that provides specific techniques for being a better listener, adding nuance and depth to the discussion of listening in employee dissent. For example, in their widely acclaimed *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and colleagues (1991) described techniques for active listening as paying close attention to what is said, asking the other party to spell out clearly and carefully exactly what they mean, requesting for ideas to be repeated if there is any ambiguity or uncertainty, and making it your task to understand them as they see themselves by taking in their perceptions, needs, and constraints (p. 34). The Harvard Program on Negotiation suggests that in active listening when a listener asks open-ended questions, seeks clarifications, drives for specificity, and demonstrates a grasp of what the other party said, the listener both learns and projects empathy of their counterpart’s point of view (Program on Negotiation, 2008). These and other techniques on active listening and negotiation could be helpful to managing dissent.

Cluster 3: Work Engagement Behaviors

A final cluster of behaviors for expressing dissent came in the various forms of work engagement and the intended destructiveness of these efforts. After listening to the interview respondents and reviewing their data and the literature, we realized that the work engagement behaviors described in the interviews fall along two dimensions set against each other. As Figure 3 illustrates, we place low and high work engagement along the x-axis and the intended destructiveness of that work (i.e., destructive, neutral, constructive) along the y-axis. This matrix roughly follows the matrix described in Farrell (1983) that placed dissatisfied employee behaviors into four quadrants along two dimensions: 1) destructive/constructive actions, and 2) passive/active actions. However, our matrix differs in that rather than active/passive behavior we refer specifically to high and low levels of work engagement, and rather than destructive/constructive behaviors we refer to destructive, neutral, and constructive behaviors. Distinguishing among behavior as destructive, neutral, and constructive better reflects our data because the term ‘neutral’ describes efforts that were intended to be neither constructive nor destructive, but rather had other goals in mind, such as following duty. We see the inclusion of duty in the mix of behaviors as a major contribution of this paper as duty is a significant motivating and ethical force in public service. Our matrix further differs from Farrell (1983) in that we also only describe work engagement behaviors along these dimensions and do not place other behaviors like exit or voice into the matrix. We also acknowledge that work communication behaviors and work status changes could be somehow added to the matrix later.

Put against each other, these two dimensions describe four work engagement behaviors we observed in the data: Neglect (low on engagement and intended to be destructive), Sabotage (high on engagement and intended to be destructive), Low Engaged Duty (low on engagement and intended to be neither destructive nor constructive), and Overachievement (high on engagement and constructive). Two more behaviors are described in Figure 3, theoretically, but were not observed in our data: 1) Passive Helpfulness (low on engagement but constructive in intention), and 2) High Engaged Duty (high on engagement but neutral on intention). We explore both of these and potential future work in the discussion section.

Figure 3. Work Engagement Behaviors Among Public Lands Employees

Intended Constructiveness/Destructiveness	Constructive	<i>*Passive Helpfulness</i>	Overachievement
	Neutral	Low Engaged Duty	<i>*High Engaged Duty</i>
	Destructive	Neglect	Sabotage
		Low Engagement	High Engagement
		Work Engagement	

* These behaviors were not observed in our data but theoretically complete the taxonomy. Future work could explore the possibility of these behaviors.

Neglect. Our findings confirm the work of Farrell (1983), and Brehm and Gates (1997) that neglect is a highly relevant category for describing employee response to dissatisfaction. Unsurprisingly, while none of the interviewees described neglecting their work, many did describe observing others neglecting their work as a form of dissent. Participants described viewing others taking to the last minute to turn in paperwork or unnecessarily complicating processes, confirming findings from O’Leary (2006; 2014; 2020). From one angle, whether neglect is seen as destructive or constructive is in the eye of the beholder and the perspective which one takes. However, we place behaviors along these dimensions according to the *intention* of the employee. So, while certain employees may view their neglect as a positive thing given their differing goals from the policy, they are deliberately not engaging in order to be destructive of top-down policy goals.

Sabotage. In addition to neglect, we heard descriptions of active sabotage in which one takes positive action to thwart a policy, once again confirming findings from O’Leary (2006; 2014; 2020). Farrell (1983) mentioned sabotage in their discussion as a possibility for future consideration but do not test it in their paper. It is obvious why an interview respondent would be hesitant to disclose sabotage, yet we did hear observations of other employees engaged in sabotage. One interviewee described that when disagreement over policy occurs, for many the first instinct is to go outside of the organization for support. This respondent described various types of sabotage in public lands agencies, including:

Sharing information with external entities:

I’ve heard of, you know, issues where people internally share information they are not supposed to share externally, create alliances in weird ways...people can do some pretty nasty stuff internally, in terms of, giving people access, you know, disproportionate and unequal access to information...you like, ‘we’re not going to share the monitoring results with the permittee but we’re

going to send them to [environmental litigants]' like I've seen that happen. They hand the monitoring results to the environmental litigants, you know, and they do not share with the permittee, or vice versa. I've seen stuff get leaked, to groups, in ways they are not supposed to.

Providing tips on what to FOIA³:

Or, I've seen people, like I know of many cases in the agencies, where people inside will say to an organization or a person 'go FOIA X, Y, and Z, specifically' so they know exactly what they are supposed to FOIA.

Data manipulation:

I've seen messing with the data. It's hard to prove whether they were doing it on purpose or they just didn't know what they were doing...some people just don't know, right, we have technical specialists—not all of them are equal—and some of them really have no idea.

Biased data gathering techniques:

I've seen other instance, where people have been doing monitoring, again with a pretty, you talk to them and they have a pretty implicit or explicit bias against grazing say, and their monitoring data corroborates that...As a collaborative we had to go back and re-site all these monitoring location using correct monitoring protocols to truly reflect the condition of the ground, vs somebody's personal bias as to where they decided to put the monitoring site...that is systemic, that happens a lot.

The above quotes echo many of the findings from O'Leary (2006; 2014; 2020) about the various ways in which employees engage in sabotage. So, while we were aware from O'Leary (2006; 2014; 2020) that these behaviors exist, we were still surprised to hear the extent to which some civil servants participated in active sabotage. The fact that organizational sabotage is occurring reveals the levels of disagreement and dissent occurring in these four federal public lands agencies.

Overachievement. Not all stories related to work engagement were about neglect or sabotage. Many employees described going above and beyond the call of duty when faced with disagreeable policies. We describe these behaviors as high on work engagement and intended to be constructive. Overachieving as means for dealing with dissent mostly occurred when respondents found creative solutions to either get around policy constraints or to find mutually beneficial solutions that satisfied the top-down policy as well as local concerns. For example, one interviewee described the tension between conservation and the immediate economics costs of conservation. In this case, the policy reduced available funding for conservation, so the interviewee described how they found collaborative partners (e.g., county government) to share costs to achieve both conservation goals and stay within budgets. In their own words:

So the direction that I gave to staff there, was to look at ways, that our partners, whether it was the Forest Service or often we are working with the counties that are doing like county roads and stuff, and find out what is their typical approach...when a road washes out, um, they trundle off to that road with their equipment and then they just plug, you know, plug the same thing in there. So sitting down and meeting with those guys, and talking about projects and how the project initially might cost this, but if they actually adequately size it to the flood plain and the high water marks along the creek and get it engineered so that it is no longer even a culvert...that had been their plan, culvert, culvert, culvert, just you know replace, but instead we replaced it with, think of a U shape, the bottom is the stream bed...and that crossing now not only allows fish passage for a pretty cool species called [blank] but it also means that the likelihood, the frequency of them having to do anything, um, you know to make those continued repairs has been greatly diminished if not eliminated for that crossing.

Thus, this employee was able to achieve a conservation goal for an endangered fish species while reducing long-term upkeep costs for a road that crosses a river by collaborating with a county government to engineer a more fish friendly and flood resistant road crossing. Other respondents described similar experiences of going above and beyond the call of duty to find unique and creative solutions, often through collaborations.

Low engaged duty. A final work engagement behavior we heard about through the interviews is what we term ‘low engaged duty.’ In the context of this paper, low engaged duty is neither intended to be constructive nor destructive and is generally low on engagement. Rather, low-engaged duty occurs when a bureaucratic employee makes decisions or behaves in such a way to not draw attention or not make anyone angry in order to increase the longevity of their job or the organization. One employee described it this way:

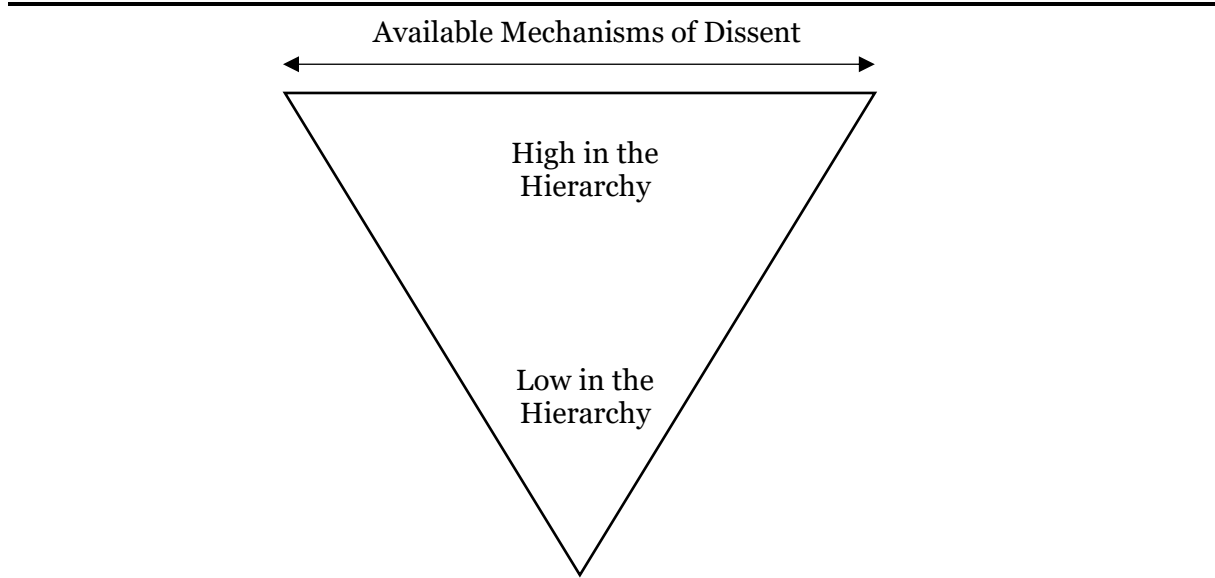
You don't get rewarded for going out there and pushing the envelope and trying to be creative and...but then it didn't work? You get screwed if it didn't work. It's way better...to not push...and safer...for your career...to not push the envelope...really.

Such behaviors can be successful for bureaucrats that do not want to engage in picking sides, thereby creating enemies. From an organizational perspective such behavior can be helpful for maintaining budgets and/or stability. Low-engaged duty may also be a successful career strategy for those loyalists who would like to remain at the organization for a long time.

Hierarchy and Available Mechanisms for Dissent

We also observed from the interview data that more mechanisms for dissent were available to employees who had more experience and/or sat higher within the hierarchy. One field-level respondent with only a few years of experience was surprised to even hear our research question. This person did not know that you could disagree with policies, their understanding

Figure 4. Available Mechanisms Along the Hierarchy



was that they were there to do their duty without disagreement. Other more experienced and upper-level employees described multiple types of responses to dissatisfaction and dissent. This finding is described in Figure 4, as one moves up along the hierarchy within an organization, more mechanisms for dissent become available.

Agency Differences

Differences in size, mission, and culture across the Parks Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish & Wildlife Service also affect employee responses to dissatisfaction. As mentioned in the literature review, Golden (1992) suggested five organizational features that affect bureaucratic resistance to political leaders: ideology, dominant agency profession, agency esprit, agency history, and careerist confidence. Our interviews indicate that dominant agency professions have changed over the years. One respondent who worked for more than 30 years in the Forest Service described how disagreements increased and getting stuff done got more difficult in the Forest Service as more ‘-ologists’ were hired into the agency. The respondent continued to explain that employees from different disciplines, like hydrology, ecology, forestry, and various types of biologists, each viewed problems through the lens of their discipline leading to disagreement about how to address issues. One downside of profession diversity in these agencies is the potential for increased disagreements.

This 30-year veteran of the Forest Service inadvertently confirmed Kaufman’s (1960) description of the Forest Service’s ability to socialize its employees into its ‘can-do’ culture when they described observing this culture slowly break down throughout their long career as a variety of ‘-ologists’ were brought into the agency, and along with them, disagreements about how things should be done (see also, Manring, 1993). Disputes inevitably come with increasing diversity, raising the importance of communication and collaboration as mechanisms for positively dealing with dissent. The differing missions of these agencies also affect employee disagreements and dissent. In relation to mission, for example, the Fish & Wildlife Service has a very targeted mission to conserve and enhance wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of Americans, the Parks Service has a dual mission to preserve nature and provide access to nature, and the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have multi-use missions to sustain the health *and* productivity of their public lands.

One interviewee described how this difference in missions affects employees this way: “You have a lot of more like-minded people in the Fish & Wildlife Service than you do in the Forest Service and the BLM because of their multiple-use mandates.” What this means for managing employee dissent and dissatisfaction was unclear from our data, but it does point to some possible hypotheses for future research. For example, on one hand it may suggest that dissent and dissatisfaction may be more intense when a policy goes against the mission of agencies with more targeted missions, as the like-minded people at those agencies may become united in their dissent against the policy. And on the other hand, multi-use agencies may have more factions spread across normative perspectives and so regardless of the administration in charge and the policies they make, disagreement could be happening by the opposite group in a multi-use agency. Though, perhaps because it happens more often at multiuse agencies, this disagreement and dissent may also be at a lower intensity.

Discussion, Further Research, and Conclusion

Because this study was exploratory and based on grounded theory, it generated insights that are in need of future research. For example, the work engagement framework we created in Figure 3 proposes two theoretical behaviors that we did not observe in the data, which were: Passive Helpfulness (low on engagement but constructive in intention), and High Engaged Duty (high on engagement but neutral on intention). Future work could explore whether these theoretical behaviors exist as well as further refine them in relation to other concepts from the public administration literature. For example, measurement of public service motivation has had dimensions related to duty at times (see Ritz et al., 2016). Possible research questions that flow from such an observation might be: How does high and low engaged dutiful behavior relate to public service motivation? Or, does job satisfaction interact with public service motivation to explain why someone might be passively helpful?

Our findings that loosely connect dissent and disagreement with suicide among public lands employees generated multiple questions with potential for further research. For example, a systematic review and meta-analysis of suicide by occupation suggests that suicide is more likely among lower skilled workers than among higher skilled workers (Milner et al., 2013). Is this trend similar among employees of public lands agencies? Such a question is interesting in light of the finding in this research about differing options of dissent up and down the hierarchy. Thus, do fewer options for dissent contribute to the possibility of suicide among lower skilled workers at the bottom of the hierarchy?

Other research is examining the links between climate change and suicide (Burke et al., 2018; Dumont et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2015). Do views on and experiences of climate change affect the possibility of suicide among public lands employees? For example, if a public lands employee feels high levels of alert about climate change but also feels policies within the agency are not doing enough to address it, could this dissatisfaction contribute to the possibility of suicide? Or, could public lands employees who experience the devastation and fallout of climate caused extreme weather events and catastrophes on public lands (e.g., wildfires, droughts) be more likely to commit suicide? These are all questions that are ripe for further research on suicide among public lands employees.

Another goal of this research was to find insights for positively managing dissent. However, it should be noted that whether dissent is managed ‘positively’ is a matter of perspective as some matters of dissent are based on differing political, moral, or ethical theories. Yet, other matters of dissent arise out of miscommunication or misunderstandings, and it is for this possibility that we think adding the modifiers ‘active’ to listening and ‘raising’ to voice (as in making one’s opinion known) are important for helping to prevent or mitigate dissent based on miscommunication. Furthermore, including pedagogical terms like ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ to the discussion on communication also help to prevent or mitigate dissent based on

misunderstandings. These findings support the previous work of O'Leary (2006; 2014; 2020) that describes listening as a tool for managing dissent but expands it to include teaching/learning about policies as part of that process. Although the term active listening appears in the latest version of O'Leary (2020), the actual term 'active listening' rarely appears in the body of the text nor does the text engage with the literature on active listening, especially in regard to techniques for active listening. We think further research connecting the techniques for active listening could be beneficial for furthering the work on managing dissent.

Another insight for positively managing dissent is an understanding of how the mechanisms we observed interact with each other. For example, Hirschman (1970) spent a lot of space describing the relationships among the mechanisms of exit, voice, and loyalty. In particular, a major theme in the book was that loyalty reduces the potential for voice and exit. When applying this insight into the management of employee dissent we observe that while loyalty may or may not be a positive thing for employees, simply offering it as an alternative to exit and voice provides employees another avenue for dealing with their dissent.

