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**INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS LIMITING SOCIAL
SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS**

by

Grant Alan Holyoak

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

**Sociology
in the Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology**

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Institutional Constraints Limiting Social Services for Immigrants

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Institutional Constraints Limiting Social Services for Immigrants

Abstract

This study advances the literature by identifying the factors that constrain the resource provision activities of social service agencies for immigrants. We consider whether and how coercive, mimetic and normative constraints shape organizational practices in this field. Drawing on twenty-five in-depth interviews with social service providers in Utah, we find that despite providers' commitment to serving immigrants, organizations remain significantly constrained due primarily to external coercive constraints including restrictive state laws and increasing competition over limited funding. We conclude by exploring the implications of our findings for policy and practice.

Keywords:

social services; organizations; isomorphic pressures; immigrants

A great deal of scholarship has documented the vulnerabilities faced by unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. (e.g., Menjivar 2006; 2008). This evidence has led scholars to conclude that significant gaps exist in the social safety net for immigrants generally and unauthorized immigrants specifically (e.g., Shier et al. 2011; Vissman et al. 2011).

While these vulnerabilities have been well documented, the factors that constrain the resources and resource provision activities of social service organizations are less well understood (Edward and Hines-Martin 2014). We seek to advance knowledge on limitations of social services agencies by identifying and explaining the factors that constrain the resources and resource provision activities of these organizations.

Specifically, we seek to resolve an important empirical puzzle: social service providers are committed to addressing the needs of immigrants yet social service agencies face constraints that impede their ability to meet the needs of this population. What explains this incongruity between providers' commitment and organizational responsiveness?

Relying on twenty-five interviews with social service personnel in Utah, we show how social service agencies are constrained by a variety of external and internal pressures. Our analysis uncovers the factors that constrain service provision to immigrants, defined both in terms of the *availability* of services as well as *eligibility* for services. Our findings have implications for scholarship on social service organizations as well as for immigration policy and practice. Below we review the literature documenting the existing constraints on service provision for immigrants and develop a theoretical framework based on institutional theory to explore how and why these constraints emerge. We then describe our methods and findings. We conclude by

considering the implications of our analysis for theory, research and policy related to social service organizations and under-served populations.

Literature Review & Theory

Existing Limits in Social Services

Scholarship on immigrant well-being has identified significant challenges facing immigrants in the U.S. (e.g., Menjivar 2006; 2008). Unauthorized immigrants experience significant social, political and economic vulnerability due to their legal and immigrant status (Androff et al. 2011; Chavez et al. 2012). Scholars have attributed these vulnerabilities to a variety of factors, including the inability of social service agencies to adequately address the needs of the immigrant community. Several scholars have documented how restrictive federal and state policies limit social service agencies' ability to meet the needs of immigrants. In 2007 alone, more than 1,600 state and local immigration-related bills were filed in the U.S. concerning issues ranging from social services to law enforcement to immigrant access to drivers' licenses (Padilla et al. 2008). Many of these policies imposed strict limits on immigrants' access to social services. For instance, a recent study found that since 2005 a single state (Indiana) has passed over 300 laws aimed at restricting immigrant access to basic services and employment (Chavez et al. 2012).

Additional evidence suggests that many state laws have facilitated partnerships among and between US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), local law enforcement and social service agencies to identify unauthorized residents and aid in deportation efforts (Kirk et al. 2012). The result has been growing distrust among immigrants—both authorized and unauthorized—in both law enforcement and social

service agencies (Kirk et al. 2012). For instance, a recent study found that distrust of social service providers leads young immigrants to rely on family members and unlicensed community healers to meet their healthcare needs (Raymond-Flesch et al. 2014).

Recent cutbacks in state funding and mounting limits on eligibility—though highly variable across cities, states and regions—have also served to restrict access to services for immigrants who remain eligible due to fear and distrust among potential recipients and uncertainty among agency personnel (Nam 2011; Warner 2012). In terms of healthcare, for instance, the Affordable Care Act of 2010 denied health care insurance—including private insurance—to those residing in the U.S. for fewer than five years and those without legal authorization (Cartwright 2011; Warner 2012). While unauthorized immigrants remain eligible for emergency medical care, fear of legal repercussions, paperwork and deportation prevent many from seeking treatment (Cartwright 2011).

While this scholarship suggests that the immigrant communities are underserved by social service agencies, very little scholarship has explored the range of constraints facing service organizations. Yet social service agencies must navigate an increasingly complex social, cultural and political environment. While their mission is often to address the needs of vulnerable populations, the legitimacy of service agencies often depends on meeting public demands of fairness, coordinating with other public and private agencies and abiding by legal and policy restrictions that set limits on service provision. Because individual service organizations are embedded in a larger political and social environment, to understand agency limitations we identify the internal and

external factors that shape organizational behavior. To guide our analysis therefore we rely on institutional theory, which posits that the institutional environment shapes organizational behavior in predictable ways. This theory is particularly useful for understanding which environmental factors shape organizational outcomes in fields like social services where organizations are highly dependent on the external environment, where the optimal means for achieving goals are ambiguous or uncertain and where organizations rely heavily on professionals within the organization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). In such environments, organizational legitimacy is dependent on organizations adopting similar practices irrespective of whether those practices advance the stated mission of the organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Thus, if the environment encourages conservative practices among a certain subset of social service organizations, other organizations may adopt similar practices. Because of its relevance for understanding the range of factors that may impact organizational practice within individual organizations as well as across a field of organizations, we rely on institutional theory to guide our analysis of interviews with social service organizations throughout Utah.