Similarly, by naming and exploring these clusters of behaviors and the numerous possible interactions across the clusters of behavior we offer dissenting employees more avenues for expressing their dissent and more ways for managers to understand the dissenting behaviors of their employees. This observation from our work supports O'Leary's (2006; 2014; 2020) 'advice from the pros' about creating multiple channels of dissent, in that we add to the landscape of potential dissenting behaviors. The behavior clusters we observed in these interviews are not mutually exclusive from one another, but rather can interact to describe different patterns of behavior and different options for dissent. For example, low engaged duty from Cluster 3 is an example of loyalty from Cluster 1 but one may also imagine instances of loyalty where one remains in their position and/or project but are more constructive or engaged than low engaged duty. Or the communication behaviors in Cluster 2 may interact with work engagement behaviors from Cluster 3 in that communications may be intended to be constructive, neutral, or destructive depending on the parties involved.

Our finding that lower-level employees were aware of fewer options for expressing their dissent was revealing. While it was clear from the data that more mechanisms for dissent were available to upper-level employees we did not have enough data to say with confidence which mechanisms were available at different levels of the hierarchy. Protecting employees' voices is important for revealing unethical, immoral, or illegal behaviors and is integral for encouraging whistleblowers. However, as mentioned, many policies are ambiguously ethical, moral, or legal and, as a result of this ambiguity, there are disagreements among workers within public organizations. In ambiguous cases, active listening and learning as strategies are necessary for building understanding, encouraging collaborations, and finding consensus at all levels in the hierarchy. Since field-level employees are working on the front lines of direct implementation of policies, they often have pertinent information about how that policy and the science of what they are doing interact, a common scene we heard play out in multiple interviews. Thus, it is integral for them to know their available options for voicing their knowledge. At the same time, field-level employees may be unaware of information that is affecting upper-level decision making, so once again, voice is better off as a two-way street. Our interviewees described both formal trainings available to them at the national level as well as informal learning opportunities in team meetings to learn communication strategies. In any of these cases, being more educated about policies and top-down decisions may have profound effects on exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, sabotage, overachievement, and dutiful behaviors.

However, there is ample reason to question the finding that lower-level employees were aware of fewer options for expressing their dissent. For example, the use of technology has flattened organizations, making it easier for employees to offer suggestions and feedback to those above them (see O'Leary & Vrij, 2012). Similarly, younger generations of employees who are also likely to be lower in the hierarchy are also more likely to use social media in raising their voice.

Finally, even though this finding emerged from multiple interviews of employees in various points in the hierarchies, the sample size of this research is too small to provide confidence in such a causal claim about place in the hierarchy and options for dissent.

As previously implied, the sample size of 12 in this study is indeed an issue for making strong causal claims, but making causal claims is not the primary focus of this research. This research is exploratory in nature and primarily is about asking the question about how employees respond to disagreements over policy while being open to other insights that emerged. This research was generative for these insights, such as the possibility that employees lower in the hierarchy have fewer options of dissent or that organizations with multi-use missions may experience more instances of dissent. These insights need further testing. For example, further research could examine the range and nature of the options of dissent both up and down hierarchies and across situations and organizations. More specifically, future research could examine which of the specific behaviors of dissent from Clusters 1, 2, and 3 differ up and down the hierarchy.

Another possibility for future research relates to Golden's (1992) related work; how do Golden's (1992) five factors (i.e., ideology, dominant agency profession, agency esprit, agency history, and careerist confidence) affect the degree to which dissenting employees do employment or project status change, inward and outward communications, or work engagement behaviors? Another possibility relates to Kaufmann (1960) who described the organization of the Forest Service with a chain of command modeled after the military, which is highly hierarchical and has clear lines of communication and hierarchical discipline. A related hypothesis and research question to this observation could be whether organizations with military roots would have fewer options of dissent among those lower in the hierarchy.

The setting of public lands agencies during the national policy environment when these interviews took place led to dynamic interviews with rich data. However, we believe the insights from this paper extend to other federal organizations that may not deal with public lands, or to state or local governments, much in the same way Hirschman (1970)'s insights extended outside of his original subjects, or how O'Leary (2006; 2014; 2020) observed guerilla behavior in many types of organizations.

Finally, it was heartening to hear stories of highly engaged employees who went above and beyond their basic duties to overachieve and find solutions when there were disagreements about policy, showing that at times there can be productive alternatives to neglect and sabotage or the neutral baseline of duty. A thread among these overachievements was that they often centered around successful collaborations in which costs were shared and in which multiple voices were at the table and heard. This finding lends support to the growing literature on collaborative governance as a more useful means for managing public lands than a command-and-control approach (Emerson et al., 2012; Holling & Meffe, 1996; Rogers & Weber, 2010). Other research could move from theory building to theory testing with larger samples, either through more interviews, surveys, or analysis of internal agency policies and cultures to understand their ability to positively manage dissent and build collaborative capacity.

Notes

1. We should note that whether dissent is managed in a positive way is a matter of perspective in both one's position and one's morals, politics, and ethics. We discuss this issue more in the discussion section.
2. 'Get out the cut' here refers to the conflict between cutting down trees for timber production and maintaining forests for recreation and wildlife habitat conservation.

3. FOIA, i.e., Freedom of Information Act, is a law or related laws that require disclosure of U.S. government information or documents upon request, with some exceptions. When used as a verb, to 'FOIA' something implies making the formal request for access to information.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocol: Public Lands Employee Project

Interviewing Approach: Semi-structured

Notes: Semi-structured interviews provide structure while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions if participants offer unique insights. Our plan is to ask the below questions and any other relevant questions to the project that arise naturally during the course of the interviews. Interviews could last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour.

Interview Questions

- Baseline-demographic questions
 - a. How long have you been working here?
 - b. What do you do for the [relevant govt. agency]?
 - c. What's the best thing about your job?
 - d. Why did you decide to work for this agency?
- Policy-related questions
 - e. During your time with [govt. agency], have there been any policies that were especially popular or unpopular among you and your coworkers?
 - f. How did employees behave, relative to the popular/unpopular policies?
 - g. Thinking about the popular/unpopular policies, do you ever collaborate with other agencies/nonprofits/businesses to deal with these policies?
 - h. How did employees talk about the popular/unpopular policies?
 - i. With each other?
 - ii. With people outside the organization (media, etc.)?
 - iii. Social media?
 - i. Were there any side-effects to employee talk about support/opposition to policy? Given a similar circumstance in the future, would you recommend that other employees behave in those ways?

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Fulfilling Two Needs With One Deed: The Psychological Effect of Volunteering on Persons with Physical Disabilities

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Volunteering not only benefits nonprofit organizations but also may contribute to volunteers' well-being. This study examines the benefits of volunteering on the psychological well-being of persons with physical disabilities. *Method:* Using a sample of 3,440 individuals drawn from national survey data in South Korea, we applied propensity score matching (PSM), a quasi-experimental design that reduces potential bias in models using multiple regression. *Results:* Our findings revealed the positive effect of volunteering on the psychological well-being of people with physical disabilities. Volunteer participants (treatment group) showed significantly better psychological well-being than non-volunteers (control group). *Conclusion:* Empirical evidence from this study supports the benefits of volunteering for those with physical disabilities, indicating that participating in such prosocial behaviors may play an important role in their psychological well-being.

Keywords: Volunteering, Physical Disabilities, Psychological Well-Being, Propensity Score Matching

Introduction

Volunteers are considered important human resources that support the success of nonprofit organizations' missions (Akingbola, 2013; Akinlade & Shalack, 2017). As an unpaid workforce that receives only nonmonetary compensation, volunteers are even more important for smaller organizations unable to afford paid employees (Cesta et al., 2017; Lee & Brudney, 2015). Persons with disability, referred to as "a deprivation in terms of functioning and/or capability among persons with health conditions and/or impairments" (Mitra, 2018, p. 9), have often been excluded by the dominant discourse in which they are "passive recipients of care, rather than active contributors to society" (Balandin et al., 2006, p. 679). As a result, persons with physical disabilities often encounter challenges in pursuing social opportunities including work, health, religion, sports, transportation, and civic engagement (Cochran, 2020; Condeluci et al., 2008; Munthali et al., 2019; Safta-Zecheria, 2020).

Having a physical disability can reduce accessibility to community participation, leading to more solitary, home-based activities. Empirical evidence suggests that volunteering is beneficial to individuals with disabilities for many reasons. For example, studies show that volunteering yields benefits such as increased self-esteem, feelings of helpfulness, a sense of

belonging, and a sense of accomplishment (Balandin et al., 2006; Kappelides & Spoor, 2019; Kulik, 2018; Lindsay & Cancelliere, 2018). Studies have also found positive relationships between volunteering and indicators of physical and psychological health, including levels of life satisfaction, actual physical health, and perceived health (Bradshaw et al., 2004; Held & Granholm, 2007; Kulik, 2019; Leiulfstrud et al., 2014; Rak & Spencer, 2016; Trembath et al., 2010; Yanay-Ventura, 2019; Yeum & Baek, 2013).

While these studies have revealed the numerous benefits of volunteering for individuals with disabilities, they have been mostly correlational in design, creating the potential for selection bias. Specifically, previous correlational findings may have resulted from selecting a volunteer group that is likely to be physically and psychologically healthier than non-volunteers. Only a handful of studies have recently applied experimental (Jiang et al., 2020) or quasi-experimental approaches (Wu & Bies, 2020) to eliminate selection bias and detect a causal relationship between volunteering and health benefits. Another limitation of previous studies is that most of them focused on Western countries. Although there has been growing interest in the benefits of volunteering in non-Western contexts (Chiao, 2019; Huang, 2019; Jang et al., 2016; Prysmakova, 2019; Wang et al., 2019), little is known about whether and to what extent volunteers (especially individuals with disabilities) can reap these benefits. For instance, in South Korea, there have long been religious and superstitious beliefs that individuals with disabilities are cursed by God for misconduct in their previous lives, which has fostered negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Jin & Song, 1998; Lee, 2009; Park et al., 2013; Seo & Kim, 2004).

Such stigma reduces opportunities for persons with disabilities to integrate into the community and build social networks, ultimately resulting in lower levels of psychological well-being for this vulnerable group (Rao, 2004; Zascavage & Keefe, 2004). Although South Korea had disability policies that included employment quotas, classifications of disability, and separate education, disability activists claimed that these policies had maintained structural discrimination (Arrington & Moon, 2020). Responding to the disability movement, South Korea enacted the Disability Discrimination Act in 2008 by modeling the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). The Framework Act on Volunteer Activities enacted in 2006 also explicitly stated that all Korean citizens must have equal access to volunteering opportunities regardless of their age, gender, and disabilities. However, empirical evidence from South Korea consistently demonstrates that individuals with disabilities tend to have significantly lower life satisfaction than those without disabilities (Oh, 1998; Park et al., 2013; Seo & Kim, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how to foster this group's well-being in societies where stigma and superstitious beliefs about disabilities predominate and whether social participation like volunteering positively influences their mental health.

Positive and Negative Effect of Volunteering on Well-Being

Individuals with physical disabilities often face various stressors, such as restrictions on daily activities, limited independence, and coping with differences from their peers, leading to negative consequences for their mental health (Wallander & Varni, 1992). Studies have found that those with physical disabilities have lower life satisfaction than those without disabilities (Smith & Alston, 2009). For instance, Decker and Schulz (1985) interviewed 100 patients with spinal cord injuries and found that they tended to have lower levels of subjective well-being compared to similarly aged individuals without disabilities.

Empirical studies found that volunteering participation might be helpful in improving the physical and psychological health of disabled people (Binder & Freytag, 2013; Borgonovi, 2008) as well as other marginalized or isolated groups, such as older adults (e.g., Jiang et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2019), LGBTQ+ individuals (Gates & Dentato, 2020), and the homeless (Morton & Cuning-Williams, 2009). Studies highlighted that volunteering—defined as “the

act of freely doing something without remuneration that is intended to improve others' quality of life directly or indirectly, with the recipient being outside one's own household" (Cnaan & Park, 2016, p. 24)—may improve the mental health of individuals with disabilities because it makes the volunteers feel that they are physically and mentally capable of playing meaningful roles in the community (Drucker, 2006). Social benefit theory (Li & Ferraro, 2005) can be helpful in understanding the positive effects of volunteering. The theory explains that volunteering experience may influence psychological health by helping volunteers develop supportive social relationships. Through relationships with recipients and other volunteers, they can obtain emotional and instrumental support, improving psychological well-being (Oman et al., 1999).

Moreover, volunteering provides opportunities to serve in socially meaningful roles, improving social integration, emotional and social cognition, autonomy, personal ability, purpose in life, and self-efficacy (McEwen, 1996; Taylor & Pancer, 2007). Consistent with the theory, empirical evidence reveals that a volunteering program can be a useful intervention for enhancing the well-being of individuals with physical and mental disabilities (Li, 2007; Poulin & Holman, 2013; Rietschlin, 1998). For instance, Rimmerman and Araten-Bergman (2009) conducted a study on volunteering activities of retirees with disabilities in Australia. They found that participants reported positive experiences with volunteer work. The authors pointed out that volunteerism was an opportunity for participants to enhance their sense of belonging to the community, self-awareness, and social inclusion. In another study focusing on older adults in the United States, Greenfield and Marks (2004) also found that elderly individuals experiencing loneliness or meaninglessness were likely to experience positive effects on their well-being through volunteering. As such, volunteering has the potential to give people with disabilities the opportunity to be involved in the communities, to gain self-awareness, and build "community, trust and reciprocity" (Bates & Davis, 2004, p. 198).

However, this will only happen when appropriate volunteering tasks are assigned to volunteers. Scholars point out that volunteering experience can also encounter negative consequences (Wilson & Musick, 1997). For instance, volunteers could experience psychological or emotional distress when they work with other people who are rude, abrasive, intrusive, or noisy. They may also feel frustrated or even asked to leave when they are assigned to tasks that they cannot physically handle (Drucker, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2003). Volunteers with disabilities, in particular, could experience a negative impact of volunteering on mental health due to the lack of accommodation or negative attitudes among other people toward disabilities (Bruce, 2006; Hall & Wilton, 2011). Traditionally, disabled people are less likely to participate in the labor market because of lower qualifications in education and skills, and physical barriers, such as inaccessible transport systems and streetscapes (Berthoud, 2006). Voluntary work is not exempt from these obstacles. Nonprofit organizations often found it difficult to hire disabled volunteers due to a lack of accommodation to support them and negative attitudes among community members (Balandin et al., 2006a). In a study of youth with disabilities, Lindsay et al. (2014) found a time gap in volunteer experience between youth with disabilities and those without disabilities, implying that people with disabilities may need more time to develop the skills required to perform the given tasks compared to those without disabilities.

In addition, as volunteers' satisfaction varies based on different aspects of volunteering motivations, volunteering individuals may experience negative consequences if their primary motivations are not fulfilled. For instance, volunteers can be influenced by contextual settings where they are forced to participate in volunteering tasks rather than motivated by goodwill. In her empirical study of volunteerism in Eastern Europe, Prysmakova (2019) pointed out that volunteers from countries with a compulsory volunteering character like Belarus may view volunteering activities as a forced obligation, showing a lower level of motivation and compassion.

The extant studies have made substantial contributions to our understanding of the effects of volunteering on persons with disabilities. However, when it comes to volunteers with physical disabilities, the volunteering effects are still debatable. Without further analysis of the relationship, one may argue that such a relationship is because healthier people are more likely to be able to volunteer. Hence, it is needed to investigate whether volunteering experience positively or negatively affects psychological health or vice versa. Some studies have attempted to detect a causal relationship between volunteering and health by adopting methods such as longitudinal approaches (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Piliavin & Siegl, 2007) or examining instrumental variables (Borgonovi, 2008; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). These approaches may uncover empirical evidence of the causal relationship. However, as Wu and Bies (2020) point out, such methods are not sufficient to confirm the effects of volunteering due to self-selection bias in the data. That is, volunteering groups selected for the studies likely have been healthier than non-volunteers; therefore, the positive outcomes for health-related factors may not be caused by the models' explanatory factors (i.e., volunteering experience). Moreover, conventional instrumental variables also risk violating the orthogonality condition or the exclusion restriction stipulating that the instrumental variable should not be associated with the error term in the explanatory equation (Kawachi et al., 2013).

More recently, studies have adopted advanced methods to address these shortcomings and establish the effect of volunteering on health. For instance, recruiting older adults from elderly service centers in Hong Kong, Jiang et al. (2020) conducted a randomized controlled trial study to examine the impact of social cognitive intervention on participation in volunteering. The authors found that intervention sessions increased volunteering among these older adults. In another study, Wu and Bies (2020) adopted treatment effects models to evaluate the net effect of volunteering on those living in urban China and found that volunteers had higher self-reported health scores compared to non-volunteers. The authors highlight, however, that the positive impact of volunteering on health reported in the literature using standard multiple regression approaches may be overestimated.