Institutional Theory

To analyze the environmental factors that shape organizational behavior, we rely on institutional theory of organizational change (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; 1991). Originally formulated to explain the ways competitive firms respond to uncertainty, insights from the theory of institutional isomorphism have been applied to a range of studies on how organizations respond to internal and external pressures (e.g., Anheier 2014; Christensen and Laegreid 2011; Perlinski et al. 2012). Whereas private firms

must adapt to competitive market pressures, non-market organizations such as social service agencies must respond and adapt to uncertainty caused by internal as well as external pressures. Thus, institutional theory has been applied to several non-profit sectors including the U.S. civil service, museums and rape crisis centers (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Townley 2002; Zilber 2002). Institutional theory argues that in the face of uncertainty, organizations will respond to pressures in similar ways leading to comparable practices across the field. Our analysis seeks to uncover whether and how these pressures shape social service agencies' ability to serve Utah's immigrant population.

Institutional theory posits that organizations seek requisite resources, including legitimacy, in the face of uncertainty. Firms must comply with and respond to external environmental pressures without sacrificing the core mission of the organization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In the case of social service agencies, organizations must seek financing and legitimacy from multiple stakeholders, including public and private funding agencies, clients, peer organizations and the public without sacrificing the mission of providing services to vulnerable populations. Over time, organizations respond to internal and external pressures in similar ways, leading to similar—or *isomorphic*—tendencies among peer organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Three mechanisms that promote isomorphic tendencies among organizations within a field include *coercive*, *mimetic* and *normative* pressures.

Coercive isomorphism refers to pressures to comply with external constraints, including laws, regulations and social norms (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). One of the most direct forms of coercive pressures facing social service organizations includes

limitations in the political realm, including federal and state laws. Politics and political constraints shape organizational action in direct and indirect ways. Organizations who fail to comply with laws may face legal sanctions but may also suffer a loss of legitimacy, a loss of funding and potentially a loss of mandate. For instance, an organization an organization that serves unauthorized immigrants despite legal restrictions may risk funding, social sanction or even legal sanction. Thus, social service agencies must comply with political and legal constraints while also seeking ways to serve immigrant clients and thus maintain legitimacy as service providers. Thus, agencies must conform to at least two forms of legitimacy: legitimacy from policy makers, private donors and the public at large and legitimacy from potential clients and service recipients. Previous research has shown that federal and state laws impose significant coercive pressures on social service agencies (e.g., Chavez et al. 2012; Padilla et al. 2008). For instance, Androff et al. (2011) show that restrictive or exclusionary policies at the local level negatively affect the economic security and health of immigrants and their children in part by limiting the availability of resources from social service agencies.

In addition to external political restrictions, cultural expectations external to the agency can also constrain organizational behavior. Cultural attitudes often inform restrictive laws and policies particularly when it comes to providing social services (Schneider and Ingram 2005). Citizens' attitudes about the relative deservingness of different populations have had significant impacts on policy outcomes ranging from poverty relief to unemployment and disability benefits (e.g., Appelbaum 2003; van Oorschot 2008). For instance, more restrictive anti-immigrant policies are more likely to

emerge in states where conservative political ideologies among citizens are strong (Boushey and Luedtke 2011; Chavez and Provine 2009). Comparative research suggests that immigrants are often viewed as the least deserving of public resources, falling far behind the elderly, the disabled and the unemployed (van Oorschot 2008). Responsiveness to public attitudes is critical for non-profit social service agencies subject to increasing cuts in federal, state and local spending (Pettijohn et al. 2013). Faced with shrinking budgets, many service agencies seek to streamline programming and limit the number of clients eligible for services (Pettijohn et al. 2013). One way in which organizations do this is by establishing distinctions among client groups based on relatively “deservingness” of benefits and services. For instance, Horton (2008) shows how public health agencies distinguished between Cuban refugees’ and Mexican immigrants’ deservingness of services, encouraging Cuban clients from seeking services while discouraging Mexican immigrants from making unreasonable demands on services for “Americans.” Distinguishing clients in this way may help secure funding and reinforce organizations’ legitimacy in the eyes of taxpayers and elected officials. Importantly, because social service agencies within a state face a common legal, regulatory and cultural environment, organizations will respond to these pressures in similar ways. When legal and policy restrictions are great and where public animosity toward immigrants is high, social service agencies will seek to restrict the provisions and services they provide to immigrants.

Mimetic isomorphism refers to the tendency of organizations to respond to uncertainty by modeling policies and practices on those of peer organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Mimetic tendencies will be particularly salient in contexts where the

legal and regulatory environment is in flux, where the implications of various laws on organizational practice are ambiguous or where organizations lack legal counsel to guide them on compliance. Thus, not only do laws and regulations create coercive pressures but they also increase uncertainty concerning organizational goals and practices.

In the face of uncertainty, organizational actors model practices on other organizations. The more organizations interact, the greater their mimetic tendencies. Because social service agencies rely on other agencies for referrals and funding, mimetic pressures will be significant. Successful referrals require the perception that the receiving agency is legitimate and agency-to-agency reliance will increase the flow of information about practices. Thus, we expect that the emergence of practices in one organization will encourage others to follow suit, leading to the diffusion of practices. If coercive pressures are great, then practices that restrict the availability of services will spread throughout the field.

Finally, *normative isomorphism* refers to internal rather than external pressures. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), normative pressures stem primarily from the professional norms of organizational practitioners. Professionals within a field seek legitimation for their expertise in order to justify their occupational autonomy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). There is substantial empirical evidence that the normative orientations and professional capacity of internal actors can shape organizational practice (e.g., Thelen 2004). Through professional training and occupational socialization, organizational actors develop strong norms and expectations regarding their roles within the agency or organization (Fligstein 1990). These norms can

significantly shape actors' priorities and values and their propensity to adopt certain organizational practices (Scott 2008). Normative pressures are particularly strong within professions (like social work) where socialization occurs through professional training and credentialing and where professional goals and norms are reinforced through continuing education requirements and professional networks (Hwang and Powell 2009). In such professions, norms will be more cohesive and more easily transferred among professionals and across organizations.