These studies provide some evidence of causal relationships between volunteering and health-related variables. However, they have focused either on the motivation stage of volunteering or on populations other than those with disabilities. No study has rigorously tested the causal relationship between volunteering and psychological well-being among individuals with disabilities. The current study attempts to address these gaps by utilizing the propensity score matching (PSM) approach that examines the causal relationship between volunteering and psychological well-being while controlling for key variables identified in the existing disabilities literature.

Other Factors Affecting Psychological Well-Being in Persons With Disabilities

Scholars have explored personal and societal factors that explain the psychological well-being of persons with disabilities. A large body of research has reported a positive relationship between one's economic situation and life satisfaction (Gitmez & Morcöl, 1994; Meadow et al., 1992). In a study on diverse aspects of life satisfaction among individuals with disabilities, Park (2009) found that satisfaction with income is significantly associated with psychological well-being. Another empirical study of individuals with developmental disabilities in South Korea (Kim & Kim, 2015) reported similar results.

Social participation and relations are also known as critical factors that influence life satisfaction for individuals with disabilities. Life satisfaction can be affected by active participation in social roles appropriate for one's life stage and social circumstances (Fengler, 1984; Nosek et al., 1995; Yun & Shin, 2015). Empirical evidence reveals that social networks are positively related to life satisfaction among individuals with disabilities (Yeum & Baek, 2013). Existing literature has shown that diverse forms of social participation, ranging from

sports and recreational activities (Murphy & Carbone, 2008) to social networking with friends (Kim & Kim, 2015) to occupational activities (Viemerö & Krause, 1998), tend to positively affect the psychological well-being of individuals with disabilities.

For those with physical disabilities, physical capability is one of the most critical factors determining levels of psychological well-being. Research has shown daily living activities (e.g., instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) or physical activities of daily living (PADL) to be a key determinant of psychological well-being for individuals with disabilities. In a study focusing on older adults' well-being, Quail et al. (2011) found the participants were likely to experience lower life satisfaction when their daily life performance (IADL/PADL) did not meet their needs. For those with disabilities, the degree to which physical and social performance are limited is likely a major cause of lower life satisfaction (Fuhrer et al., 1992; Nosek et al., 1995). This study focuses on South Korea, where cultural stigma appears to influence disabilities.

Consistent with research performed in other countries (e.g., Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Phillips et al., 2009; Saetermore et al., 2001), studies in South Korea have also reported that physical, psychological, economic, and social factors affect the well-being of individuals with disabilities (Choi, 2004; Kim et al., 2013; Kim & Yoo, 2013; Rah et al., 2002). For instance, using panel survey data, Kim and Yoo (2013) employed a structural equation model to explore the direct and indirect effects of economic factors, emotional factors, and discrimination on the psychological health of individuals with developmental disabilities. The authors found that income, leisure activities, health, and family relations were significantly associated with life satisfaction among individuals with disabilities. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational level are also believed to contribute to the variability in South Koreans' psychological well-being (Roh, 2007). Empirical studies have found that, among individuals with disabilities, women tend to have lower levels of life satisfaction compared to men. Additionally, research has shown age and education level to be negatively associated with life satisfaction (Kim & Kim, 2015; Paik & Roh, 2009).

Method

To address our research question, whether volunteering affects psychological well-being among persons with physical disabilities, we employed a quasi-experimental approach using the PSM model.

Sample

To best represent the South Korean population, we used secondary data from the 2015 National Survey of Individuals with Disabilities originally collected by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHS). The KIHS conducted the survey to understand the living conditions, welfare, and needs of individuals with disabilities by employing a stratified random sampling method. First, 200 districts were randomly selected from 1,255 districts across the nation. Professionally trained interviewers attempted to conduct door-to-door interviews with all households in the selected districts (about 45,000 households), and 38,560 households (104,703 individuals) completed the survey. Participants reported information about their disabilities, physical and mental health, social life, and economic environment. Among 6,824 survey participants, we excluded individuals aged under 18 and individuals without physical disabilities (i.e., with mental disabilities). Our final sample was 3,440 individuals aged 18 years or older who had physical disabilities.

Measures

Dependent variable: *Psychological well-being*. Five items assessed psychological well-being: satisfaction with (1) social relationships, (2) housing conditions, (3) health, (4) leisure, and (5) one's life overall. All items used a 4-point response scale ranging from 1 (very satisfied) to 4 (not satisfied at all). For this study, we used reverse coding and calculated the mean of the five items. Internal consistency of the five-item scale was acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.74.

Independent variable: *Volunteering*. We measured volunteering with one binary (yes/no) item: "Did you participate in volunteering activities over the last week?"

Covariates: We measured *functional capacity* using 12 items from the Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) Hierarchy Scale and eight items from the Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) Scale. All items used a 5-point response scale ranging from 0 (independent) to 4 (totally dependent). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.96 for ADLs and 0.93 for IADLs, demonstrating strong evidence of the scales' internal consistency. *Social participation* was measured by asking respondents how often they attended cultural or social events (e.g., movies, sports, travel, shopping, learning activities, and meeting with friends) during the week prior to the survey. Respondents also reported demographic information, including *gender*, *marital status*, *education level*, and *household income*, which we included as covariates in this study.

Propensity Score Matching

We attempted to detect the causal effect of volunteering on the psychological well-being of persons with physical disabilities. Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) are widely considered the gold standard approach for testing the causal effect of treatments on outcomes. Random assignment ensures that treatment effects will not be confounded with either observed or unobserved baseline factors. Therefore, RCTs can directly measure the effect of a treatment by comparing outcomes between the treatment and control groups. However, RCTs are not always appropriate when a study includes human subjects, as they can pose ethical issues. For example, it is unethical to withhold an effective medical treatment from a control group. Hence, a growing number of social science studies have used observational data to estimate the effects of treatments on outcomes. In observational studies, however, treatment selection is often influenced by other characteristics, which leads to questionable results (Oakes & Kaufman, 2006).

The PSM approach has increasingly gained academic attention as an advanced method that reduces or eliminates selection bias by assembling a sample in which confounding factors are balanced between treatment and control groups. Introduced by Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983), PSM has been applied in various fields to mimic RCT by statistically modeling the assignment process. Compared to traditional statistical approaches, such as least squares regression analyses, PSM is considered a more advanced approach to estimating treatment effects for three reasons: (1) PSM does not assume a pre-specified functional form, such as a linear relationship; (2) PSM is less complicated by using only propensity scores, whereas regression analyses often must adjust for many covariates, resulting in overfitting problems; and (3) PSM is a test of group similarity (i.e., testing the area of common support), whose assumptions are more transparent (Wagner et al., 2015).

As shown in Figure 1, we employed a PSM approach with four steps. First, we estimated propensity scores (PSs) for all observed covariates (i.e., age, gender, education level, marital status, household income, social participation, and functional capability) by conducting a logistic regression analysis. PSs are the probability of a participant receiving treatment on the set of covariates (Benedetto et al., 2018).

Figure 1. Steps of Propensity Score Matching

Step 1: Propensity score estimation: logistic regression	⇒	Step 2: Choosing matching algorithm: Nearest neighbor caliper (0.01)	⇒	Step 3: Comparing the balance of covariates: Group means of standardized bias (SB)	⇒	Step 4: Effect estimation: ATT (average effect of treatment on the treated)
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Second, we formed the treatment (volunteers) and control (non-volunteers) groups. Using the estimated individual PSs, we conducted 5:1 nearest neighbor caliper (0.01) matching procedures with replacement to develop unbiased treatment and control groups. Nearest neighbor matching is determined by finding control individuals with the smallest distance in PSs from the given individual in the treatment group. Caliper matching creates pairs within a pre-specified band, resulting in fewer but more closely matched pairs. Although matching with replacement could cause a sample independence issue due to duplication of the same units for the matched samples, it is considered a better method than matching without replacement to reduce bias (Pan & Bai, 2015). The matching procedure relied on the included covariates (i.e., gender, age, education, marital status, employment, household income, and functional capability). As these covariates were expected to affect whether one would participate in volunteering, we considered these background characteristics aiming to generate unbiased treatment effect estimates (Steiner et al., 2010).

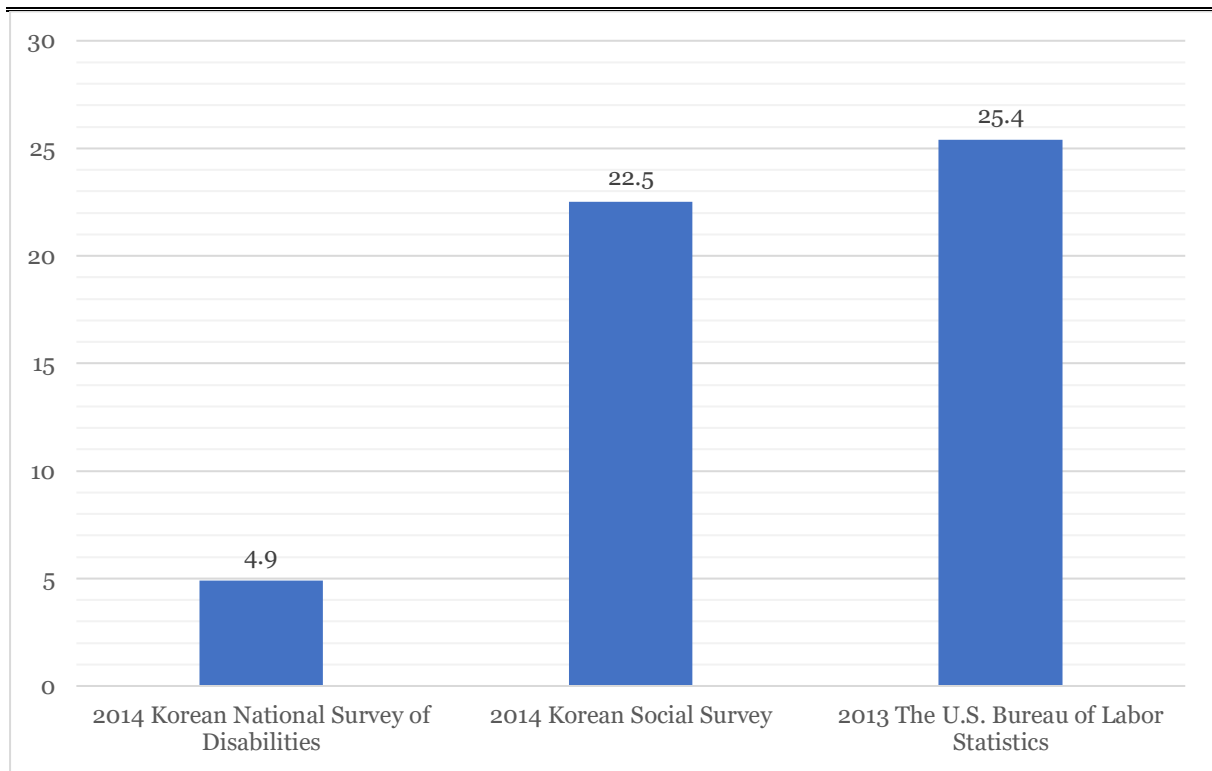
Third, we assessed the matching quality by comparing the balance of covariates before and after the matching procedure. Specifically, we evaluated the extent of balanced differences between treatment and control groups with means of standardized bias (SB). For all covariates, we calculated the SBs with an average covariate value between volunteers and non-volunteers. We then examined whether propensity score matching decreased the SBs. We considered SBs less than 10% to be negligible (Normand et al., 2001).

Lastly, we estimated the treatment effect, namely the impact of volunteering on the psychological well-being of persons with disabilities. Having established unbiased treatment and control groups, we estimated the ATT (average effect of treatment on the treated). To address the uncertainty issue in the matching procedure (Austin & Small, 2014), we conducted 50 iterations of bootstrapping for the final analysis.

Results

Among the 3,440 respondents with physical disabilities, over half were men (54.3%) and approximately two thirds were married (63.7%). The average age of the respondents was 62.41 years (SD=13.6). The average monthly household income was \$2,122 (SD=0.39). The majority of respondents had a middle-school education or less (62.62%), followed by high school graduates (23.6%) and then college or higher education graduates (13.78%).

Figure 2. Comparison of Volunteering Participation between Persons with Disabilities and General Public



As shown in Figure 2, slightly less than 5 percent of respondents participated in volunteering activities during the week prior to the survey, which was far below the reported rates of volunteering in both South Korea (22.5%) and the U.S. (25.4%).¹ This result is consistent with previous literature reporting that individuals with disabilities often have less access to volunteer opportunities (Shandra, 2017). The average level of psychological well-being was 2.63 out of 4 (SD=0.72).

Results of Propensity Score Matching

We estimated propensity scores by conducting a multivariate logistic regression with volunteering participation as the outcome. In the model, we included the 10 previously mentioned covariates that we expected to confound the relationship between volunteering and psychological well-being.

Table 1 presents the logistic regression results. One strategy for PSM is to include covariates that best predict treatment selection and outcomes (Steiner et al., 2010). In our regression model, age, education level, social participation, and functional capability (IADL) were statistically significant, demonstrating that the selected covariates were adequate to control for selection bias in the treatment and control groups. We then created propensity scores by compiling the predicted probabilities of participating in volunteering from the logistic regression model.

To create matched pairs, we used 5:1 nearest neighbor matching with 0.01 caliper, which retained 164 of 169 volunteers and significantly reduced observed differences between the volunteering and non-volunteering groups across variables. Table 2 and Figure 3 illustrate standardized differences in all variables before and after the matching procedure, showing a substantial reduction in bias resulting from the matching. After the matching, the SB (standardized bias) was reduced up to 97.2% (from 43.4% to 1.2%).

Table 1. Results of Logistic Regression on Volunteering Participation

Variables	DV: Volunteering Participation		
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Z
Age	0.129	0.049	2.63**
Age squared	−0.001	0.000	−2.57*
Female/male	−0.238	0.180	−1.33
Married/single	0.020	0.187	0.11
High school/middle school	0.843	0.223	3.78***
College or higher/middle school	1.623	0.241	6.74***
Household income	0.000	0.000	0.77
Social participation	0.034	0.011	3.18**
ADL	0.347	0.907	0.38
IADL	0.203	0.505	1.39***
Number of observations		3,437	
Model $\chi^2(10)$		107.22***	
Pseudo R ²		0.0796	

As summarized in Table 3, our findings suggest that volunteering has a positive effect on psychological well-being. Specifically, the estimated average effect of treatment on the treated (ATT)—the effect for those participating in volunteering—was 0.45, and the average treatment effect (ATE)—the effect on all participants (both treatment and control groups)—was 0.34 at the 0.001 confidence level.

Discussion

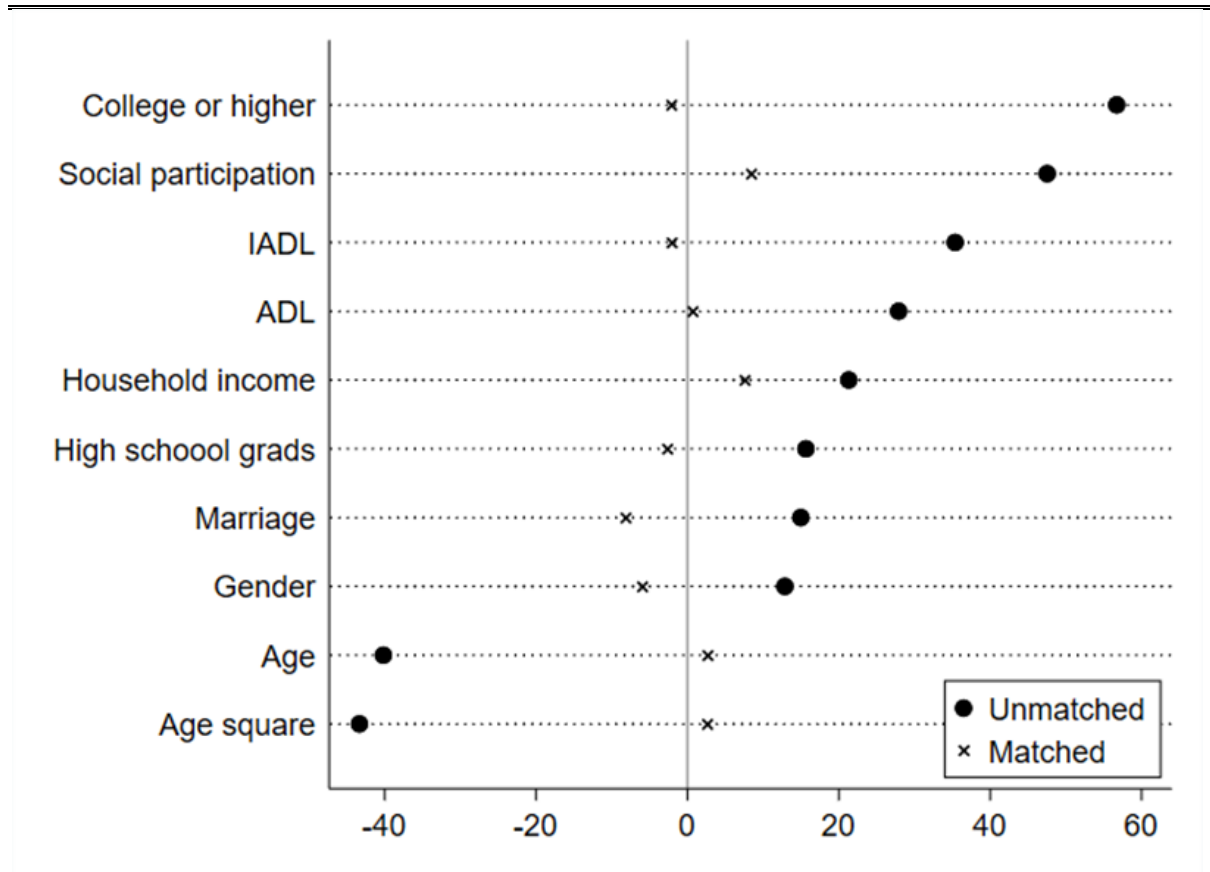
The current study utilized PSM with a representative sample in South Korea to examine the causal effect of volunteering participation on the psychological well-being of volunteers with physical disabilities. By establishing balanced treatment and control groups based on propensity scores, we detected a positive relationship between volunteering participation and psychological well-being while minimizing selection bias. This suggests that inclusive volunteering programs could be beneficial both for the volunteering agencies and volunteers with physical disabilities by improving their sense of life satisfaction. This finding aligns with extant literature reporting a positive correlation between volunteering and psychological health.