The professional code of ethics for social workers mandates that professionals serve vulnerable populations (NASW 2014; Padilla et al. 2008). Yet there is mounting evidence that professional training does not provide requisite skills to work with immigrant communities, including cultural competence skills and language training (Blunt 2007; Engstrom and Okamura 2007; Nash et al. 2006). As a result, social service agencies may face internal limitations that constrain their ability to serve immigrant communities. These challenges will be particularly salient in new immigrant destination states, including rural areas and regions that are historically racially/ethnically and culturally homogeneous. To the extent that social work professionals in these areas reflect the dominant demographic profile in terms of race/ethnicity, cultural background and religion, agency personnel may present a barrier to service provision for immigrants not only due to poor communication but also due to the lack of a "critical consciousness" among providers (Suarez et al. 2008; Vissman et al. 2011).

Institutional theory provides a framework for analyzing the constraints facing social service agencies. Rather than being free to design policies and practices that maximize the provision of services to vulnerable populations, social service agencies

face external and internal constraints that may limit the degree to which they can serve immigrant communities. Our research seeks to uncover whether and how external and internal constraints shape agencies' ability to meet the social service needs of Utah's immigrants. After describing our data and methods, we turn to an analysis of how social service organizations in Utah attempt to navigate these internal and external constraints in order to provide services to Utah's immigrant population. Our analysis provides insight into how constraints in service provision emerge despite a strong normative commitment among service providers to serve this population.

The Utah Context

Utah provides an ideal context for studying the constraints on social service provisions because of its recent history of immigration. In recent years, Utah has emerged as a major new destination state for immigration. Between 1990 and 2011, the share of Utah's foreign born population more than doubled, and approximately 44% of this population is unauthorized (Census 2011; Passel and Cohn 2011). The relatively rapid influx of new Latino immigrants was particularly impactful given the relative lack of racial/ethnic and cultural diversity in the state. Over 90% of Utah's residents are native-born white, over 60% belong to the LDS Church and more citizens identify with the Republican Party than in any other state (Census 2011; Jones 2011).

Legal and normative restrictions limiting social services to immigrants may be greater in new destinations as compared to traditional immigrant gateways (Shier et al. 2011; Vissman et al. 2011). Unlike more traditional destinations, new immigrant destinations are less likely to have well-established and culturally competent service providers and immigrants are less likely to have access to community and network

resources to compensate for the service limitations (Derose et al. 2007). New destination states vary a great deal in terms of the type of immigration laws they implement, however (Ebert and Ovink 2014). While some new destination states (e.g., Arizona) have passed extremely restrictive immigration policies, others (e.g. Washington) have passed more moderate laws. Utah falls between the two extremes, pursuing some policies aimed at regularizing unauthorized immigrants and other policies aimed at restricting services to new immigrants (Jacobs et al. 2015). Thus, rather than providing a cohesive and consistent regulatory framework, Utah's laws represent a complex constellation of policies ranging from inclusive to exclusionary. The most restrictive law passed to date is SB-81, a bill that requires all service providers to "certify the applicant's lawful presence in the United States." The relatively recent arrival of Utah's immigrant population, the lack of clear federal guidelines for immigration and the inconsistency of state-level laws has created a significant degree of ambiguity for social service agencies.

Data & Methods

Our analysis is based on twenty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews with social service personnel in Utah. Data for the project was collected in two stages. In the first stage, the research team created a data set of all social service agencies in the state of Utah that provide services to immigrants. Data on service agencies was collected using a variety of sources, including agency websites, state, regional and local government websites and religious and other non-profit organizations' websites. This resulted in a data set of seventy-three agencies that varied by funding source, location and service type. We then organized this population by type of service with categories including

housing, employment, family/counseling, legal/advocacy, food, English/cultural, education, medical and general. For example, the English Skills Center was classified as an “English/cultural” services organization, whereas the Child and Family Support Center was classified as a “family/counseling” service provider. We then further divided our sample into agencies located in the northern, central and southern regions of the state and by funding type, which included public, private and mixed. Organizations such as Lutheran Social Services and Holy Cross Ministries were classified as “privately funded” while organizations like Workforce Services and Utah Public Health Department were classified as “publicly funded”. Organizations that receive private and public funding, such as a regional Community Action Partnership, were classified as “mixed” funding. Organizations located in the greater Salt Lake region were classified as “central”, organizations in the Logan/Cache Valley region were classified as “northern” and organizations south of Provo were classified as “southern”.

In the second stage, we selected a stratified sample of agencies from the larger data set based on location, funding source, and service type. Respondents were identified using snowball sampling methods. Each respondent interviewed was asked to identify other agencies and/or social service personnel with whom we should speak. Approximately half of our interviews were purposively selected through stratified sampling techniques and approximately half were identified via the snowball method. These two methods resulted in twenty-five interviews. Interview respondents were recruited via email and phone. An initial email was sent to potential respondents detailing the study and requesting an interview followed by a phone call. Interviews were conducted by the authors in concert with student research assistants. At least one

of the authors participated in each interview and at least two researchers (from the faculty and student team) participated in each interview. All but four of the respondents were white native born English speakers. Four respondents were foreign born with Spanish being the native language.