This study makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, while prior research has reported mixed findings on the relationship between volunteering and the psychological well-being of volunteers, the results of our study support a positive effect on volunteers with physical disabilities. This suggests that volunteer participation promotes a positive experience that outweighs the negative effect reported in the previous research (Berthoud, 2006; Lindsay et al., 2014; Prysmakova, 2019). Furthermore, while previous literature has offered little discussion of causality, leading to multiple interpretations of this relationship, our findings provide substantial evidence regarding the causal effect of volunteering on the psychological

Table 2. Comparison of Volunteers (n=164) and Non-Volunteers (n=2,194) Before and After Matching

Variable	Before Matching		After Matching		Balance Test	
	Mean		Mean		Reduction Bias (%)	t-test P
	Vol	Non	Vol	Non		
Age	57.39	62.67	57.39	57.04	93.40	0.80
Gender (female)	0.60	0.54	0.60	0.63	53.50	0.58
Married	0.70	0.63	0.70	0.74	45.40	0.43
High school grads	0.30	0.23	0.30	0.31	82.90	0.81
College or higher	0.36	0.13	0.36	0.37	96.20	0.86
Household income	316.50	235.60	316.50	287.80	64.50	0.33
Social participation	3.98	1.24	3.98	3.50	82.30	0.56

Figure 3. Standardized Bias (%) Across Covariates Before and After the Matching Procedure: Volunteers Versus Non-Volunteers



well-being of individuals with physical disabilities. This study also extends past findings to the South Korean context, where there may be different societal attitude towards persons with disabilities compared to Western countries due to their historical and cultural background.

Our findings also bear theoretical implications to the social benefit theory. As people with disabilities are often viewed as those being helped, helping others may have them experience more enhanced psychological benefits, including social integration (Berkman & Syme, 1979), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), meaningfulness (Pargament, 2001), and even physical activeness (Oman et al., 1999). The present study found that volunteerism was associated with psychological benefits among volunteers with physical disabilities, which is consistent with

Table 3. Treatment Effects (ATT) of Volunteering on Psychological Well-Being

Treatment Effects Estimation			Number of Observations=2,156		
Estimator: Nearest Neighbor Caliper Matching			Treated=161		
Outcome Model: Matching			Untreated=1,995		
	Treated (Volunteers)	Controls (Non-Volunteers)	Difference	S.E.	T-Statistic
Unmatched	3.01	2.56	0.45	0.042	10.75***
ATT	3.02	2.72	0.30	0.046	6.49***
ATU	2.62	2.96	0.34		
ATE			0.34		

the social benefit theory that explains sets of causal pathways of volunteering to physical and mental health.

Implication for Practice. In South Korea, there have been policy efforts to eliminate discrimination against individual disabilities. For instance, the Framework Act on Volunteer Activities enacted in 2006 states that all Korean citizens must have equal access to volunteering opportunities regardless of their age, gender, and disabilities. However, the results of this study indicate that persons with disabilities in South Korea were significantly less likely to volunteer than those without disabilities. Previous studies posit that many individuals with disabilities have sufficient willingness but limited opportunities to volunteer due to lack of awareness and social stigma (Andrews, 2005; Bruce, 2006; Lindsay, 2016; Miller et al., 2003). That is, social stigma remains pervasive in society concerning what volunteers with physical disabilities can and cannot do, and the level of accommodations necessary for them to perform volunteer tasks. This may negatively affect volunteer opportunities where nonprofit organizations provide less opportunities for those with disabilities due to the misunderstanding or lack of awareness driven by this stigma.

Our findings suggest that, beyond policy efforts, there is still a need for volunteering agencies to provide persons with disabilities with greater access to volunteering opportunities to help improve their life quality while simultaneously achieving organizational missions and responding to community needs. Volunteer administrators are called upon to establish and develop more inclusive volunteer programs.

Implication for Research. This study's limitations suggest several paths for future research. A critical limitation of the PSM approach is its inability to control unobserved confounding variables. Although we included key covariates based on previous literature, we did not incorporate other probable predictors of volunteering and psychological well-being, such as affiliate stigma, social support, and adaptation to disability, due to limitations of secondary data. To minimize this potential distortion, we used a conservative approach by applying bootstrapping with 50 replications.

For the same reason, this study did not examine the long-term effect of volunteering. In our survey data, psychological well-being was measured within a week after respondents' volunteer participation, and thus we still do not know whether the beneficial effects would continue in the long term, for which a rigorous longitudinal approach would be needed. Also, it should be noted that this study is limited by the classification of all kinds of volunteering participation as one group. That is, we did not investigate what kind of volunteering experience has a positive impact on psychological well-being. Misplacement of volunteers in positions that are beneath their abilities can be detrimental to their sense of self-worth and the value of volunteering. Further research is needed to determine what kind of inclusive volunteering programs should be created to provide a positive experience to volunteers who experience disabilities.

Further, we could not include other benefits of volunteering discussed in the previous literature, such as self-efficacy (McEwen, 1996; Taylor & Pancer, 2007), belief in self (Miller et al., 2003), social integration (Binder, 2015), and sense of meaningfulness (Balandin et al., 2006). Future research should continue to probe more deeply into the consequences of volunteering by examining these variables.

Conclusion

Volunteering is one way to enhance psychological health for individuals with disabilities. Our study adds evidence of the independent effect of volunteering on health, particularly among South Koreans. As the ultimate goal of rehabilitation, improving quality of life and our findings suggest that volunteering may do this for volunteers with disabilities, which merits further exploration.

Notes

1. While our data include individuals aged 18 or older, the U.S. data include teenagers aged 16 or older, and the Korean Social Survey only includes individuals aged 20 or older.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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Challenges in Assessing the Scope and Dynamics of the Nonprofit Sector

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How many nonprofits operate in your community? How many closed during the pandemic? These questions are not as easy to answer as you might think. Production of demographic data for the nonprofit sector has been a challenge for nonprofit researchers. Scholars frequently rely on administrative records, but they sometimes make leaps without evaluating the shortcomings of their data. Our exploration documents the challenges researchers should confront when they seek to produce accurate demographics of the nonprofit sector. We compare administrative records and lists (core files, full Form 990 digitized, Business Master Files) with online footprints (news, websites, state records) to account for the variety of ways that living organizations get mislabeled as dissolved. We urge researchers to approach administrative lists critically when using them to paint pictures of community ecology.

Keywords: Community Ecology, IRS Records, Administrative Data

Introduction

This is a cautionary tale. We frequently see researchers using administrative records to document, measure, or evaluate the scope of nonprofit organizations in a community. We like the idea. However, our efforts on this front uncover a variety of shortcomings in the data that researchers need to confront. In this paper, we document our experience and outline how the presence or absence of organizations in administrative lists are not always reliable indicators of their active presence or absence in our communities.

Nonprofit organizations can be found in every municipality in the United States. They provide avenues for civic engagement, deliver services, propagate local culture and values, and allow communities to remake themselves (Frumkin, 2002). The number of organizations in a given space, their resources, growth, decline, competition, and collaboration are basic to assessments of scope, scale, behavior, and impact of community organizations. Paarlberg and Hwang (2017) make this point explicitly, pointing to population ecology, network, and institutional arguments regarding the density and legitimation of organizations in U.S. counties. They rely on the only consistent source of counts of U.S. charities: those that register with and report to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Indeed, federal government data provides the foundation for scholarship on the ecology of nonprofit organizations in the United States.

In this paper, we document challenges to the reliability of this data in assessing nonprofit organization ecology. By *ecology*, we refer to the teaming milieu of organizations in a

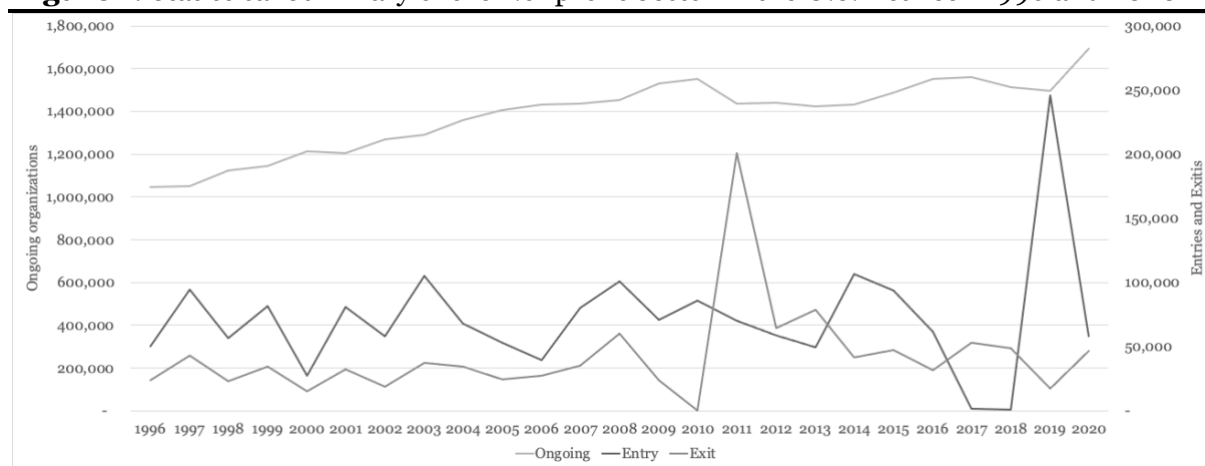
particular field or space. Populations of organizations grow and decline through a churn of foundings and closures. They collaborate and compete in a community space, or at least in a particular niche of that community. Scholarship that describes or assesses the scope and dynamics of a field helps us to understand its ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1988; 1989). In this paper, we are principally concerned with efforts to document the counts of nonprofits in a given time and space, especially the difficulty of documenting which organizations have left that space. Our goal is to encourage care by nonprofit sector scholars who rely on administrative data to study the scope and dynamics of the nonprofit sector. Other efforts have raised healthy questions about the accuracy of key information reported in annual regulatory reports (Qu et al., 2020; Trussel, 2003). While the issue of data accuracy persists, our current inquiry focuses on gaps in using U.S. regulatory reports to assess the scope and churn of organizations, which we consider an ecological issue. Our interest in this question grew from two roots, both of which began as unassuming questions that blossomed into more difficult ones. The first concerns the number of organizations in the sector over time, and the second concerns the reliability of counting (or discounting) organizations that stop operating.

First Root: Numbers of Organizations

The most well-developed scope-of-the-sector assessments in the United States have been published by Grønbjerg (e.g., Grønbjerg & Kurt, 2021; Grønbjerg et al., 2021), who provides careful detail on operations of nonprofits in Indiana. Perhaps more vital, however, is that project's lessons on the challenges of relying on incorporations and state and federal registrations and filings for an accurate count of nonprofit organizations. Grønbjerg et al. (2010) document that nearly a third of Indiana nonprofits are registered with the state but not with the federal government (i.e., the IRS), sounding an alarm that reliance on federal registrations provides a badly biased view of the sector. That is a lesson that should be front-of-mind for scholars who rely on federal data for assessment of community ecologies.

However, researchers under demands to publish quickly (among other things) may rely on existing administrative data available even when the quality of this information is limited. Some states make their lists of nonprofits publicly available, but they vary in what they collect and distribute. This complicates national (or state comparative) pictures of nonprofit ecologies. We could identify no efforts to assemble state reports for a full national (U.S.) picture of foundings, ongoing counts, or failure of nonprofit organizations. Rather, ecological summaries typically rely on federal data. Prevailing national snapshots rely on regular reports from the Urban Institute (2022a), which in 2019 last reported 1.54 million federally registered nonprofits, but only around 533,000 are required to report details on their activities to the IRS. Their occasional counts provide the beginnings of an ecological assessment of the sector but do not illuminate the evolution of organizational populations over time or the churn of foundings and dissolutions that characterize any count. To our surprise, we could identify no descriptive time-series on U.S. public charities built from federal lists. Colleagues urged us in a predictable direction: Build your own series from public charities documented in annual IRS Business Master Files (BMFs). We noted Grønbjerg's important caveat that these counts overlook organizations without federal registrations, but the project provided a basis for documenting other limitations of the list.

Figure 1 provides the result of this data exercise. The Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics warehouses periodic extracts of charitable organizations listed in the IRS BMF (Urban Institute, 2022b), which we were able to access through their public links. We downloaded the latest abstract for each year from 1995 to 2020 and matched organizations by Employer Identification Number (EIN). By comparing year-over-year, we classified organizations into three categories: (i) *entries* that appear in the BMFs for the first time, (ii) *ongoing* organizations that were listed in previous years, and (iii) *exits* that fall out of subsequent BMFs. Figure 1 graphs these time series. The column on the left (primary axis)

Figure 1. Statistical Summary of the Nonprofit Sector in the U.S. Between 1996 and 2020

indicates the number of *ongoing* organizations, while the column to the right (secondary axis) indicates the number of *entries* and *exits*.

Figure 1 suggests a dynamic nonprofit sector. For example, in 1996, we observe about 50,000 new organizations that were not in the 1995 file (*entries*), 1.05 million organizations that continued from 1995, and more than 23,000 organizations that were in the 1995 file but not in the 1996 file (*exits*). For 2020, we observe more than 58,000 entries, bringing the 2020 total to the familiar 1.75 million organizations, excluding the 46,000 that fell out of the 2019 file.

Figure 1 documents both growth and degree of churn (creative destruction) over the past two decades but also highlights several data quality questions. The analogy of *creative destruction* comes from Schumpeter (1942/1975) who proposes that organizational change in industries may come from disruptive and discontinuous trends fostering innovation and dismantling existing practices. In other cases, population changes seem to result from administrative decisions. For example, see in Figure 1, what should we make of the spike in exits and decline in the number of nonprofits in 2011? This is almost certainly an artifact of the IRS decision to purge organizations that failed to file Form 990 over a period of several years, the ‘auto-revocation’ event (Lu et al., 2020). This decision improved the data by removing dead organizations from the roster but also harmed it by removing nonprofits that were simply delinquent in their filing. In any case, any ecological snapshot based on administrative data will be subject to such history.

Indeed, this example highlights a thorny issue in documenting the ecology of nonprofit organizations: Knowing whether they are truly alive or dead. This challenge is not only associated with the availability and quality of administrative records but also with the diversity of livelihood status that nonprofits might experience. We take up this issue next.

Second Root: The Livelihood Status of Organizations

Assuming one could compile a full national list of nonprofit organizations, a second problem presents itself. In the last decade, the use of administrative information to study the demographics of the nonprofit sector has been popular. Most studies have used financial information reported by nonprofits in Form 990 to study the financial capacity and growth of the sector (Chikoto & Neely, 2014; Lecy & Van Slyke, 2013; Paarlberg et al., 2018). Other researchers have even explored IRS listings to study nonprofit *exits*, or at least *exits off* the IRS radar. For instance, Lu et al. (2020; see also Park et al., 2021, or even Hager, 2001) used

a list of nonprofits that had not filed Form 990 for three consecutive years as a proxy for dissolution. We believe this assumption highlights problems endemic to administrative data.

Some other studies have gone the extra mile and combined administrative information with surveys or interviews with members or former members of organizations to shed light on the status of registered nonprofits. For instance, Garrow (2015) combined administrative information with primary and secondary sources to determine whether an organization was active or disbanded. As Searing (2020) notes, this is a rabbit hole that uncovers ‘living’ organizations with no activity (zombies), organizations that fully change their mission and direction (reincarnation), and organizations that close and later return to operation (resurrection). Case analysis of closed organizations that still appear on active lists, or living organizations that escape these lists, provide lessons on the messy fringe of community ecologies. Scholars of nonprofit demography ignore this messiness at their peril.

Our goal in this section is to document our efforts to explore this fringe, including documentation of the variety of livelihood statuses for nonprofit organizations. When we see counts, we might ask what is missing. When we see organizations labeled as *alive* or *dead*, we might inquire about the lengths that researchers went to document an organization’s status. We focus on *exits* because this determination has been identified as problematic in previous studies of sector dynamics (Helmig et al., 2014; Searing, 2020). Our effort to raise your concern on these counts follows.

Exploring Operational Status

Our inquiry started in 2003 when we sampled 3,000 public charities from a population of 214,995 IRS Form 990 filers in 2000 (Hager & Brudney, 2004). The focus of the original project was on volunteer management; the current research re-approaches the sample with an eye toward exploring the dynamics of the nonprofit sector. The volunteer administration project meant to exclude grantmaking foundations, so 7 sampled organizations that crept into the initial sample were removed. The remaining 2,993 subjects were drawn within expenditure and subsector strata. Princeton Survey Research Associates, a professional research firm, tried to track down and call all of these. They were able to verify that 73 organizations identified as ‘closed,’ but many others fell into a gray space between life and death. More than 230 others defied initial contact, including 92 with a disconnected phone and 47 that never picked up the ringing phone. We might assert that 12% of organizations had ceased operating between filing their Form 990 in 2000 and awaiting our call in 2003, but this assertion would be a leap of faith. Nearly a decade later, we looked to see how many of these 310 organizations ‘presumed dead’ in 2003 had filed a Form 990 in 2006, 2007, or 2008. As it turns out, most of them showed signs of life: 191, or 62%. Presbyterian Elders in Prayer, in Kansas City, had an October 2009 newsletter online. River Vale PTA, in New Hampshire, was alive at a working URL, but operating under a new EIN. Clearly, establishment of the operating status of nonprofits can be a challenge.

The original sample of 2,993 nonprofits received new attention in our current inquiry. We should underline that our study organizations are drawn from Form 990 filers. We concentrate our analysis on such organizations since they are trackable in administrative records. Nonetheless, we recognize that concentrating on this group only captures the experiences of Form 990 filers and not all charities. What’s more, since we drew our study sample from the list of Form 990 filers in 2000, our analysis includes organizations that were created before or in 2000. Our study does not include newer organizations (those created after 2000).

Relying on our BMF time series (described above), we identified 733 of 2,993 organizations that fell out of the BMF between 2000 and 2020. If we assume that absence from administrative lists is indicative of closure (an assumption that runs through the

Table 1. Datasets Used for the Analysis

Dataset	Description of the Dataset	Period Available/ Under Study
Business Master Files (BMF)	List of nonprofits that are recognized as tax-exempt entities by the IRS. Focus on identifying information.	2000 to 2020
Forms 990 digitized of electronic filers	List of nonprofits that submit the electronic version of Form 990 or Form 990-EZ. Provides information on most of the sections reported on Form 990 and Form 990-EZ.	2012 to 2017
The cumulative list of Form 990-N (e-postcard) filers	List of nonprofits that submit Form 990-N (e-Postcard), which is the requirement for most small tax-exempt organizations. Focus on identifying information.	2007 to 2020
Core files	List of nonprofits that submit either Form 990 or Form 990-EZ. Provides basic financial information for the period 2000 to 2011, and several Form 990 sections starting in 2012.	2000 to 2017

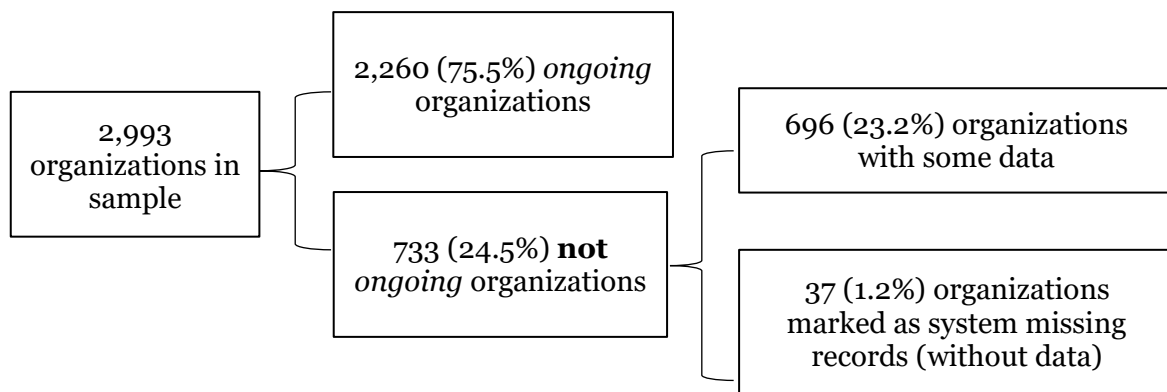
organizational population ecology literature), then approximately 24% of charities churned out of the sector over a period of two decades. How accurate is this assumption?

We explored four data sources to triangulate information about the current state of the nonprofits in our probe. We used information from i) Business Master Files from 2000 to 2020, ii) Forms 990 digitized from 2012 to 2017, iii) the cumulative list of Form 990-N (e-postcard) filers from 2007 to 2020, and iv) Urban Institute core files from 2000 to 2017. At the time of our analysis, data from Form 990 digitized and core files were not available for 2018 and subsequent years; consequently, the analysis of core files ends in 2017. We download BMFs, core files, and Forms 990 digitalized from Urban Institute (Urban Institute, 2022b; 2022c). The cumulative list of nonprofits that submitted Form 990-N (e-postcard) was available for download from the IRS website (IRS, 2022a).

In the following sections, we describe our process for studying the current disposition of cases of organizations that were presumably alive in 2000. As we proceed with the analysis of data, we present assumptions regarding the activity or inactivity of these nonprofits. No assumption stands by itself: We present a narrative of the pieces of information we found and how we interpreted each piece.

Business Master Files

First, as is common in nonprofit scholarship, we started with the BMFs. This is a publicly available list of federally recognized nonprofit organizations in the United States. If an organization terminates or fails to submit annual reports for three consecutive years, it is no longer listed. The list of tax-exempt organizations is provided to the public by the IRS (IRS, 2022b). As described above, we compiled a longitudinal file of BMF filers; this provided us a basis to infer the status of organizations that fell out of this listing.

Figure 2. Disposition of Cases Based on Business Master Files from 2000 to 2020

We created flags to identify which of our 2,993 study organizations entered or left the longitudinal BMF file. For each year, we created a *demographic* variable and assigned 1 for *entry*, 2 for *ongoing*, 3 for *exit*, and 4 for *post exit*. *Entry* means organizations that entered the dataset with a unique employer identification number (EIN) not used before. We assigned *ongoing* for those organizations that appear on the BMFs for at least two consecutive years. *Exit* means that an organization was not listed on the BMF in a given year. We assigned *post-exit* for the subsequent years that an organization exited the BMFs unless they regained their tax-exempt status.

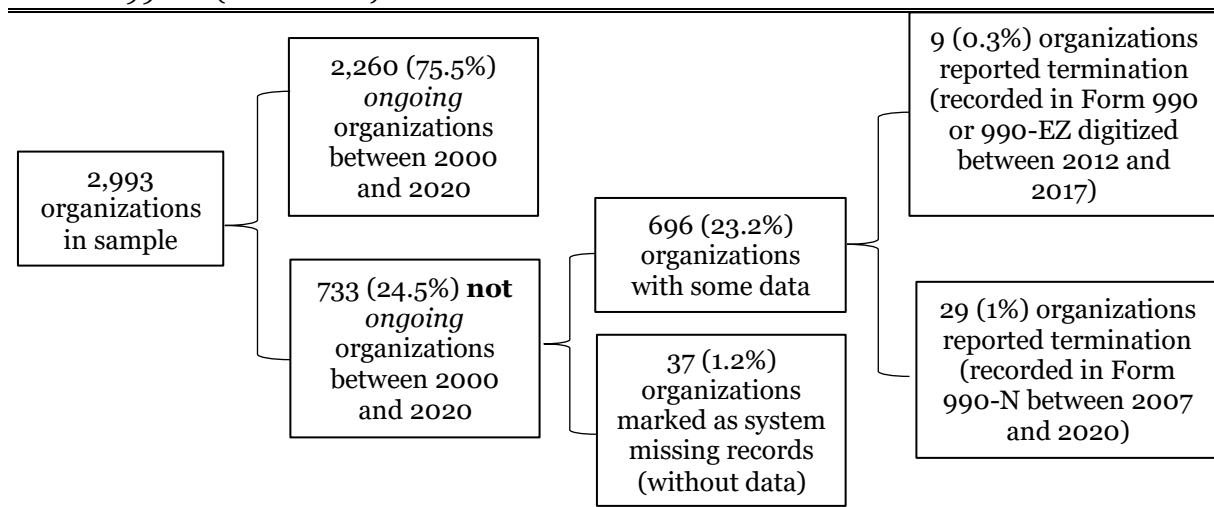
These flags assisted in exploration of the disposition of cases. Most of the organizations *appear continuously* on the BMFs (2000–2020). The IRS has improved its maintenance of the BMF over the last several decades, so we assume that organizations continue *active* if they maintain their tax-exempt status with the IRS through 2020. Of the 2,993 organizations in our sample, 2,260 organizations (75.5%) were continuously listed in the Business Master Files for the period 2000 to 2020. However, organizations with missing entries, especially if they fall off the list and do not return, could be closed, lost tax-exempt status, or are simply delinquent in filing. The other 733 organizations left IRS records some time between 2001 and 2020 (see Figure 2). Out of these cases, 37 organizations never reported activities to the IRS. Although these cases were originally drawn from a list of Form 990 filers, they escaped future federal oversight. These 37 cases might correspond to administrative record issues or organizations that never reported activities to the IRS once they obtained their EIN. We proceed to explore additional information to determine the fate of the remaining 696 records.

Reported Termination: Form 990 Digitized and Form 990-N (E-Postcard)

We explored the instances where nonprofits can formally report termination. At the top left of the front page of Form 990 and 990-EZ, in section B, organizations can check ‘terminated.’ The most current version of the Form reads ‘Final return/terminated’ (IRS, 2022c). Smaller organizations that file Form 990-N (the e-postcard, aimed at organizations with less than \$50,000 in annual gross receipts) can also report termination. Nonprofits that report formal termination are likely to have stopped operations or undergone some form of transformation such as a merger or a change to a for-profit entity. We identified those organizations that marked termination and no longer reported activities under the same EIN.

We identified two datasets where the *termination box* data is digitized and proceeded to verify the validity of this information. The Urban Institute keeps records of Form 990 and 990-EZ digitized from 2012 to 2017. We identified organizations that marked ‘Final return/terminated’ in this file and noted the year. We expected that nonprofits that were closed or on the verge of closing would typically report *termination* in its final Form 990 or

Figure 3. Disposition of Cases Based on BMFs, Form 990 Digitized, and the Cumulative List of Form 990-N (E-Postcard) Filers



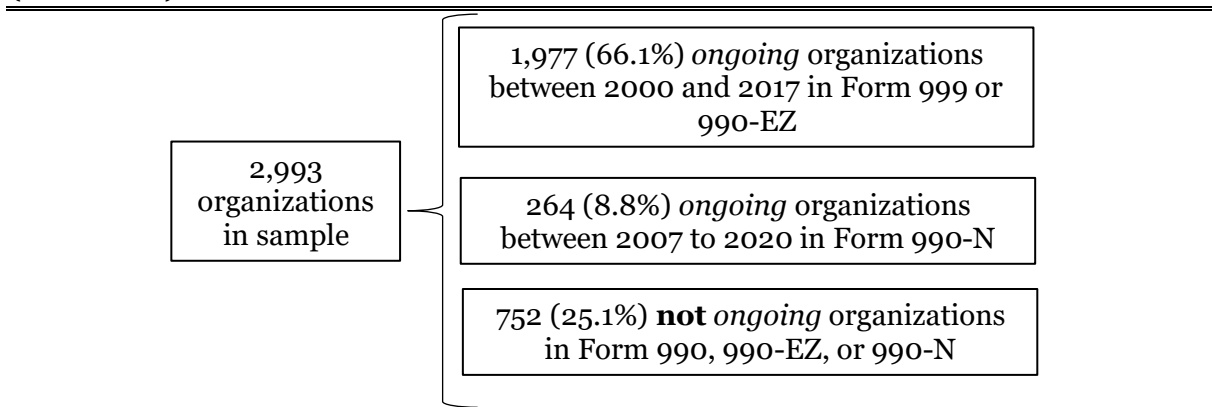
990-EZ. However, this was not the case. Out of the 696 cases in this stage of the probe, only nine organizations formally reported termination.

We presumed that noncompliance was rampant, meaning that organizations ceased operations without bothering to transmit this event to the IRS. However, this also was not the case. Some of these organizations *did* report termination, but this notation is not properly recorded in the digitized files. We can hope for improved capture of data as electronic filings become more universal; For instance, the Nonprofit Open Data Collective (NODC) plans to publish the revised records of electronic filers of Form 990 and 990-EZ digitized from 2009 to 2017 (NODC, 2022). However, even with that advance, our probe will suffer from unreliable data between 2000 and 2008. Moreover, the focus on Form 990 and 990-EZ would not be able to capture reported termination on Form 990-N (e-postcard).

Most small nonprofits report termination in Form 990-N (e-postcard), which is our second source of formal termination information. The IRS publishes the list of nonprofits that filed Form 990-N between 2007 to 2020. This list indicates which organizations marked *termination*. Using this information, we found that 29 more of our study organizations reported termination between 2007 and 2020. Considering the 9 organizations identified in the digitized Form 990 data, we only identified 38 organizations that formally reported *termination* sometime between 2007 and 2020. This means that for only 5% of nonprofits that no longer appear on the BMF were we able to assert termination using the digitized information from Forms 990, 990-EZ, and 990-N (e-postcard). Figure 3 presents the disposition of cases in the datasets used. Our exploration of additional sources of information to triangulate the initial diagnoses of BMFs continued.

Last Place Seen Active: Core Files and Form 990-N

To triangulate the disposition of cases, we look for the administrative records where nonprofits were last active in the federal files. We might assume that nonprofits are active until they no longer file the required regulatory reports. So, we look for the last return submitted by nonprofits to the IRS. We inspected the list of nonprofits on the core files and the list of Form 990-N (e-postcard) filers. We created demographic variables that flagged *ongoing* cases. Following this process, we found that out of the 2,993 cases under study only 1,977 (approximately 66%) reported activities in Form 990 or 990-EZ for consecutive years in the period 2000 to 2017.

Figure 4. Disposition of Cases Based on Core Files and the Cumulative List of Form 990-N (E-Postcard) Filers

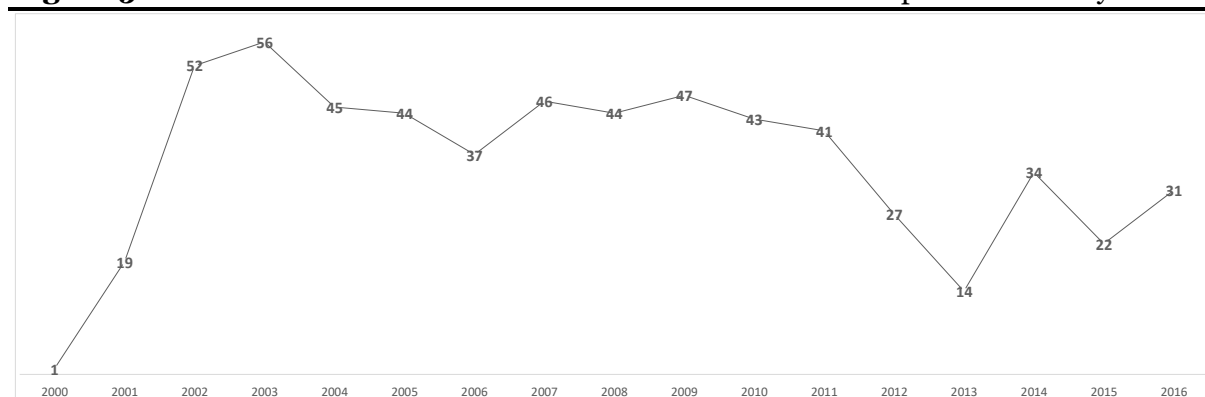
Small nonprofits can maintain federal tax-exempt status by submitting Form 990-N (e-postcard). As we described in the above section, the IRS publishes the list of nonprofits that have filed Form 990-N from 2007 to 2020. Out of the 2,993 cases under analysis, we found that 264 organizations submitted Form 990-N sometime between 2007 to 2020. Of these, 29 reported *termination* and 235 did not. Figure 4 reports the disposition of cases as documented from these two exercises.