The first part of the interview focused on the agencies' mission, including the range of services offered and eligibility requirements for services. The second part of the interview included questions about respondents' perception of the major constraints in terms of service provision and eligibility both with regard to the focal agency and in Utah generally. The final part of the interview included several questions regarding respondents' perception of any challenges their agency faces in meeting the needs of immigrant clients. While our interviews were not conducted multiple times over time, our questions did ask respondents to reflect on recent strategies or changes their agency has pursued in response to various constraints. When appropriate, our findings reveal changes that agencies have made over time as described by respondents.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted at a time and place chosen by the respondent. Interviews were carefully typed on a laptop computer by one or more members of the research team. When possible, selected quotes were typed verbatim. Other members led the interview and took detailed hand-written notes. Following the interview, the typed notes were compared with handwritten notes and, when necessary, modified or enhanced. Interview transcripts were coded independently by the second and third author with input from student research assistants. Initial coding aimed to identify major themes regarding the range of services and eligibility requirements for each agency. The second round of coding aimed to identify existing

constraints on service provision. The third round of coding aimed to identify the coercive, mimetic and normative pressures facing each agency.

Findings

Coercive Pressures: Formal and Cultural Constraints on Service Provision

Nearly all of our respondents identified coercive pressures that limited their ability to serve immigrant clients. The most common among these pressures included state regulations on service eligibility and declining funding sources. In terms of state regulations on eligibility, nearly all of our respondents received at least some portion of their funding from public sources. As a result, most were limited by SB-81, the state bill that requires social service agencies to verify the lawful residence of all clients. Nearly all respondents were affected by this bill either because they receive public funds or because they fear that even private funders will revoke funding unless they comply with the strictures of this bill. One respondent described the impact of SB-81 in the following way:

SB-81 made it so government funds can only be spent on those [clients] with legal status. It requires agencies to affirm that their client base is legal...The hardest hit [by these requirements] were ESL education and training, employment services and legal services.

Anxiety about non-compliance was reflected in the following statement by the director of a social agency that provides legal services: "The agency will not have the money necessary if they don't comply with the stipulations of funding. If they give money to people that don't qualify for those services, their money gets taken away."

In her view, this restriction meant that agencies were being forced to move away from providing services to clients in order to focus more effort on agency compliance. In her words, SB-81 was forcing organizations to become “agency-centered” rather than “people-centered”. This view was echoed by many respondents; in most cases, compliance with SB-81 meant burdensome book-keeping requirements for organizations. SB-81 required that social service organizations use the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements Program (SAVE), which is a federal database that verifies the legal status of individuals. SB-81 also required very arduous case management practices. Most organizations receive funding from multiple sources, including public and private sources. Thus, respondents reported that they must keep specific files on every client so that they can verify which accounts were used to provide services. For some agencies, this meant keeping track of dozens of accounts and hundreds of clients. One respondent who worked for an educational services agency stated, “It’s a shell game, we are moving [funds] from one pot to another.”

While SB-81 only imposed restrictions on the use of public funds, the book-keeping requirements led organizations to apply the same eligibility requirements even to clients receiving services through private funds. The net result was that unauthorized immigrants became ineligible for fewer and fewer services over time. In the words of one respondent, a director of an agency that provides social and legal services, “SB-81 was intended to be another barrier [to providing services for immigrants] and it worked.”

The second major coercive pressure organizations faced was a decline in funding over time. Many respondents reported that funding for agencies that serve immigrant clients was a very low priority among state legislators and several implied

that, even compared to neighboring states, Utah's funding for social services had failed to keep pace with population increases. In the words of one educational service provider, "our money is peanuts compared to other states."

Funding scarcity was not simply due to legislative restrictions. Agencies also struggled to convince private donors that their work was legitimate. Several respondents noted private donors were more likely to view refugees as more deserving of services than immigrants. This aligns with previous research on the construction of clients' deservingness, which finds that refugees are viewed as more deserving than immigrants (e.g., Horton 2008). Agencies' desire to appear as legitimate to donors led many to strategically adopt more refugee-centered programming and fewer immigrant-targeted services over time. According to the head of a multiservice agency, "donors are interested in prioritizing who you are going to help....refugees are no problem because they all have legal status and it's easier to support refugees politically." In this way, cultural ideas about deserving and undeserving clients restricted whom agencies could and could not serve both through formal legal limits as well as cultural and financial limits. Thus, in responding to coercive pressures, including donors' opinions about the relative deservingness of different populations, agency personnel reported that they limited direct services to immigrants over time.

Mimetic Pressures: Uncertainty Breeds Conformity

In addition to coercive pressures, our respondents reported a high degree of mimetic pressure due to four factors: uncertainty about legal compliance, the implementation of a sole-sourcing model, a high degree of referral-based ties among organizations; and concerns about legitimacy in their communities.

Several respondents reported that the legal and political climate in Utah, characterized by a number of contradictory laws with unclear implications for service providers, created a high degree of confusion and uncertainty about compliance. According to one respondent, SB-81 in particular had created a great deal of confusion among service providers. While she noted that compliance was challenging and confusing, many agencies simply did not understand their responsibilities:

There has been some confusion on what exactly [agencies] need to do.

[Agencies] have been told that they just need to prove that their clients reside in the state of Utah and not prove that they are a legal citizen.

She was quick to note that still other agencies hired lawyers to help guide their practices, while others were faithful in their use of the SAVE program.

For many of our respondents, uncertainty led to a high degree of misinformation among practitioners in the field. One respondent stated that “everybody’s just kind of guessing [how to comply]”, while another respondent stated that “everybody is working under assumptions and those assumptions create larger gaps [in understanding].” Uncertainty, which institutional theory identifies as one of the primary mechanisms driving mimetic pressure, led to a great deal of communication among and between service providers seeking to understand emergent norms in the field. Several respondents indicated awareness of the practices of other agencies, and several indicated that they had borrowed practices known to be used by peer agencies. According to one respondent, this uncertainty led many or most agencies in her field to avoid any potential suspicion about client eligibility. She noted with regard to SB-81

compliance, “[Agencies] take the lesser of the roads. They don’t want to get into the legality of who’s who.”

One way the structure of public funding limited service provision and contributed to organizational isomorphism was the introduction of a sole sourcing model, in which the state contracts with a single, exemplary agency to provide services to clients eligible for public support. Unlike open sourcing models where all agencies compete for government contracts, a sole source model grants funding to agencies on a limited competition basis. For instance, if an individual is eligible for home health care services due to a disability, the state will contract with a single non-state agency to provide those services. Sole sourcing is one way in which state governments have sought to private public services and, since the 1990s, this model has become one of the dominant ways in which states provide services to eligible clients (Van Slyke 2003). This funding model grants the government greater oversight and monitoring of individual agency practices and, due to the desirability of government contracts, encourages other agencies to model their practices on the contracted agency (Dicke and Ott 1999). This funding model had a strong isomorphic impact by, in part, compelling agencies to adopt practices consistent with the sole sourced agency and limiting funding to agencies who fail to conform to these standards. One respondent who headed a legal agency *not* granted a contract with the state reported,

We struggle looking for funding as an organization...It’s been tough being a Latino nonprofit organization...[because] we compete with a lot of Americans, with other big nonprofit organizations.

The spread of agency-to-agency practices was accelerated by the high degree of referrals between and among agencies. Social service agencies are generally referral-dependent and agencies that provide services to immigrants are even more so because clients tend to learn about services through word-of-mouth. Most respondents noted that advertising is both risky because it may bring negative scrutiny if the agency is perceived to be serving undocumented immigrants and a waste of resources in that most immigrants seek services only through trusted personal networks. The following response from a provider from a state-wide agency was typical:

There is no way I can advertise for a program or class. I need a native who has an 'in' with the [immigrant] population... attendance grows...because people spread the word.

Yet another respondent reported that his agency limited advertising to former clients and local immigrant-owned businesses:

[We advertise] in tiendas, bakeries that are Hispanic owned and operated. Friends who are growers and farmers, owners who let them go out and recruit...a trailer park in [local neighborhood], locations populated by mainly Hispanics.

Thus, most respondents noted that immigrant clients hear about their services either through family or friendship networks or from other agencies or service personnel. Dependence on referrals means that agencies are eager to appear as legitimate and trustworthy. This also means that agencies try to mimic the practices of peer agencies in order to secure a reputation as a legitimate and trustworthy agency. In the words of a

director of a legal services agency, “we strive really hard to borrow trust through [other agencies].”

One example of an agency’s effort to pursue organizational change in order to be viewed as legitimate came from a local community organization. The director of the agency described his decision to fire an employee because she was not an authorized resident. While SB-81 only restricts the eligibility of clients, this director felt that his agency had to fire this employee in order to appear compliant to other agencies. He described the impact of this decision in the following way:

I had to let go of a qualified wonderful teacher because her social security number was invalid. It is not right. This single mom has nothing, she is forced to go out and clean people’s homes. Now she has to get services that other people are paying taxes to pay for. Who won in that situation? Nobody. Technically she was breaking the law, but was she harming anybody?

The final source of mimetic pressure was the reliance of agencies on multiple private and public donors as well as partner agencies. When asked about funding sources, agencies in our sample listed dozens of sources including but not limited to the Department of Education, Utah Department of Public Safety, community block grants, citizen block grants, social services block grants, Homeland Security, United Way, Catholic Social Services, private corporate sponsors including American Express, Goldman Sachs, Walmart and Zions Bank as well as hundreds of individual donors. Furthermore, many respondents noted that their agency exists in partnership with

several other community organizations and agencies, including but not limited to schools, police departments and universities.

Pressure to maintain funding required agencies to strive for legitimacy and, for many, this meant strict compliance with the law and the adoption of practices viewed as “legitimate” in the field. In this way, pressure to secure funding from donors acted as a source of both coercive and mimetic pressure for agencies. Donors’ concerns about which populations were worthy of their resources coerced agencies to comply with their preferences, while competition among agencies for limited donations led to pressures to mimic the practices of other agencies. Indeed, competition among agencies for donations led agencies to strategize about which client populations donors would view as deserving or not. As a result, agencies tended to target similar populations and limit services for others populations. For instance, one respondent from a community agency stated that “donors are interested in prioritizing who you are going to help.” This reliance on donors and the need to appear to be providing legitimate services limited the ability of her agency—and other agencies in her field—to provide services to single male immigrants, for instance. Donors tended to view these individuals as undeserving and not “compelling” and thus agencies were pressured to pursue programs and services aimed at more legitimate “at risk” clients, like children and families.

Normative Pressures: Internal Constraints

Finally, our respondents reported that a major constraint on their ability to meet the needs of immigrant clients related to the professional limitations among service workers themselves. While nearly every respondent expressed a strong professional commitment to meeting the needs of Utah’s immigrants, many also identified ways in

which the lack of racial/ethnic and cultural diversity and Spanish fluency among service providers limited their organizations' ability to adequately serve clients.

Consistent with the professional code of ethics of social workers, nearly every respondent expressed a strong commitment to service vulnerable populations in general and immigrant communities in particular. The professional ideals expressed by respondents reflected a commitment to fairness, human rights and social justice. The following quote from the director of an educational service agency was typical: "When [we] opened this center our decision was to have a place of warmth and love. We've never deviated from that. We are here to serve the one person and to help them" Yet another respondent noted, "any human being has a need to survive—heat, water, food—but beyond that...they need to contribute and to receive help. That's a basic need of all human beings, but especially for immigrants." This commitment to serving vulnerable populations also motivated a strong desire to undermine negative stereotypes about immigrants. According to the director of a community services agency,

These are very good, hardworking people. They didn't do anything other than cross somebody's dotted line on somebody's map...These families are escaping from a country that just can't help them....They bring a rich culture, they bring rich traditions, they will come and make us better.