Last Time Seen Active: The Exit Year

While some organizational ecologies rely on single-time snapshots, others (such as our BMF time-series) describe change in populations over time. Based on our exploration of BMF, core, 990-EZ digitized, and Form 990-N files, we sought to assign an *exit year* to the cases under analysis. For each of the processes described above, we create dummy year exit variables: *ExitYear1* for the year that nonprofits reported termination on Form 990-N, *ExitYear2* for the year nonprofits reported termination on Form 990 or 990-EZ digitized, *ExitYear3* for the year nonprofits submitted their last Form 990 or 990-EZ and this is listed on core files, and *ExitYear4* for the year nonprofits last reported activities using Form 990-N. Note that for *ExitYear3* and *ExitYear4* we took the last Form 990 submitted even if organizations did not mark termination or final return.

We compared the different *exit years* and created an *Exit Final* variable with the last year nonprofits reported activities to the IRS. We followed the prevailing assumption that nonprofits are active until they no longer report activities (including organizations that did report termination). In Figure 5, we present the disposition of cases for the period 2000 to 2016. Our analysis runs from 2000 to 2017, but we only present data through 2016 that account for 603 organizations that administratively *exited* the study. We observe that many organizations seem to exit in 2017, but this is a problem of the availability of information we used (particularly core files and Forms 990 digitized that are only available until 2017). These organizations have probably stopped reporting activities to the IRS between 2017 and 2020. However, core files and Forms 990 digitized for 2018 to 2020 were not available to approximate the year of exit at the time of our analysis. Therefore, we only report the *exit year* until 2016.

Recall that this national sample was drawn based on charities that filed Form 990 with the IRS in 2000. The sample included nonprofits of different ages, sizes, and subsectors. We observe that several nonprofits *exit* the records of the IRS around the first three years (2000 to 2003) and then the *exits* slow down, perhaps reflecting the liability of newness. Exits accelerate again in the Great Recession, 2009–2011, reflecting environmental conditions. That

Figure 5. Number of Exit Cases Between 2000 and 2016 in the Sample Under Analysis

these inflection points can be explained by theory and history bodes well for a general longitudinal study of organizational ecologies.

We might stop the explanation here and suggest that we triangulated enough sources of information to approximate which cases *exited* the sample and their year of exit. However, we took one last step: individual inspection of nonprofits marked as *exits*.

Case-by-Case Sleuthing

So far, we have described an effort to document the administrative trajectory of the original 2,993 organizations drawn into the study. The original purpose for drawing the sample was a 2003 survey that drew 1,753 respondents. Of those returning surveys, 399 were out of scope for the inquiry on volunteer administration, leaving 1,354 cases for longitudinal study. Hager and Brudney (2021) endeavored to return to these cases for further study in 2019 and found that only 773 of the 1,354 original respondents continued activities with the same EIN. This means that approximately 581 organizations (or 42%) did not continue activities during the period 2003–2019.

We made this determination through a process we call *sleuthing for internet traces*. An internet survey requires names and email addresses, but these are not readily available in administrative records. Compilation of such contacts requires internet searches and phone calls. Sometimes the sleuthing is easy: Googling of an organization name hits an active web page, leading to an active contact name and working email address. Sleuthing is harder when organizations do not want to be found, websites are out of date, or email addresses are not forthcoming. However, sleuthing is hardest when the operational status of an organization is unknown. Occasionally, an archived website, news story, or call to a former board member will reveal that an organization is closed. Too often, a lack of information or contact left us uncertain of the fate of a given organization. Even with recent Form 990s in hand, internet searches and phone calls left us unable to uncover even generic email addresses for 176 cases.

Exemplary Cases

Previous studies in nonprofit demise and closure have noted that qualitative methods such as case study are useful in assessing the fate of subject nonprofits (Fernandez, 2008, Lena, 2018; Searing, 2020). To assess whether the cases that left the sample actually ended their activities or not, we further explored organizations and carried out two explorations on the suspected cases. The first effort was based on a purposeful selection of cases from the case-by-case sleuthing described above. The second effort explored a random sample of cases that are no longer listed on the BMFs (see Figure 2). We randomly selected 3% of the cases (21 organizations). Based on both explorations, we present eight scenarios that complicate the use

Table 2. Characteristics of Organizations Used as Examples

Org.	NTTE code	State	Ruling Year	Last Form 990 Submitted	Marked Termination
1	Big Brothers, Big Sisters	TX	1967	2003	Yes
2	Ambulatory Health Center, Community Clinic	LA	1946	2015	No
3	Ballet	CA	1982	2009	Yes
4	Parent Teacher Group	AL	1951	2008	Yes
5	Environmental Quality, Protection, and Beautification	MI	2000	2004	Yes
6	Urban, Community	TX	1981	2015	No
7	Emergency Assistance	MD	2003	2017*	No
8	Nursing, Convalescent	CA	1967	2017*	Yes
9	Nursing, Convalescent	PA	1999	2012	Yes
10	Theater	OR	1985	2014	No
11	Hospital	OH	1991	2013	No

of administrative information to study *exits* of nonprofits. We acknowledge that the selection of cases is restricted and may not be statistically representative of the population of nonprofits. The exemplary cases reported have the goal of documenting types of transitions experienced by nonprofits. The characteristics of organizations used as examples are presented in Table 2.

Mergers. We found *mergers*: Most cases correspond to non-surviving organizations in merger scenarios. This finding leads to a conceptual question of whether *exits* from merger processes can be equated to exits due to closure. On paper (Form 990), they look similar. In both cases, they can check the *final return box*, and at least one organization disappears from the rosters. Only when we carefully review the last Form 990 submitted can we distinguish between *exits* associated with closures and *exits* associated with mergers. For instance, Organization #1 marked as final return its last Form 990 submitted (2003) and attached its Certificate of Merger.

Starting in 2008, the IRS requires nonprofits that file Form 990 or 990-EZ to use Schedule N to provide information about disposition of more than 25% of their net assets in event of termination (IRS, 2022d). This means that if they merged and transferred final resources to surviving organizations, they need to report this information in Schedule N and support their claims by providing certified copies of their articles of dissolution or merger (IRS, 2022d). We found cases of organizations that did not include such certificates. Only by reading statements and other clues in the filings could we determine that they merged. This is the case of Organization #2. This organization did not include its Certificate of Merger; it only included a statement in Part III of Schedule N where it mentioned that their administrator and accounting manager would have the *same positions after the merger as before the merger*. We present this as an example of the difficulties in assessing the last statuses of organizations and distinguishing among types of *exits*: mergers (as non-surviving organizations) or dissolutions.

Reincarnations. We also found *reincarnations*. As defined by Searing (2020), nonprofits *reincarnate* when they disband the original organization and create another organization with a similar purpose. This means that an organization looks like an *exit* in the records of the IRS, but in reality, they just dissolved the original organization and obtain a new EIN for the latest organization. This might be as simple as a move from one state to another, where new incorporation requires new organizing documents at the federal level, necessitating a new EIN.

As an example of *reincarnation*, Organization #3 checked the *termination* box in their last Form 990-EZ submitted (2009). They did not attach any certificate of merger or dissolution. We Googled the name and last address of this organization. What we found is a similar organization associated with this address. We searched this name on GuideStar and found a new EIN and new official name. The ruling year of this *new* organization is 2011 and the first Form 990 submitted was 2010. When comparing the purposes of both organizations stated on Schedule O of last and first Form 990, we observed clear similarities in terms of goals and targeted beneficiaries. In addition, we also found that three out of the five board members continued in the *new* organization. It is a reincarnation rather than a termination.

PTA and PTO Cases. A wave of dissolution of *Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)* and establishment of new *Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTO)* might be considered reincarnation, but it is a special case. The difference between PTAs and PTOs is that PTAs are required to pay dues to the state and national parent organization, while the PTO remains independent to these associations. We documented several cases of dissolutions of PTAs where PTOs were immediately created. For instance, Organization #4, a PTA, checked the termination box in its 2008 Form 990. They attached a Resolution stating that the dues that they annually paid to the National and State PTA would be better utilized in their school system. As a result, they approved the dissolution of the organization. While they did not explicitly mention the PTO re-constitution in the latest Form 990 (2008), we did find an active PTO chapter associated with the school that the PTA used to report to, and a controlling PTO created in 2009. Similar to the *reincarnation* case described above, Organization #4 looks like an *exit* case when casually inspecting the IRS records, but actually, a new and virtually identical controlling organization was created in its place.

Migration. We documented cases of organizations that *migrated*. This is the case of organizations that continued operations but in a different location. Cases included migration within U.S. territory and outside the United States. For instance, Organization #5, an international professional association, marked the final return box in its final Form 990-EZ submitted (2004). In Statement 2, they indicated that assets, liabilities, and their fund balance were transferred to another organization abroad. In the webpage of the society, we found that the operations of the organization effectively transferred abroad around 2004 and that the organization continues to be active.

In the case of migrations, we recognize that such a phenomenon may be marked as *exits* of the community space. This is especially true when researchers study changes at the local or state level. Rather than offering a definitive definition of the phenomenon of migration in nonprofits, we document this event as a way to show the various transformations that nonprofits may experience.

Informal Operations. We also documented cases of nonprofits that *continued informally* without being tax-exempt entities. This includes organizations that once had federal tax-exempt status, but the IRS revoked it. Take the case of Organization #6, which lost its tax-exempt status due to failure to file its regulatory forms; the IRS listed it on the auto-revocation list in 2019. With the help of Google, we triangulated the name and address of this organization and found it with activities in 2020. In our final follow-up of this organization, we also found statements about virtual gatherings due to COVID-19. Operating informally, it flies under the IRS radar.

Transformations. We found *transformations* inside and outside the nonprofit sector. This means that the organizational structure continued but probably with a different purpose or legal requirement. Within the nonprofit sector, we documented cases of conversions from public charities to private foundations. This is the case of Organization #7. Until 2007, this organization, a fund, operated as a public charity, but in 2008 they started to report activities as a private foundation (on Form 990-PF). This was also the case of Organization #8: This

organization filed Form 990 as a public charity until 2007 but in 2008 they reported activities in Form 990-PF as a private foundation.

We documented cases of organizations that disbanded to become *for-profit organizations* or *public/government entities*. While for-profit transformations are harder to corroborate when they skirt regulatory requirements, we found statements of organizations being ‘sold.’ For instance, consider Organization #9, which specified in Schedule N of their final submitted Form 990 (2012) that all assets were sold, and the name of the recipient appears to be associated with a business entity rather than a nonprofit. In a different case, Organization #10 did not mark the final return box in its final Form 990-EZ (2014), but they stopped filing. Consequently, the IRS revoked its tax-exempt status in 2019. What we found by a general Google search using the last reported name and address of the organization was a fully operational theater now under the control of a city. It apparently operates now as a public rather than a private entity.

Controlled Organizations. Finally, we found *nonprofits controlled by parent organizations*. While nonprofits in this group did not necessarily exit the records of the IRS (meaning that they are up-to-date tax-exempt entities), they are somehow lost in the administrative records of parent organizations. This limits the ability of researchers to know about the workings of the organization as a separate entity. This is especially true when nonprofits have been controlled for several years. As an example, consider the case of Organization #11, a foundation. This organization filed Form 990 by themselves until 2013. After that year, another charity controlled the foundation and submitted compiled financial reports of all of its controlled entities under Section 512(b)(13). The organization did not close: It only disappeared under the administrative umbrella of a parent corporation.

Summation

We present the results of multiple exercises in which we triangulate administrative data and online secondary data to determine whether organizations that exited public records closed or continued on. Some of them certainly closed. As documented in the last two subsections, other nonprofits disappear from administrative lists (or out of administrative data files) but are still contributing mission efforts and resources to their communities. From these observations, the main takeaway of this work is an invitation for researchers to carefully assess the quality of the administrative data used to study the dynamics of the nonprofit sector. We present evidence that shows that disappearance from list to list is not necessarily evidence of failure, closure, or dissolution.

To explore the quality of administrative data in assessing the ecology of nonprofit organizations, we triangulated BMF, NCCS core, full Form 990 digitized, and listings of Form 990-N e-post card filers. We used numerous data points to produce a determination of the *exits* of nonprofits from a study sample. We did not stop there: We were curious about the accuracy of our determinations. Consequently, we investigated selected cases to evaluate our initial determinations by comparing administrative information with secondary online data.

The lessons are clear. One, our exploration’s focus on public charities ignores the swath of nonprofits that are incorporated at the state level but do not seek federal recognition (the charitable exemption). These organizations do not appear in the Business Master File because they do not aspire to it. Two, determining whether an organization is alive or dead is not as simple as inspecting lists. We learned that public charities are unreliable in reporting their dissolution to the IRS. Despite clear regulations and guidelines, we suspect that organizations undergoing substantial change (dissolution, merger, or otherwise) have little incentive to comply, and the IRS has little incentive to regulate. The consequence is a fundamental lack of

clarity on how and how many organizations actually disappear from our community ecologies over time.

Rather than preventing the use of administrative data, we hope to re-open existing discussions on the reliance on administrative data while studying the dynamics of the nonprofit sector. Previous studies have proposed triangulating federal and state records to determine the status of nonprofits (e.g., Grønbjerg et al., 2010; Smith, 1997). We also identify online secondary data (e.g., websites) as a useful source of information. Used in conjunction with administrative data, internet traces provide a better understanding of the types of *exits* that nonprofits experience. We hope that researchers can benefit from assessing and exploring data sources to study the ecology of the nonprofit sector. Realistically, such data triangulations may be conducted in subsamples of larger samples and may be oriented to establish estimates of administrative data errors. The research processes mentioned above are time intensive, but they are worthy investments if we value accurate representations of the ecology of the sector.

Regarding federal administrative data, we see promise in using Form 990 digitized files and the listings on small nonprofit filers (e.g., Form 990-N e-postcard). However, there are still several limitations on the accuracy of aggregated data, such as how electronic fields sometimes differ from the information actually reported by nonprofits on Form 990 and its variants. The main contribution of our cautionary tale lies in the emphasis on the limitations of using *only* IRS records and using them uncritically. We propose that researchers complement and triangulate their determinations through a careful investigation of cases. Data limitations and proposals for detailed explorations have been extensively discussed and documented in the nonprofit research field (Grønbjerg et al., 2010; Searing, 2020; Smith, 1997). Such diligence requires time, but a more judicious process will improve studies of organizational demise and our portraits of community ecology. We advocate also for a methodological pluralism in nonprofit sector research. As Searing and Berkovich (2021) argued in their study of nonprofit finance, methodological pluralism is helpful for cultivating stronger theoretical roots and richer practical insights. For the study of the dynamics of the nonprofit sector, we recommend a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and research methods that help to expand our understanding on the different ways nonprofits evolve.

We recommend that the IRS revise the information requested from nonprofits in Form 990 (and its variants). An ideal form would allow nonprofits to report better the transformations they experience. Form 990 only allows organizations to report if the report submitted is *the final return*. This information has limitations for observers who use the forms to document the dynamics of the nonprofit sector. An opportunity for nonprofits to report dissolutions, mergers, and other transformations would be valuable for researchers studying organizational dynamics and decision-makers trying to understand the implications of economic trends and policies in the nonprofit sector.

While our exploration focuses on the *exit* side, several research paths are contingent on the quality and availability of data but are still open for further exploration. First, the research field would benefit from a further discussion on the categorization of terminal phenomena usually characterized as *exits* but that, in reality, apprehends not only closures but also mergers, migrations, rebrandings, reincarnations, etc. Only a handful of studies have focused on this aspect (e.g., Hernandez Ortiz, 2022; Searing, 2020). Second, a typology of *exits* would allow researchers to compare different trajectories of nonprofits and the elements that influence such trajectories, such as size, leadership, and funding. Third, as the data quality evolves, studies of the *exits* of nonprofits will be useful to identify trends and changes in the nonprofit sector at large. Examples of the possibilities are studies on survival expectations, corporatization, and conglomerations. Specifically, efforts have been made around exit and entry rates in the nonprofit sector (e.g., Harrison, 2007; Harrison & Laincz, 2008). Future studies should also explore the characteristics and dynamics associated with the *entry* or

creation of nonprofits. Such explorations would help to have a comprehensive understanding of the ecology of the nonprofit sector.

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Reckoning with Digital Inequity in Place-Based Community Revitalization

Sarah Hope Marshall – Profound Hope Industries

Place-based community development in America has a rich history. Practices and procedures for successful redevelopment are supported by lobbying efforts, public administration, policy, federal funding, and the efforts of non-profits dedicated to neighborhood revitalization. Community revitalization work is often centered around specific geographic locations, while in recent decades modern technology has caused social networks to become increasingly geographically disparate. Social networks have been demonstrated to support the economic mobility that community development strives to create. However, the impact of modern technology on place-based community development has not been clearly understood. Increasing digitalization has impacted the effectiveness of place-based social equity efforts such as community organizing, affordable housing and economic development, and financial capability interventions. This essay explores how place-based community organizing led to the creation of current policies that govern community development, how technology has impacted urban communities and how these changes may subsequently affect social equity objectives in public administration.

Keywords: Community Development, Digital Equity, Lending, Social Capital

Introduction

Community revitalization work in the United States has historically been centered around geography. Policy and federal funding support community development, but many community revitalization levers were developed before the digital era. As a result, many strategies for poverty intervention prioritize a place-based approach. However, information and communication technologies (ICT) have allowed social networks to become geographically disconnected over recent decades. Social networks are now less likely to be place-based, although social networks have been demonstrated to support the economic mobility the community development field strives to create.

This essay explores how place-based community organizing led to the creation of current policies that govern community development, how technology has impacted digital inequities in urban communities and how these changes may subsequently affect social equity objectives in public administration. In this essay, community development is defined as work designed to improve social equity for individuals and communities living with incomes below 80% of the area median income. Likewise, technology refers to ICT and algorithms, data analytics, surveillance technology, automation, and artificial intelligence (i.e., big data).

The History of Community Development Lending

The relationship between the financial services industry and economic development is complex but is rooted in the history of the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), a legislation passed in 1977. CRA was instituted as the result of grassroots organizing initiated in the Austin community area of Chicago. When residents noticed patterns of redlining by local banks, they formed an interracial coalition known as the Organization for a Better Austin (OBA) to bring about change (Marchiel, 2020). The practice of redlining led to neighborhood disinvestment, White flight, blockbusting, restrictive racial covenants, and other practices that contributed to the racial wealth gap between White and Black households that stood at a factor of ten times difference in 2020 (Brookings Institute, 2020).

These local issues were simply a prototype of similar activity in urban neighborhoods across the country. OBA formed National People's Action (NPA), one of the first national coalitions of community organizers, to help organizers take their demands to the federal level (Marchiel, 2020). The coalition lobbied for two actions, both of which were passed by Congress. In 1975, the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) was the first coalition victory. HMDA required mortgage lenders to make loan distribution data publicly available. Although HMDA did not have an enforcement mechanism, it gave OBA and NPA the tools necessary to prove patterns of discrimination (Marchiel, 2020). The coalitions next introduced CRA, brought to Congress by Senator William Proxmire (Marchiel, 2020). CRA required bank accountability to the local community in the form of investments, loans, and service. The policy appealed to government officials who saw CRA as a path to revitalize communities without federal spending. CRA uniquely relied on local, place-based organizing to maintain pressure on local banks to be most impactful.

The Act led to the inflow of funding to community lenders and non-profits that served disinvested communities and codified the relationship between financial institutions and community revitalization. Billions of dollars have passed between banks and community lenders as a result. CRA required banks to demonstrate they were lending to all segments of its assessment area. One of the three measures banks must pass is a lending test, but lending activity can be passed to a non-profit lender in the form of investments. Between 1977 and 1991, \$8.8 billion in CRA credit agreements were formalized between banks and community organizations (Von Hoffman, 2012). The ideology that the private sector could be just as, or more effective in moving resources to low-income communities than the federal government led to another wave of grassroots organizing that established the Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Fund in 1994.

The CDFI Fund sits within the US Treasury. The Fund certifies mission-focused lenders and offers federal funding opportunities for lending to low-income or minority communities. It has enjoyed bipartisan support and encompasses a range of programs focused on community development finance. By 2017, over one thousand institutions were CDFI certified and held collective assets above \$130 billion (Rosenthal, 2018). Banks make an estimated \$500 billion in CRA investments annually (Snyder, 2021). Portions of CRA money are routed through CDFIs to underserved communities. Today, technology has enabled community lenders to reach further, access geographically disparate markets, and expand their own footprints. But more capacious work is not equivalent to more effective work. Effective work requires considering how technology has changed the dynamics in communities as well.

The Rise of Technology and Digital Inequity

The term 'community' was predominately defined as one's geographic location before the Industrial Revolution. Humans formed relationships based on proximity. Every form of technology has been disruptive to local relationships in some manner. The airplane, vehicle,

telephone, television, and radio each expanded our physical boundaries. But even with these earlier technologies, barriers to maintaining distant relationships were high. No form of technology has had the radical impact of ICT, followed by applications of big data. Unlike other forms of technology, eventually it connected us to people around the world for a relatively low cost. However, the ubiquity of the internet has not led to the achievement of equity in American society.

A very real digital divide exists. It is traditionally defined as the gap in access between groups that have access to basic technology tools such as broadband internet and a home computer, and those that do not. A 2021 Pew Research study found barriers to broadband access still exist. Broadband access is reduced in predominately minority, and/or low-income communities and among seniors (Pew Research, 2021). Much work, initiated by a range of organizations from corporations, small non-profits, and government agencies, has sought to correct the inequities. In 2016, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) passed a final rule determining that new constructions or significant rehabilitation work of HUD-financed multi-family housing structures will require installation of broadband infrastructure (Federal Register, 2016). The passage of this rule ensures families living in HUD affordable housing will have the ability to get connected to a fast internet connection. The legislation recognizes internet access as a necessity. Without interventions, the most financially vulnerable Americans are poorly equipped to advance socioeconomically in a highly connected society.

Social Capital's Role in Improving Economic Mobility

Technology's impact is pervasive. Another type of digital divide exists that impacts the ways we interact with our neighbors, effects our expectations, and influences the ways in which communities interact. This divide is extant, but not visually observable. Although big data and ICTs are now nearly omnipresent in society, its impacts and effects are harder to articulate. Researchers have referred to this divide as the 'second digital divide' (Elesh & Zhao, 2007), and pertains to ICT usage. Elesh and Zhao (2007) highlight the importance of recognizing the capability of ICT in reinforcing existing social capital. In equity work, it is critical to recognize the social context in which big data and ICT are being used or implemented. Unequal social contexts generate unequal digital access and results. The second layer of the digital divide is predicated on reinforcing social networks. Elesh and Zhao's critique of social inequities that perpetuate digital inequities must be expanded upon. The technology sector has gained outsized influence in society. Leaders and personnel of large technology companies may never have been to your neighborhood, but through access to granular detail about our lives, data warehouses hold more information about what happens in every community than any individual ever will. What it means to be in community has been reshaped by the forces of ICT and big data.

Extensive scholarship has been conducted on the correlation between a person's zip code and potential for economic mobility. Availability of social capital is determined by where one resides. The popular sociological book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* defines social capital as, "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2001, p. 19). The strength of the network also matters. The state of being well connected is not the sole differentiator for upward mobility; being connected in a network that is connected to resources is what matters (Putnam, 2001). Social capital is self-perpetuating. People in disconnected physical communities often end up struggling to achieve full economic potential, and a community may wrestle with persistent poverty. Poverty is inseparable from geography. While individuals may be poor in isolation, one person living in conditions of poverty does not disrupt the social and material capital found in a well-connected neighborhood.

Local civic participation and social capital were once interlinked. Over two decades ago, Warren (2001) wrote, “Local elites that used to gain career-enhancing prestige from their leadership of civic life in their communities now work for companies more tied to the global economy than their localities” (p. 37). Now, working professionals use social media platforms such as LinkedIn to cultivate profitable relationships by engaging with the site’s data sets, search capabilities, and algorithmic suggestions. Social capital still matters, even if we seek it out in remote and distant ways and through a computer screen rather than through the local congregation or Rotary Club. Americans no longer behave as though social capital must be developed in one’s own neighborhood. In many cases, local community participation has been replaced by professionalization of community responsibilities (Putnam, 2001). Professional roles have replaced volunteerism and mutual aid. Arguments that community is changing, devolving, or fracturing are not unique and can be disproven by other perspectives. Vibrant organizing efforts and relationships do form online. But it’s hard to argue that local community still holds the centrality it once did.

A key study on the role of place-based poverty intervention is known as the HUD Moving to Opportunity (MTO) study. The well-known and often-cited study was revisited by economists in 2015. The study has been frequently cited because relocation to a community in a higher socioeconomic bracket imparted great improvements to the mental and physical health of adult participants (Chetty et al., 2016). The 2015 Harvard study updates these findings to emphasize the strongest benefits were to the youngest children and adults, potentially highlighting the significance of an improved economic environment on early childhood development. The benefits of moving to a better neighborhood were not transferred to older youth and teenagers (Chetty et al., 2016). Disruption of social networks was offered as an explanation. It is worth noticing that the MTO experiment was conducted between 1994 and 1998. During this time period, only the most well-off households had access to home internet. It is implausible that low-income individuals living in subsidized housing had home access to the internet in its early stages, if at all.

Although neighborhood and place do matter to economic opportunity, social capital in the form of present relationships matters more significantly than previously recognized. Adverse effects of a move begin around age twelve, at the point when social networks become more significant to an adolescent’s development. It is also possible that this study cannot directly tell us what impact physical mobility will have on a person’s future any longer. Although the HUD experiment illustrates important insights into neighborhood and opportunity, it was conducted in a different macro-environment than exists today. This subcategory of young adults is now connected to peers through smartphones or social media. Should they move to a better neighborhood in teenage years, they may be able to maintain social capital over a distance through use of ICT.

In 2018, researchers used Twitter data from 50 cities, accessing 650 million tweets, geotagged by location, as a dataset to understand patterns of interactions between various local communities and social classes (Wang et al., 2018). The study findings indicate poor residents are as mobile in daily life as nonpoor residents. However, poor residents were least likely to interact with nonpoor or White communities. Race was the biggest predictor of networked social mobility. The result indicates an important consideration for community revitalization. If residents of poor neighborhoods are mobile, but interacting with other poor communities, these populations are likely interacting with communities of similarly limited resources, reinforcing the boundaries of existing social capital.

Technology’s Consequences for Civic Life

Networks of interconnected and interdependent people form communities. Big data and ICT have introduced the potential of expansive communities by performing two roles. First, social

media and tools of communication have redistributed society's social networks. Primary communities no longer need to have a place-based element. Dominant interpersonal relationships can be now conducted over long distances. ICT has made it possible for a person to focus heightened degrees of time and attention on relationships outside of one's physical proximity. People can find networks based on shared interest online more easily than they may be able to find in one's own neighborhood or town. But strong local social networks trump infrastructure. Organized community residents can improve disinvested neighborhoods, although it may mean partnering with external developers and elected officials.

Big data's capability to collect enormous amounts of information is the second critical role technology has played in social networks. Algorithms function as a facilitator of civic life. Machine learning and decision trees determine what is introduced to users of technology based on historic activity. Algorithms are capable of very specific targeting but can decrease the diversity of perspective that comes from interaction with new concepts and diverse content. Consumers of the internet become siloed by interest and develop confirmation biases that solidify ideologies. Because of reduction in local civic participation, residents can choose to interact primarily with those who share philosophical beliefs. Big data and ICT have created the possibility of disconnected, disparate communities that congregate online and reinforce perspectives. Reinforcing social networks are mediated by corporate sponsors with prejudiced interests. Reduction in trust and shared norms required for building social capital is a byproduct of algorithms.

As technology advances, place will still matter. Humans abide in physical bodies in concrete locations that have an outsized impact on socioeconomic mobility and health. Physical place cannot be abandoned but could become increasingly neglected if technology agendas proceed unhindered. In October 2021, Facebook changed its name to Meta to refocus strategic priorities on 'social connection' (Meta, 2021). CEO Mark Zuckerberg envisions a world where people interact in virtual spaces referred to as the Metaverse. Although this move has been criticized, virtual reality has existed for decades. Since virtual reality has not yet played a significant role in Americans' daily routines, it is easy to scoff at a vision of a three-dimensional world that improves the human experience. However, the development of technology consistently outpaces the trajectory of other industry and social sectors. A desire for shared virtual experience is not inconsequential once we consider how technology has already reshaped our interactions with our geographic communities. Shared space matters for creativity and innovation. Inhabiting spaces with one another is necessary for organic conversation and the type of idea-generation that solves problems (Brucks & Levav, 2022). Virtual reality offers a shared environment to online forums. The aspiration to cultivate and construct a world where significant relational connection occurs on a virtual platform is less uninformed if we explicitly identify how ICT and big data has already rearranged our neighborhoods. New but poorly understood variables have been introduced into communities. Unequal impacts across social class have also resulted from the capabilities of technology.

The consequences to the built environment are a clear starting point for discussion. Today, the buildings that formerly housed centers for community are being reimaged for other uses. Churches have historically been at the center of American civic life. Churches were indispensable to pivotal community organizing movements, including the Civil Rights Movement that led to the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Over the past decade, Protestant churches closed at rates between 3,850 and 7,500 annually (Reinhard, 2021). Abandoned church infrastructures must now be demolished or put to reuse. In urban areas, many former church buildings are being reimaged as living quarters with projects that run the gamut from affordable housing to luxury condo units. Shuttered schools and civic clubs with dwindling participation are also being rehabbed for new purposes. When this occurs, a nexus for socialization with neighbors is lost. Buildings purposed for civic engagement provide opportunity to build social capital. Physical gathering places are being decommissioned as a feature of society.

Technology Increases Efficiency and Mobility While Reducing Social Ties

The absence of civic centers is only one factor that fractures community. Public familiarity, or the regular interaction between familiar strangers, contributes to what has been described as ‘shared trust, norms and reciprocity’ (Curley, 2010). Familiar strangers may never have a formal conversation with one another but recognize the other belongs to the community through recurring but indirect interaction. Platform technology, or services that run through websites and online apps, can disturb public familiarity. Platform technology may not be visible on our streetscapes and in public spaces, but its consequences create new realities for communities. Platform technology has made many services available through apps and smartphones, including transportation, housing, delivery, neighborhood watch, security, and bartering. With the right resources, groceries, goods, and services can be ordered with an internet connection. No longer does one need to run to the local corner store or nearby pharmacy for a household item. The elimination of brief shopping trips reduces the opportunity for Americans to have an impromptu connection with a neighbor they see while running errands or interacting with their geography.

Mobility patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic provide further evidence of detachment to place. In the first year of the pandemic, people relocated. Major cities experienced high resident turnover, while smaller cities and metro areas gained population. A 2020 study conducted by the United States Postal System found 15.9 million people filed address change requests with the post office (Paez Bowman, 2020). The numbers represent only a 4% increase from the same period the prior year, but large urban areas were disproportionately impacted. New York City, Chicago and San Francisco saw year-over-year increases in turnover in the triple digits (National Public Radio, 2021).

Another study of the same period found that 22% of Americans moved, had someone move into their home, or knew someone who moved (Cohn, 2020). The pandemic forced unanticipated lifestyle changes. Social networks were fractured, particularly in cities. 18% of movers relocated for financial reasons, including job loss (Pew Research, 2020). The metro areas that gained population had lower living costs than the urban areas that lost population. Housing affordability could be a determinant in pandemic mobility. Young adults were most likely to move or know someone who moved, while Hispanic adults were most likely to have someone move into their home. These two demographics may have experienced financial hardship at higher rates. Higher income and educational bracket survey participants had the highest likelihood of knowing someone who moved (Pew Research, 2020). High income zip codes saw the most mobility. This suggests insecure place-attachment, the psychological term for the connection of a person to their place, in higher income communities. Technology-facilitated social networks can reduce fears over losing local relationships, or perhaps there were few local relationships to begin with. In any case, people can move without losing contact with their most important relationships. Before ICT, the relational cost of a move was much higher.

Technology and the Financial System

In an evaluation of the role of technology on community development it would be remiss to overlook the impact of technology on access to credit. Artificial intelligence is generically defined as the capacity of computers to make decisions through machine learning, natural language processing, and other capabilities of big data. Artificial intelligence is increasingly being used to automate credit decisions that have major impact on people’s lives, including where they can live. Predictive analytics and artificial intelligence are used by lenders to evaluate candidates for mortgage products. Landlords also use automation to determine suitability of tenants for rental units. Historic HMDA data has demonstrated that discrimination in access to mortgages by race exists, a situation unlikely to be reversed

through decision automation. Extensive research, outside the scope of this essay, has demonstrated algorithmic bias exists in forms that perpetuate existing inequities.

Similar forms of discrimination appear in credit approval software and can hinder access to housing. Biases can violate lending laws regulated by the Fair Housing Act of 1968 (Rodriguez, 2020). Algorithmic alternative credit scoring models may include inputs such as social media activity, retail spending activity, bank account balances, college of attendance, or retail spending habits (Rodriguez, 2020). Alternative credit data has two serious problems: 1) the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has acknowledged these criteria are often incomplete, and 2) private technology companies do not have to disclose the scoring factors built into their decision trees (Rodriguez, 2020). The lack of private or regulatory accountability around big data needs continued attention. Automation introduces the possibility of re-segregation of communities based on race and class that civil rights organizers fought to overcome.

Financial technology is also not the viable solution it is proposed to be because of existing disparities in access to devices, hardware, and resources. Technology centered strategies such as delivery services or mobile banking access will not solve problems for neighborhoods that lack these facilities in physical presence. The digital divide is an indirect byproduct of economic disinvestment from mortgage redlining. A duplicitous problem referred to as 'digital redlining' exists (Friedline, 2021). The scenario follows: neighborhoods experience differential access to digital technologies that often mirrors lending activity in those same communities. These communities may have access to some degree of technology, but at a lesser or slower pace than neighborhoods with more wealth. Banks close branches in lower income communities and encourage online banking. Economic conditions may be the stated primary reason for these decisions, but ultimately the consequences are dual. These same neighborhoods that lack access to traditional financial institutions do not have the appropriate resources for robust use of online banking platforms and digital tools (Friedline, 2021). Low-income communities lag in access to adequate technology necessary to make basic online transactions easy and efficient. Without basic tools of the technology, ordinary activities in a digital society become difficult.

Recommendations: Achieving Social Equity Objectives in Public Administration

Additional research around the sociological impacts of technology on community revitalization is needed. Achieving social equity requires a better understanding of technology's impact on social capital. Technology facilitates inequity in two critical ways. First, the pace of technology widens the gap between those who have digital access and skills and those that do not. Second, technology interrupts opportunities to build social capital necessary for socioeconomic mobility. Classifying the consequences of technology on social capital in the following ways could be useful: variables that enable distant interaction and geographic mobility, variables that increase convenience and decrease local interaction, and variables that influence judgment and decision making. Financial technology may have more direct economic impact than other categories.

Technology increases efficiency or capacity for those that can afford or develop it, leaving those that cannot competitively behind. The dynamics have impacts on economic mobility. Technology has changed societal dynamics around speed, convenience, and lifestyle. Increased convenience, decreased unwanted interaction, disconnect to local mutual aid, and control of artificial intelligence can only be afforded by privilege and resource. Regulation, public policy stop-gaps and community development interventions lag technology's reimagining of social structures, including those that create social safety networks.

Evaluating discrete community development initiatives against the core goal, to improve socioeconomic mobility for underserved individuals, is critical in achieving social equity.

Physical communities need strong networks of neighbors who are mutually interdependent to thrive. At the same time, big data and ICT are not going away. A modernized definition of community revitalization must include both physical and virtual communities and engage with concurrent work in both. Concurrent work must improve physical communities *and* increase digital capacity. Digital capacity equates to access to technology's full spectrum: physical hardware, evolving technologies, social media intelligence, coding and development, and opportunities to own, develop and invest. Poor digital equity can negate or reduce the impact of local community development efforts. Although other sectors do address some digital equity challenges by focusing on community supports, ICT and big data are fully integrated into the human experience. Its impacts and inequities must be considered in every project designed to create conditions for thriving. Government community development funding and contracting opportunities should include a digital equity benchmark. Communities without connectivity will remain at a disadvantage.

Currently, strong networks of CDFIs are located in urban centers. Community development practitioners must keep an eye on mobility patterns. Federal resources also lag demographic or cultural shifts. Changes in metropolitan statistical area populations will shift where resources are most needed. Specifically, the en masse exodus of residents from large U.S. cities to smaller cities during the COVID-19 pandemic caused economic strains on long-term residents as demand drove up housing prices. Experienced CDFIs should incubate new community lenders in states that are experiencing population growth, with responsive funding in place to support efforts.

Increased support for consumer financing initiatives that support homeownership and foreclosure prevention are necessary when major investments are directed to low-income communities. Gentrification is a prevailing concern in urban communities slated for development all over the United States. In a highly mobile society, the reduction in social costs of lost relationships makes relocation for latent opportunity more attractive for high-income earners. Support for existing residents must be enhanced when community development investments enter a community. Consumer finance elements and partnerships should be prioritized. Homeownership is demonstrated to increase both neighborhood and personal stability. In a highly digitally connected and mobile society, individual financial capacity bears great weight.

Community development practitioners must be wary of imposing their understanding of technology onto neighborhoods with differential access to technology. The evolution of the CDFI industry might be indicative of increased outsourcing of community revitalization. Although the industry is diverse, it evolved from a grassroots history of local organizers working to rebuild their own neighborhoods to one comprised largely of credentialed finance professionals. Social good still dominates the sector, but with more employee labor and less volunteer and community engagement. The financial services industry is adept at utilizing tools of technology. Because of the professionalization of community development finance, decisions to incorporate technology are often made from the vantage point of access. It is easy to overestimate the level of technology that is truly accessible to a disinvested neighborhood when decision makers are individuals with advanced technology. The assumption that community residents are digital natives because they have a smartphone lacks perspective. Interventions must increase digital capacity but remain cognizant of non-technical solutions.

Finally, community development practitioners must consider and be aware of potential financial entanglements between the technology sector and the community development industry. The biggest technology companies have recently given significant funding to community development work. Technology partnerships should be approached cautiously. Technology has undue influence on our communities. Technology activists raise legitimate concerns about data privacy, online security, surveillance, disclosures, and algorithmic bias. Advanced access to technology and better use of big data can be useful in reinforcing and

improving the capacity of CDFIs. As with any private funder, objectives must be aligned and social costs of adopting a new technology in community development work should be examined. Unlike most private funders, technology is a sector that exercises disproportionate influence on society and can aggravate disparities in the social conditions that community development organizations seek to solve. Financial relationships between technology and community development must be carefully managed.

At the very minimum, if we do not think about where technology is taking us, we will build community development models that are obsolete before execution. Community development initiatives stabilize communities and increase the likelihood that a given community will receive investments that ensure opportunity. Moving forward, it will be critical to balance the local, place-based intention of historic community development with the expansive path that technology provides. History of place, people, and even policy is relevant in order to properly contextualize progress. Although technology will determine much about future trajectory, social networks can decide whether that future is equitable, thriving, and conducive to flourishing communities. Place will continue to matter. The investments of time, attention, and participation into community and local social networks, in addition to financial investments, must remain a priority even as pressures of technology demand that we expand beyond our geographic and relational boundaries beyond our physical spaces.

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Lessons in Social Equity: A Case Study Book, Edited by Richard Gregory Johnson III and Seth J. Meyer

José Luis Irizarry – University of Illinois Springfield

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Keywords: Social Equity, Public and Nonprofit Affairs, Case Study Book

Lessons in Social Equity: A Case Study Book is guided by the premise that “if the world is to be more equitable...administrators in all sectors must be competent in how to promote fairness for all” (Johnson & Meyer, p. vii). This text is a formative pedagogical resource for undergraduate and graduate educators and learners to address issues of inequities and foster social equity throughout the public and nonprofit sectors in ways that connect public affairs research and practice and contributes to developing culturally competent public service social equity champions. The use of case studies remains one of the better ways to expose future public servants to, and train them in, “the complex dynamics involved in diagnosing, understanding, and resolving inequities” (Johnson & Meyer, p. vii).

This curated volume by Johnson and Meyer (2022) informs readers and stimulates additional critical thinking, analysis, and the development of cutting-edge solutions to wicked social problems. Many important social equity issues are addressed with impacts on various identity groups (i.e., Indigenous people, Asian Americans, Black/African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, women/gender, disabilities/ableism), industries and sectors (i.e., nonprofits, higher education, martial arts/sports, neighborhood development, local governments, human services), within the United States as well as in other countries (i.e., India, United Kingdom, Zambia). Chapters address a variety of public service social equity topics (i.e., civic engagement, nonprofit leadership, fundraising, building networks and coalitions, ethics, succession planning), and a multitude of intersectional relationships between and among various identities, locations, perspectives, and topics. Most chapters end with discussion questions that are great ways to start discussions and apply case and relevant course concepts.

This book consists of 14 chapters, each reflecting a unique case study relevant to the study of social equity in the public sector. In chapter 1, readers are presented with exposure to the Native American nonprofit sector and the role and impact of that sector in advancing social equity for indigenous identities and native communities throughout the United States. This chapter addresses gaps in the public and nonprofit literature that inadequately address Native nations generally, and more specifically, the Native American nonprofit sector, its emergence and significance in modern Indigenous existence in the United States. This chapter pertinently

ties these social equity issues together with an explication of the role of knowledge and misunderstanding about Native nations and Indigenous people and the perpetuation of bias and stereotypes (building on similar topics recently addressed in this journal, see Jackson & Fashant, 2021).

Chapter 2 addresses community philanthropy in India and how it was used to foster social equity and inclusion through the role of inspirational leadership, community organizing, volunteering, and giving. This chapter aptly integrates and illustrates many public service values including equity, ethics, identity, inclusion, and belonging in real world contexts that foster reflection and comparative analysis of multiple topics especially relevant to public and nonprofit affairs.

Chapter 3 focuses on an African American HIV/AIDS human services organization in the United States. This case highlights many of the challenges faced by nonprofit organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic such as shifting political and social norms, values, and goals. It addresses issues such as capacity building, human resource, leadership, communication strategies for diverse stakeholders, and the role of stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Lessons from this chapter may be applicable to the management of other public and nonprofit organizations that must contend with stigmas associated with other identity groups (i.e., LGBT+).

Chapter 4 elucidates the work of a group of people to foster social equity in sports, in particular Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, by joining together to create a nonprofit organization in the United Kingdom. Issues of social equity pertaining to associating with like-minded individuals, advocating for solutions, and the venues in which this takes place are addressed with the example of a UK Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Facebook Group and its impact on the fight for social equity. International and comparative examinations of the nonprofit sector are facilitated with this chapter as readers are introduced to some of the nuances of the distinctions between a nonprofit organization and a charity in the UK and what flexibility and legal abilities and limitations each organizational form would provide to this social equity effort. Decisions about management, communications, leadership, program, and activity development are addressed along with ethical fundraising and resource development.

Chapter 5 presents readers with the moral dilemmas facing public servants and the need to listen to constituents and balance popular demands for representation with professional and institutional responsibilities, or principled leadership and popular sovereignty. This chapter presents the case of the 2006 protests by students demanding representation on the Board of Trustees and in presidential appointments at Gallaudet University—the only global liberal arts university for members of the Deaf community and those hard of hearing. This case presents issues that transcend this specific event and involves leadership, ethics, politics, protests, civic engagement, ideal types of democratic representation, and the role and significance of institutions beyond its geographic borders to representing and fostering social equity.

Chapter 6 addresses the cities of the future and urban renewal efforts since the 1950s. This case highlights the inequitable impacts of urban renewal construction on minoritized people and communities. It focuses on urban renewal developments in Durham, North Carolina and the disinvestment of this community for more than three decades. Equitable neighborhood projects are presented as a way to address past injustices suffered by minority communities due to earlier urban renewal efforts.

Chapter 7 examines the role of Chikumbuso women—a group of widows—and their work towards gender equity in Zambia. These women used the process of nonprofit social enterprise to provide for themselves and their children. Through these self-empowerment efforts, readers learn about how such efforts also led to community empowerment. This case study introduces

readers to the Zambian context in the fight for gender inclusion and social equity in an international context pertaining to the use of social enterprises.

Chapter 8 introduces the concepts of Foreigntern and Foreignternships to describe the quasi-volunteering internships. Students and professionals from First Nations are placed as interns in for-profit companies overseas in exchange for grants in-kind support instead of monetary compensation to help local communities. This case may challenge notions of what it means to be a volunteer intern, for who, and where, especially for readers only familiar with volunteering in an American context, largely through the nonprofit sector.

Chapter 9 presents a look at the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable populations, how it disproportionately victimized and took the lives of minoritized community members, and the roles of various stakeholders such as local governments and the media. Readers interested in public health, public policy, and social equity will find this case insightful and informative when addressing a variety of issues including discrimination, healthcare access, occupational segregation, gaps in education and wages, and housing.

Chapter 10 addresses student success in higher education, particularly pertaining to creating and fostering inclusive learning environments for all. This case highlights the experiences of an individual with generalized anxiety disorder and the social equity issues faculty have to address within classroom settings. Similar to Chapter 3, this case highlights the role that stigma plays, and exposes why certain learners are reluctant to report disabilities for fear of backlash. Readers of this case are exposed to empowerment, empathy, inclusion, and social equity in real world ways that go beyond the limits of existing formalized rules and procedures. A key contribution of this case study is an examination of how faculty may foster social equity in the classroom learning environment beyond the traditional accommodations generally afforded students (i.e., extra time during exams, taking examinations in a distraction free environment).

Chapter 11 presents readers with a case of how universities and community partners use Critical Race Theory in Baltimore to develop and implement initiatives to address a long history of violence, trauma, and inequities. This case shows how stakeholders came together to pursue policy changes and host events, as well as how social workers can foster social equity among students from micro, mezzo, and macro perspectives. Public affairs students familiar with NASPAA standards, NACC standards, and codes of ethics from associations like ASPA, and ARNOVA will find NASW mission, standards, and codes of ethics equally aim to foster social equity, justice, and ethical practice by helping professionals to protect and serve the vulnerable and oppressed. Recent scholarship examines how accreditation standards and professional codes of conduct foster social equity and are transferred to new generations of public service leaders (see Evans et al., 2023). Finally, case authors presented a model founded on Critical Race Theory, multi-level practice, and antiracist pedagogy that can significantly enrich learning in the classroom by helping to facilitate difficult dialogues in our learning spaces (see Love et al., 2016).

Chapter 12 shows readers how a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) responded to the increasing prevalence of racial injustice and the rise of anti-racist social movements like Black Lives Matter. The development and implementation of the Equity Action Initiative is elucidated for readers along with its impetus, challenges, stakeholders, and recommendations for change at the university and in society through efforts to foster and advocate for social equity. This case introduces students to the role of universities in society in the front lines of social change, the social equity challenges and historical legacies of such institutions, and the type of ethical and collaborative leadership and planning needed to collaborate with diverse groups of stakeholders to effect positive change.

Chapter 13 recounts the disparate impacts of the COVID–19 pandemic on the lives of Blacks and Latinos globally and then focuses on the special needs of the Asian American population in the U.S. with limited English proficiency (LEP). This case highlights the inequities in health and social services for Asian Americans and articulates the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS). Emphasis is placed on the inequitable and discriminative impact of COVID–19 on older individuals, as well as their families who care for them. A major contribution of this case is the introduction of Asian Critical Theory conceptualized as an expansion of Critical Race Theory.

Chapter 14 addresses the long history in higher education with a legacy of limiting the educational pursuits of nonwhite individuals in the US. This case applies Critical Race Theory to examine and analyze the legacy of racial and systemic inequities endured by the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that brought the suit against the State of Maryland. While focused primarily on social work programs in the four HBCUs in Maryland, this case more broadly illuminates the role of systemic inequities in higher education that also happen to disproportionately impact certain segments of society more than others, the role and magnanimous contributions of HBCUs in particular to students from all parts of society, and the pivotal challenges faced by HBCUs including those related to community development and engagement, financial sustainability, and public policy.

Lessons in Social Equity is an excellent primary textbook in social equity and public administration and policy courses and its affordability (approximately \$40) makes it a viable choice as a supplemental text for a variety of public administration, public policy, public health, human service, social work, and nonprofit courses. This text is also suitable for adoption across public and nonprofit curricula as a formative pedagogical resource exemplifying social equity across public affairs curricula. Each case presented highlights and fosters various high-impact pedagogical (HIP) practices that have been shown to help learners develop a deeper understanding of the content, issues, and their applications, consistent with many innovative, experiential, reflexive, mindfulness-based pedagogical approaches that simultaneously foster democratically minded public service leaders more inclined to actively participate in civic engagement activities that foster social equity (Dabek, 2022; Irizarry, 2022). Pre-service learners and experienced public servants alike will find the cases in this text informative, eye-opening, and helpful in learning about and fostering social equity in practice today.

While a benefit of this text is that the cases vary in structure and approach and thus improve the ability of faculty to adopt various cases in numerous courses, future editions of *Lessons in Social Equity* may want to consider organizing the cases by theme (i.e., related to nonprofits, higher education, public health, international, and/or specific policy domains). A description of the cases can be provided in the introduction to help readers make sense of and begin to think about how the cases collectively contribute to and provide lessons in social equity, beyond the specifics of the individual cases presented. Future editions may expand on some of the critical social equity issues that were not included in the current volume (i.e., LGBT+, religion, foster care). Finally, a short instructor manual (or chapter in future editions) could be helpful to faculty unfamiliar in the use of case study pedagogy and how to do it well, as well as for faculty working in turbulent political environments where social equity pedagogy is increasingly attacked and outright prohibited.

I applaud the editors' attempt to combine innovative pedagogical tools with the social equity subject matter. The structure of the book can be seen as a form of 'social equity in action' in the selection of authors, topics, and presentation of cases. This book pulls in a diverse range of authors representative of multiple intersectional identities, academics and practitioners, junior and senior scholars, students, multiple disciplines (i.e., public administration, social work, nonprofits, interdisciplinary studies, sociology) and walks of practice (i.e., government, higher education, nonprofits). *Lessons in Social Equity* successfully answers the call of faculty

to address the gap in the literature pertaining to the actual ‘how to’ teach about and foster social equity in the classroom—how to bridge the theory and practice gap. Accordingly, this volume effectively responds to the call to address the social equity grand challenges for public administration in education, training, and research (Gerton & Mitchell, 2019), and toward moving the field forward with empathy, engagement, equity, and ethics (Meyer et al., 2022).

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