Despite a strong professional commitment to serving Utah's immigrant community, however, every respondent identified persistent constraints on their ability to effectively serve this population. In the words of one respondent, "all [immigrant] services are underdeveloped...the systems are not flexible and do not adapt." While respondents

identified a number of external constraints on their ability to serve immigrants, nearly all also identified a number of internal constraints, including a lack of racial/ethnic and cultural diversity and bilingualism among service providers. One director of a community outreach program stated this very clearly:

Our service assistance and eligibility criteria and the service providers are not fully prepared to connect with this [immigrant] population and know how to serve them. We need human resources prepared and ready to assist the population. More diversity in all Utah service providers. I'm talking about the workforce in service agencies.

For this respondent, lack of diversity among service providers led to negative stereotypes about immigrants that impeded cooperation between service organizations and immigrants. She went on to lament the impact of the lack of diversity on agencies' ability to adapt to Utah's changing demographics, "We haven't had the ability to be open-minded and change the strategies in our agencies....Service providers [in Utah] are overly representative of White people." This sentiment was echoed among many of our respondents. For most respondents, the lack of racial/ethnic diversity, cultural competence and bilingualism among service providers impeded service provision in two ways: (1) by limiting organizations' ability to recruit clients; and (2) by exacerbating distrust among potential clients.

Many respondents recognized that shortcomings within service agencies were at least partly to blame for the challenges of recruiting clients from the immigrant community. When asked about the reasons behind existing constraints

on services, one respondent identified agency limitations in terms of personnel and cultural competence:

[Service providers] don't feel comfortable [around immigrants], don't speak Spanish, not sure how to reach the community. Don't know how to do it. It is hard work, it's the hardest work I do...[many agencies] lack the manpower.

The lack of diversity and Spanish fluency also exacerbates feelings of distrust between potential clients and service providers. Many respondents identified distrust as a major factor driving the constraints on services to immigrants.

According to the head of a community agency, "a lot [of immigrants] are afraid to access services that they legally qualify for because they are afraid of being deported." While several respondents noted that earning the trust of the Latino community is vital to their agency, developing that trust is challenging. According to a service provider at a community agency,

[Good service] happens when there is a willingness and a shared trust developed....The question is not how do we get information to the families but how to we gain the trust of the population?

The challenges establishing trust among clients weakened organizations' ability to provide services. One agency director of an urban community program stated that language and cultural barriers limit services to immigrants: "There is a lack of knowledge and understanding about a lot of issues [among service providers]. Even if you are eligible, you face a lot of difficulty accessing services...the fear is just so intense." Yet another service provider, who headed a religious based

organization, stated that the clients who get the most services are those who “speak the most English or know technology” yet she lamented that “those aren’t the people in the most need.”

One important exception to the general lack of cultural competence and community outreach included a new organization whose missions includes forging partnerships with various individual service providers to provide services free of charge to immigrants in a single urban neighborhood. The organization refuses public funding and so is not subject to the restrictions of SB-81 and instead relies exclusively on grants and community partnerships. The organization relies heavily on unpaid interns who are Spanish speakers and who volunteer their time making connections with families in the community. The partnership offers housing, medical and health services and represents a unique model for service provision in the state. While this organization has successfully overcome some of the barriers associated with normative and coercive constraints, its impact is minimal given its small size and limited scope, servicing families in a single neighborhood. According to the director, even within the small scope of the program “all services are underdeveloped”.

Discussion

While scholars acknowledge that constraints on social service provision for immigrants exist, little is known about the factors that contribute to these limitations. This study advances theory and research by exploring whether and how external and internal factors contribute to constraints on in social service provision among organizations in Utah. Interviews revealed a finite set of coercive, mimetic and

normative constraints that limit organizations' ability to meet the needs of immigrant clients including policy limitations, competition for scarce funding, the strategies of peer agencies and the linguistic and cultural competence of service providers themselves. While previous research has identified eligibility restrictions as a primary driver of service limitations, our findings shows that formal limits on eligibility are only one of several constraints facing social service organizations. In addition to formal eligibility constraints, the rapidly changing legal and policy climate creates a high degree of uncertainty among providers. In an uncertain legal environment, we found that this led organizations to increasingly adopt a very conservative approach to serving immigrants. Thus, despite a strong commitment to serving immigrants, service providers reported that over time they moved away from providing direct services to immigrants. Their recognition that a high degree of distrust existed among immigrants made them hesitant to provide any services that required identification; as a result even eligible legal residents are likely prohibited from receiving the range of services for which they remain eligible.

Our findings have several implications for policy and practice. One of the primary constraints facing social service providers is SB-81. This bill restricts services to immigrants and reinforces immigrants' distrust of service agencies. In order to enable service providers to properly serve vulnerable populations, policy makers must rethink SB-81 and similar bills. The political climate regarding immigration in Utah is far from extreme; indeed, the Obama Administration has referred to Utah as a model for the nation in terms of immigration reform. Though restrictive policies like SB-81 exist, policy makers have also passed laws aimed at regularizing Utah's unauthorized population

and providing a legal pathway for continued residence and employment in the state. The Utah Compact, signed in 2010 with overwhelming bipartisan support, affirmed the state's commitment to supporting immigrant families by improving the health, education and well-being of immigrant children (Compact 2010). Thus, while SB-81 exists it is only one part of a complex and contradictory approach to immigration. Policy advocates could potentially co-opt the inclusive language of the Utah Compact to argue against SB-81 on the grounds that it limits the state's ability to support immigrant children and their families. According to a recent study on the evolution of immigration policy in Utah, such a reframing may find reception among Utah's policymakers (Jacobs et al. 2015).

The second major constraint faced by our respondents concerned funding. Nearly every respondent in our study pointed to a lack funding as an important limitation on their ability to serve immigrant clients. Not only are agencies limited in how they can use public funds but private donors also set limits by influencing "appropriate" versus "inappropriate" uses of donations based on their construction of the relative deservingness of different populations. To reduce constraints on service availability, state and private donors must recognize the vulnerabilities that exist in immigrant communities—particularly in states that fail to protect immigrants through inclusive labor laws that enable immigrants to secure formal employment and decent wages. To encourage private donors to support social services for immigrants, policy reform advocates could exploit private businesses' growing support for immigration reform. In Utah and around the country, large employers in construction, agriculture and services have increasingly lobbied for policy reform that provides a legal pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Making a stronger case for private sources of support

from these business interests by linking immigrant welfare to responsible business practices could significantly increase funding for social service agencies. While perhaps not a permanent solution, such a strategy could increase funding for immigrant services in the short term.

Finally, we join calls by social work scholars to enhance professional training for social workers in the areas of language, cross-cultural competence and diversity. Service providers in our study were deeply committed to serving the state's immigrants. However, the lack of bilingualism and cultural competence limited their ability to effectively reach clients. Agencies can overcome these limitations in two ways. First, many of these agencies rely heavily on volunteers. Aggressively seeking volunteers from within the immigrant community could significantly enhance organizations' ability to gain legitimacy and trust among immigrant clients. Peer-led programming and community outreach has been used successfully to improve health outcomes in immigrant communities (e.g., Tovar et al. 2014). Recent research reinforces the effectiveness of peer-led outreach programs in the areas of education services and social services broadly defined (e.g., Cui et al. 2015; Gonzales 2014). A greater emphasis on peer-led and community outreach programming in Utah could significantly impact the ability of service agencies to address the needs of immigrant populations. Second, our respondents' desire to service this community likely reflects a professional willingness to seek training in areas that would allow them to be better equipped to earn the trust of foreign born clients. Because social work requires practitioners to pursue regular continuing education courses, professional associations might increasingly emphasize these types of skills in the requirements for continued licensing.

This type of training for social service personnel could not only empower them to better serve the immigrant community but could allow social workers to be stronger political advocates for immigrant rights. Many of our respondents were hesitant to engage in political organizing around immigrant rights because they feared negative backlash from legislators, donors and the public. This is a real and enduring concern for many non-profit organizations as advocacy can undermine the legitimacy of the organization and risk future support (for a systematic review of the challenges of advocacy see Pekkanen et al. 2014). However, the regularization and legalization of undocumented immigrants motivated by the Obama Administration's Executive Order may reduce the stigma associated with this type of political activity. This new political and legal environment—combined with the rhetoric related to the Utah Compact—may provide social service agencies an opportunity to advocate for immigrant well-being more effectively. Previous scholarship suggests that political advocacy among service and nonprofits organizations may be most successful when done as part of a larger coalition (Boris et al., 2014; Fyall and McGuire 2014). Doing so can reduce the risks to any one agency and allow for greater voice in policy formation. This opportunity—combined with a stronger professional commitment to training and diversity—could significantly enhance the political influence of these organizations at the community, state and federal level.

Conclusion

The current study builds on previous scholarship by showing the ways in which coercive pressures in the form of state laws significantly impact the extent to which service organizations will adapt to mimetic and normative pressures. However, there are

several limitations to our study that could be addressed by future research. First, our focus on a sample of service providers in a single state limits our ability to generalize beyond Utah. Utah is an important state in that it has forced a “middle path” between the extremist contexts like Arizona and more unambiguously inclusive policy contexts like Washington. Thus the constraints that Utah agencies face are likely similar in other contexts and even more constraining in more conservative contexts. Utah is also an important context because it is a new destination state for immigrants. While services in new destination states tend to be less comprehensive and well-established than those in traditional destinations, the receptivity to immigrants in new destination states varies considerably (Derose et al. 2007; Ebert and Ovink 2014). Future research could explore this possibility by comparing the range of internal constraints facing service organizations in different cultural and political contexts. Such studies could also target smaller or less well known agencies to compare the constraints based on size and visibility. Finally, future agency-based studies could compare agencies’ strategies over time, tracing how processes of organizational change evolve over time.

Our study is also limited in that our respondents are service providers and not immigrants themselves. Other researchers might incorporate immigrants and immigrant communities in a project that explores their experience with service providers. For instance, while our respondents reported a high degree of commitment to this community, the experience of immigrants who interact with these providers may reveal an important distinction between the perception of service providers and perceptions of clients.

Finally, future research could build on the current study by incorporating the perspectives of actors who determine the legal and funding context for social service agencies including lawmakers, private donors and state contracting agencies. Interviews with legislators, state budget directors, large institutional donors and small local and regional donors could reveal the perspectives that drive funding-related constraints on service agencies. While scholars may be tempted to dismiss the perspectives of such actors, their views on inequality, immigration and social services may reveal important nuances. For instance, though Utah legislators have passed several restrictive laws, there has also been broad bipartisan support in the state to provide a pathway to citizenship for Utah's immigrants. Indeed, President Obama has identified Utah as a model for federal immigration reform given its strong commitment to humane immigration policy. The case of Utah suggests that the perspectives of lawmakers who impose constraints on service agencies may be more complex than is typically understood by scholars and immigrant rights activists. Understanding these nuances could reveal appropriate strategies for advancing policy reform that benefits immigrants and expands the services available to them.

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Reflection on Honors Thesis

Grant Holyoak

Utah State University

January 8th, 2016

I returned from my LDS Mission to Chihuahua, Mexico in July 2013 and happily resumed my studies at Utah State. My Freshman year had introduced me to the many opportunities that research offered and I was already a published author and experienced presenter, but I had no idea what form my research would take in the three years to come. All throughout the fall semester I kept an eye open for interesting projects. And, in December, I found the one. Dr. Christy Glass, my Freshman year research mentor, told me that she was leading a team of researchers in a study regarding the availability of social services for Utah's unauthorized immigrant population. Having already learned to love and respect the Hispanic culture and people, and having already completed immigration-related research in the past, I knew this was the project for me. I never could have imagined, when I sat down with Professors Glass and Browne for our first team meeting, how much this project would grow to further define my undergraduate studies, my research skills, and my worldview. It became one of the most time-consuming, demanding, and enriching journeys of my life. The writing was exhaustive and the travel was extensive, but the results were above and beyond any costs I had had to pay. I simply loved my research.

From the start, every piece of this project stretched me. For example, I had never administered a professional interview before, all of a sudden, I was thrown into a situation where I was interviewing high-profile state and regional officials about the circumstances of our immigrant population on a weekly basis. The project was designed to incorporate telephone interviews with the directors of social services all across Utah, and I soon became a key player in the direction and analysis of those interviews. My heart quickly went out to the immigrants that our respondents referenced, and I soon came to realize that this project was about much more than research or organizations. This research was about the hopes, dreams, and tears of the

millions of people who, struggling against the suffocating constraints of a world that rejects them, fight to live, work, and survive in a country that is stronger than their own. At the moment I realized the gravity of my work, it was no longer labeled “research” in my mind—it became my passion and my crusade.

I do not have time to outline the intricacies of our research findings here. Suffice it to say that Utah made a pledge in 2010 to treat immigrants decently and humanely, and they/we are not living up to that pledge. Our state continues to act on draconian policy drafted in a panic-stricken time that reduces immigrant access to services that would better their lives. And while I would not, perhaps, go so far as to suggest that we close down all borders and treat unauthorized immigrants as full citizens of the United States, I believe that something very ugly is revealed about us if we condone a system that constantly forces our neighbors to live in fear that they may be permanently separated from their families and, if that does not happen, that they may not have enough means to feed them. Something about that equation has to change.

And so I took that message, and that untold story about suffering in our state, all over the country, presenting my findings in four states. I think, perhaps, that my greatest presentation highlight of this project came in April 2015, when I was invited to give a dynamic, 5-minute “Ignite Talk” in USU’s Research Week on the subject. Ignite Talks are designed to encapsulate short, powerful messages in a 5-minute (and 20 slide) window, like a mini-TED Talk. With the opportunity to give this presentation came my first opportunity to speak to a wide group of students, teachers, and community members about the issues that festered at the hidden heart of our neighborhoods. My presentation didn’t fit the average mold of Ignite Talks at USU—never had such a politically-charged talk been given. But I felt a moral obligation to share the truths I had learned in as public a venue as possible. I came to see Ignite as my “final matchbox

moment.” The talk was extremely well received, and I received inquiries and comments via my personal email account for weeks afterward. I was so proud to have shared something so very important to me. (If you’re interested, you can watch the talk at <https://ignite.usu.edu/grant-holyoak/>.)

If I were to give one piece of advice to future USU researchers, I would suggest that they make sure that they’re studying something that they really believe in. Research without passionate commitment would be very dry and un compelling, at least for me. But finding a project that I could think about, read about in the newspapers, talk to my friends and family about, and live for endowed me with a depth of experience, education, and fire that I have yet to replicate in any academic setting.

This project, which took me roughly 18 months to complete, was undoubtedly one of the most fulfilling parts of my entire undergraduate career and, indeed, of my life. It was exhilarating, exhausting, and educational in the extreme. My research experience allowed me to professionally tell an important, overlooked story about our state. I walked away from it having traveled hundreds of miles to share its message: that Utah’s immigrants are being systematically denied social services by a state that has vowed to treat them humanely. I came to view myself as something of a muckraker—one who passionately decries a societal injustice that they’ve uncovered. And, to be honest, there are few things more fun for me than crusading. My findings have spurred me to engage in a new level of political and civic activism, one that most recently includes my teaching of Citizenship Classes to Logan’s refugees and my communication with the governor regarding the admission of Syrian refugees. I never would have predicted that my research would provide me with this kind of direction and drive—it will stay with me for the rest of my life. I can’t wait to discover my next crusade.

Grant Holyoak is an undergraduate senior pursuing majors in sociology and economics and a minor in statistics from Utah State University. He graduated from Madison High School in Rexburg, Idaho in 2010. He took a leave of absence from USU to serve a full-time LDS (Mormon) mission to Chihuahua, Mexico from 2011-2013, an experience that has shaped his research interests and career goals. He married Morgann Seipert in August 2014. They live in Logan, Utah.

Grant's research experiences began in his freshman year when he was named a USU Undergraduate Research Fellow. Throughout his tenure at Utah State, he has engaged in multiple research projects on topics ranging from corporate migration and Utahn development to climate change beliefs and state immigration policy. He has presented his findings in the following conferences: Salt Lake City's Research on the Hill, Saint George's Utah Conference on Undergraduate Research, Eastern Washington University's 2015 National Conference on Undergraduate Research, California's Pacific Sociological Association Conference, Washington DC's Posters on the Hill, and Utah State's Ignite USU. His published works can be found in the Fall 2012 edition of the University of Utah's *Social Dialogue* and an upcoming edition of *The Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. He is employed by the school as the Sociology Peer Advisor and an Undergraduate Teaching Fellow. He volunteers in the leadership of various student and community organizations including the UNICEF campus initiative, the Sociology Club, and Bridgerland Literacy. Grant is a recipient of USU's Lillywhite Scholarship and was a finalist for the 2015 Harry S. Truman Scholarship.

Grant will pursue a career as a Foreign Service Officer in the US Department of State following his graduate education. His most recent activities include a summer internship at the Department's Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia.