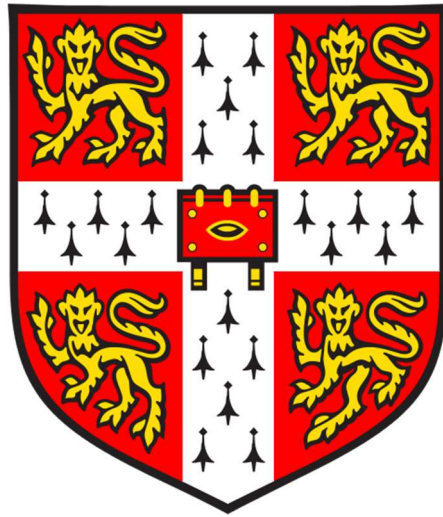


**When Audiences and Targets Collide:
Towards a Relational View of Stigma in and Around Organizations**



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The dissertation is submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee

The second and third chapter of this dissertation are co-authored with my supervisor, Professor Jennifer Howard-Grenville. In the second chapter I contributed 70% of the work and in the third chapter I performed 85% of the work. In the fourth chapter, in the spirit of a true collaboration, Wesley Helms and myself contributed equally (i.e., 50% each).

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Abstract

When Audiences and Targets Collide: Towards a Relational View of Stigma in and Around Organizations

Jan Stephen Lodge

In recent years, organizational and management scholars have taken a strong interest in the study of *negative social evaluations*, with a particular focus on *stigma* that occurs in and around organizations. To date, research in this context has focused on two overarching themes: First, it has examined how the targets of stigma respond to the pressures of social audiences by, for example, attempting to reduce their stigmatization. Second, it has investigated the flipside, namely how audiences decide to and then proceed to stigmatize and sanction targets in the first place. However, in both cases the literature to date has not examined in detail how targets' or audiences' interactions and crucially their relationships with one another may shape the process of stigmatization as well as responses to it. Thus, we know little about the drivers and motivations of specific actions and how, in particular, these are influenced by existing relationships between audiences and targets in the context of stigma. The present dissertation addresses this by building a more relational view of stigma in and around organizations. It does so through three studies in different contexts: the first study analyzes how organizations struck by scandal and stigma spillover navigate stigmatization and sanctions from multiple, powerful stakeholders and how their historical relationships influence their actions. The second study, located in the context of an organization that supports ex-offenders back into employment shows how relationships between staff and ex-offenders that may be established with the best of intentions can, over time, challenge and shape interactions between both groups of actors and lead to difficulties. Finally, in the third study, I theorize how organizations, through their members, can form relationships with stigmatized groups and how organizational members' backgrounds and experiences play into this.

*To my mother and father,
the kindest, most caring, and humblest people I know,
for their unconditional support.*

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In recent years, scholars in organizational and management research have taken an increasing interest in the concept of *social evaluations* and the role they play in society at large and in organizational contexts in particular (Pollock et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). This interest in social evaluations – characterized as actors’ socially constructed perceptions of others in terms of reputation, status, celebrity, legitimacy, or stigma (Devers et al., 2009) – is suggested to have been spurred by a range of different factors and developments, some of which stand out particularly prominently following Roulet (2020) and others:

Some have, for example, argued how the rapid digitalization of both our private and professional worlds has influenced the means by which actors – both individuals and organizations – interact and communicate with each other (Precht, 2018). This development is important for the study of social evaluations as the digitalization has enabled a much more rapid flow of both factual and fake information, meaning opinions and perceptions can spread and be consumed much more rapidly (McKee, Schalkwyk, & Stuckler, 2019). In other cases, scholars have become increasingly intrigued to study social evaluations given the emergence of many organizations that operate as platforms in which service providers and users interact directly. Such interactions often are followed by incentives to evaluate one another, which is further encouraged by the frequent anonymity these platforms provide to users (Wang, Wezel, & Forgues, 2016). With some already reckoning that we live in an “evaluation obsessed society” (Roulet, 2020: 5), the emergence of such new forms of interaction between actors has given rise to an increased presence and consumption of social evaluations across many domains. Further, it is suggested that social evaluations have become a growing area of scholarly interest – presumably driven by the exposing nature of the above-named influences – as society at large is increasingly being confronted with

topics around individual- and organizational-level transgressions, such as scandals (Jonsson, Greve, & Fujiwara-Greve, 2009), particularly in the context of often polarizing topics around social and environmental change. In terms of social evaluations, these events are important as they can elicit extremely differing opinions and shape actors' beliefs about and evaluations of those entities or similar others (Paruchuri, Pollock, & Kumar, 2019).

Taken together, more than ever it may seem that social evaluations – either by deploying them oneself, by consuming them, or by being their target – are a central part of life.

Because social evaluations have shown to be “sticky” (Phung et al., 2020: 1108) and last in the minds of audiences, social evaluations can have a substantial impact on how organizations and individuals operate and fare. Here, studies have shown how social evaluations can impact the actions and economic prospects of individuals or organizations (Pollock et al., 2019) by influencing others' willingness to engage with such actors (Rindova & Fombrun, 1999). For example, actors with a strong reputation for their capabilities may be able to garner substantial resources and thrive over time, while those with a low reputation for their capabilities may struggle and even falter under certain conditions (Park & Rogan, 2019). As such, while social evaluations can often lead to positive outcomes by elevating and individuating actors for their achievements or attributes (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019), social evaluations can also lead to the opposite: When groups in society interact around topics about which they have extremely diverging opinions, emotional attachments, or moral convictions, the deployment and experience of *negative social evaluations* – a term depicting “any assessment of an actor that has a negative valence” (Roulet, 2020: 10) – can often occur, which has garnered substantial scholarly attention over the last decade (Zhang et al., 2021).

Among the streams of research concerning negative social evaluations, which include constructs such as illegitimacy (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017) or a spoiled image (Sutton & Callahan, 1987), the topic of *stigma*, defined by Goffman (1963: 3) as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting”, has particularly stood out and has garnered a lot of scholarly interest. This is because stigma can be seen as the most extreme form of negative social evaluations, resulting from a profound moral disapproval by actors towards targets (Hampel & Tracey, 2019). As a result, this moral disapproval frequently leads to a highly pernicious impact on organizations or individuals that are its subject. It further has been shown to be very difficult to manage and reduce, given its substantial moral dimension, both by those organizations or individuals that experience it or by others that want to help (Pozner, 2008). What lies at the heart of this field of inquiry and what makes it different to other relevant constructs is that stigma is seen as a flaw that “deindividuates and discredits” targets (Devers et al., 2009: 155). As such, instead of making targets stand out as individual entities with certain positive and negative characteristics, stigma links targets to a negatively evaluated stereotyped category that then negatively overshadows all of a target’s attributes and actions, often leading them to experience substantial social and economic sanctions (Helms, Patterson, & Hudson, 2019).

In response to this, research on stigma within organization and management studies has focused on two broad streams of research. First, a substantial body of work has examined how the targets of stigma respond to the pressure of social audiences – i.e., those groups in society with a negative valence that take actions towards the targets of stigma (Kvale & Murdoch, 2021). In particular, this body of work has focused on how targets navigate the stigmatization and sanctioning by audiences and how targets can work to reduce their stigmatization, largely by changing audiences’ minds or appeasing audiences by conforming to their expectations (Vergne,

2012). For example, Hudson & Okhuysen (2009) examine how the operators of stigmatized bathhouses performed a range of practices that helped their organizations ‘hide away’ from and ‘shield’ against the negative evaluation of audiences. In essence, these organizational actors tried to reduce stigmatization by avoiding the stigmatizers. Relatedly, in the context of mixed martial arts practitioners and organizations, Helms & Patterson (2014) show how stigmatized actors leveraged the stigmatizing labels they were confronted with and coopted them to draw more attention to their practices and garner broader acceptance. Some scholars also demonstrate how targets can move from stigmatization to legitimacy, thereby completely overcoming the negative labeling they have previously experienced from audiences (Hampel & Tracey, 2017). Taken together, this body of work has been formative in providing insights into how targets, once labeled, vilified, and sanctioned, can reduce or even completely overcome their public stigmatization.

Second, increasingly researchers also examine the flipside of the above, namely how audiences decide to and then proceed to stigmatize and sanction targets in the first place. These studies are important as they draw our attention to the socially constructed nature of stigma. Rather than stigma being an inherent attribute of targets, it is a label that is created, attributed, and then levied onto groups in society. In this context, Wang, Raynard, and Greenwood (2021), for example, show how Traditional Chinese Medicine in China moved from a state of being a prestigious medical profession with broad societal approval to one that became increasingly criticized, attacked, and ultimately stigmatized. They delineate this complex process and examine how the stigma emerged over time. Relatedly, Ferns, Lambert, and Gunther (2021) move this conversation to the industry level by examining how activists within the global fossil fuel divestment movement worked to stigmatize the fossil fuel industry. In particular, they examine the role of analogies in the process of stigmatization. This line of work is important as it has opened up the theorization of the ‘front

end’ of stigmatization in that it provides insights into how stigma actually comes about, is applied to targets, and is made to stick.

However, regardless of the important insights we have gained from scholarly work to date on the efforts of the stigmatized to reduce or overcome their stigmatization or on the actions of the stigmatizers who aim to label and sanction targets, two things stand out in particular about the current status quo of the literature.

Firstly, studies examining the process of stigmatization or its management have largely done so by primarily focusing on either the audience or the targets. In other words, targets’ and audiences’ actions have frequently been studied in isolation. On the one hand, we are confronted with target-centered theorizing that focuses on targets’ actions and seeks to uncover how targets respond to stigmatization and sanctioning. Here, the audiences that work to label targets and the resulting stigmatization are often implicitly assumed. In particular, stigmatization is often demonstrated somewhat passively through referring to secondary accounts, often in the media (c.f., Vergne, 2012; Helms & Patterson, 2014). On the other hand, research that investigates the process of stigmatization and sanctioning does not pay specific attention to how targets experience, react, and respond to such pressures (c.f., Ferns, Lambert, & Gunther, 2021; Wang, Raynard, & Greenwood, 2021). As a result of this, which some scholars have characterized as focusing on “only one dancer in a duet, rather than looking at the synergies and interdependencies between the two dancers” (Mikolon, Kreiner, & Wieseke, 2016: 639), studies have seldomly paid attention to how direct interactions and relationships between both parties may motivate and influence specific actions and behaviors. Furthermore, when research has focused on social audiences and their role in stigmatizing and sanctioning targets, these audiences have often been characterized as a relatively large, unspecified collective (Shadnam, Crane, & Lawrence, 2020; Devers et al., 2009).

This realization has evoked substantial interest among scholars around the composition and characterization of social audiences (c.f., Devers & Mishina, 2019; Ashforth, 2019; Hampel & Tracey, 2019), without having yet focused empirically on the implications of considering a variety of audiences in the study of stigma. Again, this present focus on an audience as a large, homogenous entity rather than considering the presence and involvement of a range of different audiences with various interests and motivations has led the literature to date to not pay substantial attention to the direct and various relationships between audiences and targets and how such relationships may influence the actions they choose to engage in towards one another.

Secondly, while work has focused on how audiences stigmatize targets or how targets of stigma fight back (Lyons, Pek, & Wessel, 2017; Hampel & Tracey, 2017), increasingly research is exploring how some audiences may also work to support the targets of stigma (Goodstein, 2019; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). In these studies, interestingly, the interactions between audiences that want to provide help and support and the targets on the receiving end of these efforts are often implicitly taken for granted: interactions occur and helping and support is either successful or not (Lawrence, 2017; Claus & Tracey, 2020; Mair, Wolf, & Seelos, 2016). Yet, research – often from healthcare (Vogus & McClelland, 2020) and human service organization (Cherniss, 1980) contexts – indicates that how audiences are able to support targeted groups is less obvious and more complex than one might think. Many targeted groups have negative past experiences that prevent them from opening up to and trusting audiences, even those that openly convey that they want to help and support targets. This can mean that even with the best of intentions, targets might decline or hide away from well-meaning audiences, making it difficult for audiences and targets to build deep and generative relationships. As such, it seems that scholarship around stigma and related audiences that want to help targets could benefit from deeper insights into how interactions

actually come about in the first place and how relationships between both parties develop, evolve, and play out over time. In particular, it might be relevant to explore in more detail the challenges that may hinder interactions. If we do not develop new insight into these areas we risk oversimplifying the work that those audiences have to accomplish in order to support and interact with targets and may lead to misunderstandings about how actions such as advocacy or allyship for targets can occur in practice. It further may oversimplify our understanding of what it takes to build lasting relationships between both groups and what consequences, opportunities, but also challenges establishing relationships between audiences and targets may entail.

In sum, while much of the above-named research has been formative in the establishment and development of the field of studying stigmatization in and around organizations, this research also provides a number of important avenues for further investigation into stigma in organizational contexts. Specifically, considering the above argumentation, the literature to date has not examined in detail how targets' or audiences' interactions and crucially their relationships with one another may influence the process of stigmatization and sanctioning as well as responses to it, or how audiences are able to support targets. In other words, we know little about the drivers and motivations of specific actions and how, in particular, these are influenced by existing relationships between audiences and targets in the context of stigma. Increasingly, scholars have, however, called for more examination into how relationships shape and drive actions between audiences and targets (Lyons, Lynch, & Johnson, 2020; Greve et al., 2010). These calls appear particularly urgent if we consider the early foundations of scholarship on stigma in which Goffman (1963) pointed to how different audiences in society – the own, the wise, and the normal – may have varying relationships with the targets of stigma and that this may influence their behaviors and interactions in some shape or form. While this early work hinted at a potentially important relational dimension

between audiences and targets of stigma, to date, however, we still have little empirical insights in organizational and management theory into such relational view of stigma and what its consequence, for both audiences and targets, may be.

Without developing a more relational view of the process of stigmatization and its management, we might overlook important nuances of why or why not certain decision to stigmatize and sanction targets are taken, or how and why targets of stigma may respond in the specific ways they do. We might, for example, overlook the role of historical contestation between both groups and how this may shape actions. We might, further, not pay enough attention to how audience members' own personal experiences with the targets of stigma may shape their decisions to either sanction or support them. Finally, without exploring a relational view of stigma in detail, we may miss important insights into how audiences and targets can more effectively engage with one another to overcome their differences and bring about social change, or understand what the potential barriers, given their relationships, to this may be. As such, a more relationally-focused view of stigmatization and its management is likely to advance existing theory in important and interesting ways.

My dissertation takes on this challenge and contributes to building a more relational view of stigma. In the first study of the dissertation (Chapter 2), I examine how organizations struck by scandal and stigma spillover (Barnett & King, 2008) navigate stigmatization and sanctions from multiple, powerful stakeholders – so called 'social control agents' (Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010). In particular, I study both audiences and targets and their interactions simultaneously in the context of stigma and show how the varying historical relationships between social control agents and their targets influence how social control agents venture to stigmatize and sanction them and how, at the same time, targets choose to respond to social control agents given their historical

relationships. Although recent scholarly work has focused on how organizations can navigate scandal spillover by improving ensuing negative social evaluations, we know less about how they manage sanctions that threaten their ability to do their work and survive. Drawing on a longitudinal, inductive study of Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs) in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017 in the UK, I explore how these organizations were able to keep operating and serving their social housing residents despite experiencing an array of sanctions including the withholding of resources and support. Through the analysis of both multiple social control agents – residents’ groups, local governments, and central government – and multiple targets – different TMOs across the UK – simultaneously, I am able to address recent concerns in the literature around negative social evaluations that more insights are required into how the relationships between audiences and targets influence both parties’ actions (Helms, Patterson, & Hudson, 2019; Kvåle & Murdoch, 2021). In particular, I am able to show how different audiences sanction targets differently given varying historical relationships and capture the reactions and responses by targets to such sanctions. Surprisingly, I find that by actively managing resulting sanctions, TMOs emerged operationally and relationally stronger than they had been prior to the scandal. From this, I develop theory on how navigating sanctions following scandal spillover comprises social control work, through which targeted organizations strategically respond to and influence sanctions imposed by social control agents. I discuss implications of the theorizing for emerging scholarship on the potential positive consequences of scandals and their spillover, and for the need to consider responses to scandal spillover as delimited by historical relationships between targets and social control agents.

In Chapter 3, I develop insights into how organizations that work with stigmatized individuals on a daily basis convey and attempt to sustain compassion over time. Exploring the efforts of one

specific audience – the staff of a UK-based reentry organization that supports ex-offenders back into employment – I outline the daily struggles staff faces in their endeavor to help stigmatized targets achieve their goals. Interestingly, I find that the staff utilizes a set of behavioral approaches to convey compassion and build relationships, which, however, over the course of their casework creates challenges for them with individual ex-offenders, hampering their ability and willingness to continue treating them compassionately. This then triggers efforts by reentry staff to rebuild their ability to sustain compassion. As such, I show how relationships that are built between audiences and targets and that may be established with the best of intentions can, over time, challenge and shape interactions between both groups of actors in the context of stigma and lead to difficulties. Based on the analysis I develop theory on how compassion is a much more relational concept than has been previously suggested and further propose a more proactive view of compassion in organizational contexts. In so doing, this paper adds more depth to our understanding of how audiences interact with stigmatized targets: it shows that while often helpful such relationships and interactions can also become contested and then examines the means by which audiences work to sustain their efforts, even in the face of adversity.

In Chapter 4, a conceptual piece, I then move to develop insights into how organizations, through their members, can form relationships with stigmatized groups. Although stigmatized groups can be central stakeholders that organizations want to connect to and interact with, for normative, instrumental, or social reasons, prior research has shown that this can be notoriously difficult to accomplish (Dwertmann et al., 2021; Kulik, Bainbridge & Cregan, 2008). As such, in this paper, I depart from an existing focus in organizational scholarship on the strategies through which organizations attempt to publicly destigmatize and garner acceptance for stigmatized groups and their attributes in broader society (Hampel & Tracey, 2017) and, to the contrary, theorize how

they can form positive relationships with stigmatized groups and in doing so garner acceptance from those stigmatized groups they seek to interact with. To theorize this, I extend Goffman's (1963) observation that actors vary in their capacity to relate to the stigmatized depending on their social positions. I build upon this argument to unpack the role of stigma-interactional scripts – schematic patterns for navigating interactions around targeted individuals' stigmatized attributes. Based upon combinations of stigma-interactional scripts internalized by organizational members based on their backgrounds and past experiences, I propose a typology of six stigma-relational identities for how organizational members relate to stigmatized groups. Subsequently, I put forward a model of relational stigma management, theorizing how stigma-relational identities provide organizational members with linguistic and behavioral guidelines to navigate diverse stigma identity management strategies deployed by targets. While existing theory on stigma management has focused upon how the stigmatized gain acceptance, this paper flips this perspective and extends theory by building relationship-centered theory on whether and how external organizations, thorough their members, can garner acceptance from those groups they seek to interact with.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the last part of the dissertation, I provide a general conclusion, particularly highlighting a range of future research directions for scholars of negative social evaluations or those that are interested in studying stigmatized populations in general. I conclude with some relevant thoughts for practitioners. Overall, it is thus hoped that this dissertation may not only lead scholars of negative social evaluations to view aspects around stigma and its relational dimension in new ways but that the insights I develop may also offer value to those in society who work on such topics and engage in such often challenging contexts on a daily basis.

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Chapter 2 – Persisting and thriving through social control work: Navigating scandal spillover in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy

ABSTRACT

We examine how organizations struck by scandal spillover navigate sanctions imposed by multiple, powerful stakeholders – social control agents. Despite considerable attention to how organizations deal with scandal spillover by improving ensuing negative social evaluations, we know less about how they manage sanctions that threaten their ability to do their work and survive. Through a longitudinal, inductive study of Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs) in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, we explore how these organizations were able to keep operating and serving their clients – social housing residents – despite experiencing an array of sanctions including the withholding of resources and support by residents themselves, local governments, and central government. Surprisingly, by actively managing these sanctions, TMOs emerged operationally and relationally stronger than they had been prior to the scandal. We develop theory on how navigating sanctions following scandal spillover comprises *social control work*, through which targeted organizations strategically respond to and influence sanctions imposed by social control agents. We discuss implications of our theorizing for emerging scholarship on the potential positive consequences of scandals and their spillover, and for the need to consider responses to scandal spillover as delimited by historical relationships between targets and social control agents.

INTRODUCTION

On June 14th, 2017 a fire broke out at Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey tower block in London, managed by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organization (KCTMO). Housing roughly 500 residents across 120 flats, Grenfell Tower had recently been re-cladded with a material that was highly flammable. As a result, a small fire sparked by a kitchen appliance on the 4th floor spread rapidly through the tower. 72 people lost their lives and many more were injured (Tucker, 2018). KCTMO was vilified in the media, and by former employees, residents, and housing experts who called attention to negligence and poor management on the estate, which, in their minds, had contributed to the tragedy (Grenfell Action Group, 2017).

Rather than being contained, the scandal around KCTMO spilled over onto the entire UK Tenant Management Organization (TMO) sector, comprising 200 social housing organizations in which residents themselves manage their own estates, setting them apart from most social housing, which is managed by local governments. TMOs were labelled and negatively evaluated by many as ‘dangerous’ and ‘run by amateurs’, and a sector few had previously heard of was now being called into question. We might expect organizations targeted and labelled in this manner to work to reduce such negative social evaluations to be perceived favorably again (Helms, Patterson, & Hudson, 2019; Desai, 2011). However, rather than responding to the negative social evaluations that challenged their organizations and their entire sector, TMOs took a different approach. They, instead, chose to fight the subsequent organizational sanctions that were imposed on them.

Scandals – publicized acts of misconduct that run counter to social norms (Adut, 2005) – and their spillover are typically regarded as harmful for organizations caught up in them (Frooman, 1997; Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, & Scully, 2010; Paruchuri & Misangyi, 2015). Significant scholarly attention has focused on how targeted organizations in such situations react and respond to the negative social evaluations inflicted upon them (Desai, 2011; Jonsson, Greve, & Fujiwara-

Greve, 2009; Barnett & King, 2008). However, to date, we have limited insight into how these organizations may manage the harmful sanctions that often follow negative social evaluations and threaten organizations' abilities to do their work (Devers, Dewett, Mishina, & Belsito, 2009). Understanding this is important, as many organizations may find it undesirable or difficult to respond directly to negative social evaluations, for they might wish to stay true to their practices and preserve who they are in order to serve their clientele, rather than simply comply with stakeholders' expectations (Helms et al., 2019). Further, some organizations may accept that their work may never win broad approval (Slade Shantz, Fischer, Liu, & Lévesque, 2019) and that trying to manage negative social evaluations may even backfire (Barnett & King, 2008). Nonetheless, these organizations must still overcome the detrimental consequences of scandal spillover and, to keep pursuing their purpose, will need to secure resources and support from key stakeholders who seek to sanction them (Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010).

Taken together, the challenges faced by TMOs in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy led us to consider the research question: *How do organizations navigate imposed sanctions following scandal spillover, and with what consequences?*

To address this question, we conducted a qualitative study drawing on interviews with TMOs and other experts in UK social housing, observations of TMO events and conferences, and archival materials. We found that TMOs focused on responding in varied ways to sanctions imposed by different key stakeholders – their residents, local governments, and central government. Regarding these stakeholders as *social control agents* (Dewan & Jensen, 2020; Greve, et al., 2010), actors who have the authority to enforce rules, apply sanctions, and adjudicate misconduct, we build theory on the *social control work* that targets of scandal spillover perform. Social control work describes targets' strategic eradication, reduction, or constructive accommodation of sanctions

imposed by social control agents. It involves both *working with* sanctions – accepting them but creating substitute opportunities or co-opting them to advance targets’ own agendas – and *working on* sanctions – reducing or eradicating them by dissolving their basis through reframing or negotiating with social control agents.

Our findings demonstrate that beyond navigating the specific sanctions themselves, social control work may lead targeted organizations to emerge operationally (e.g., through improved access to novel resources or monitoring mechanisms) and relationally (e.g., through reconfigured interactions with social control agents) stronger than they are prior to a scandal. Further, we find that the choice to work with or work on sanctions is informed by targeted organizations’ historical relationships with social control agents. Interestingly, in navigating sanctions, these varying historical relationships further influence how targeted organizations articulate, leverage, or extend their own identities as part of these efforts, enabling them to become truer to their own ideals, rather than accepting others’ evaluations and conforming to their critiques.

We discuss implications of our findings and theory development on social control work for understanding the outcomes of scandal spillover and more broadly for how targeted organizations can persist and even thrive without directly managing negative social evaluations. In so doing, we also extend scholarship that has begun to explore how scandals can yield positive outcomes (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short, & Coombs, 2017). While competitors of a targeted organization may unexpectedly, yet somewhat passively, benefit from scandals (Paruchuri, Pollock, & Kumar, 2019; Piazza & Jourdan, 2019), our work shows how peers of a targeted organization can actively manage scandal spillover to ultimately emerge advantageously. Finally, we call for further attention to how historical relationships delimit organizational action (Hatch & Schultz, 2017) to deepen our understanding of the context for and outcomes of social control work.

SCANDALS, SPILLOVERS, AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

A scandal is defined as a publicized instance of transgression that runs counter to social norms (Adut, 2005). One of its central characteristics is the ability to taint others, in particular “those associated personally, institutionally, or even categorically with the suspect” (Adut, 2008: 24). Crucially, there need not be a direct link for a scandal to spill over. Spillover may result simply from perceived similar features between transgressing organizations and others (Piazza & Jourdan, 2019). For example, an accident by one chemical manufacturer can spill over and taint stakeholders’ evaluations of other chemical companies (Barnett & King, 2008; Howard, Nash, & Ehrenfeld, 2000). The mechanisms that facilitate spillover are generalization and association of culpability, through which actors identified as similar become suspects themselves (Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, & Shapiro, 2012; Jonsson et al., 2009). Hence, when an organization is judged to have committed misconduct, which is then publicized and regarded as a scandal, audiences may conclude that similar organizations are likely to have committed or may commit similar actions.

Scandal spillover has received increasing attention as the labelling of innocent others leads to negative repercussions (Paruchuri & Misangyi, 2015), including relational and resource-provision consequences (Helms et al., 2019; Hudson, 2008), and in some cases even threatens the survival of organizations (Roulet & Pichler, 2020). Scholars have explored how scandals come about (Greve et al., 2010), how they spread (Jonsson et al., 2009), their consequences (Jensen, 2006), and how organizations subject to spillover respond publicly (Desai, 2011).

In this work, a central focus has been on how organizations manage, and ideally maintain or regain, their *social evaluations* – such as legitimacy or reputation – in a scandal’s aftermath. For example, Desai (2011) examines how accidents by specific railroad operators spilled over to challenge the entire sector’s legitimacy, and how these organizations worked to regain their legitimacy. Focusing on discursive strategies directed at key stakeholders, such as press releases

aimed at customers, Desai finds that organizations most similar to the accident-stricken ones issue more press releases containing statements that highlight the safety of rail transportation in general, or that place blame for accidents on others. Comyns and Franklin-Johnson (2018) examine the case of the Rana Plaza garment factory fire which resulted in over 1,000 deaths and many more injuries and show how similar organizations adopted defensive or accommodative communication strategies to re-establish their reputations. These studies show how organizations experiencing scandal spillover use various strategies to restore their social evaluations among stakeholders.

While such studies have been formative in understanding the aftermath and management of scandal spillover, there are two important unexamined tensions in the literature. First, inherent in most studies to date is an assumption that one of targeted organizations' most pressing concerns is to actively fight and reduce negative social evaluations and regain their standing among evaluating stakeholders (Sims, 2009). Implicit in this is the idea that there is a valuable and desirable pre-scandal status quo in terms of stakeholders' social evaluations (Pfarrer, DeCelles, Smith, & Taylor, 2008), which provides an aim for targets to move back to. These pre-scandal social evaluations might influence how organizations attempt to restore their standing – for example, by engaging the media (Zavyalova et al., 2012; Desai, 2011) or by quietly waiting for the scandal to pass (Barnett & King, 2008). However, for some organizations these approaches may be neither viable, as there may be no clear and more positively evaluated pre-scandal status quo to return to, nor desirable, as such organizations may not want to conform to stakeholders' expectations, win their approval, and 'fit in' at all cost (Helms et al., 2019). For example, organizations operating drug injection sites may, given their contested nature and mixed social evaluations by diverse audiences (Lawrence, 2017), choose not to manage social evaluations in the aftermath of a scandal and its spillover and instead manage stakeholder relationships to maintain access to vital resources in

order to continue to serve their vulnerable clientele. As such, attempting to manage social evaluations may not always be considered viable or worthwhile by targets of scandal spillover.

A second tension unexplored in the literature is that, as suggested, scandal spillover involves a range of audiences that have varying degrees of involvement and influence in adjudicating its nature and evaluating responses (Desai, 2011; Barnett & King, 2008). Whether a scandal spillover leads to negative consequences (or can even yield advantageous outcomes) may depend in significant ways on how targets directly interact with these varied audiences. Not all of them hold equal influence over targets, as this is shaped through their resource dependencies, their authority to impose or enforce sanctions, and their ability to have a legitimate voice in challenging them (Dewan & Jensen, 2020). It is therefore important to focus on examining how targets of scandal spillover respond to and interact directly with their specific, diverse audiences – something that has recently been called for, but not yet fully explored (cf. Helms et al., 2019). In particular, understanding how targets work to manage multiple, influential audiences and the varied sanctions they impose requires scholarly attention (Devers et al., 2009). To examine such interactions, we draw on the literature of social control (Simpson, 2002; Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997) and adopt Greve et al.'s (2010) conceptualization of audiences that evaluate and have the power to punish organizations as *social control agents*.

Social Control Agents and the Sanctioning of Targets

Through the concept of social control the literature on scandals and misconduct has moved beyond the simplification of there being an obvious and easily recognizable boundary between what constitutes good conduct and misconduct in organizational life, and toward a view that certain actors considerably influence such evaluations. *Social control agents* are such actors who have the authority and position to label and sanction targeted organizations for perceived transgressions (Dewan & Jensen, 2020; Koch-Bayram & Wernicke, 2018). They represent the interests of a

broader community and have the capacity to monitor and enforce targets' behaviors. In other words, social control agents are the "line-drawers, monitors, and enforcers to which organizations must, from a practical standpoint, pay the most attention" (Greve et al., 2010: 79).

Examples of social control agents traditionally include governments or professional associations and targets are often evaluated by a number of them simultaneously. Social control agents can move the line demarcating acceptable from unacceptable behavior and its consequences through imposing new laws or changing the enforcement of existing ones. Beyond legal actions, they also impose other punitive sanctions on organizations to dissuade and punish misconduct. Because they can enforce actions towards actual or perceived transgressors, social control agents are important in the context of scandal spillover. They differ from other, broader stakeholder groups such as the media, which can draw attention to events without being in a position to sanction potential transgressors directly (Greve et al., 2010).

The literature to date has mostly examined either the nature of social control agents – *who they are* – or the actions they take – *what they do* (Dewan & Jensen, 2020; Greve et al., 2010). We know little about the other side of the coin: how do the *targets* who are sanctioned by social control agents react and respond to them? In particular, we have little understanding of how organizations may interact with social control agents directly to lessen or overcome sanctions or even develop more advantageous outcomes for themselves. While for social control agents sanctions are useful tools to enforce behavior or even advance their own interests, organizations subject to sanctions typically suffer (Devers et al., 2009). Thus, understanding how targets attempt to navigate sanctions is important, especially as organizational sanctions in the aftermath of scandals are themselves under-researched (Helms et al., 2019). Further, this would answer the call to examine interactions between social control agents and targets more directly (Greve et al., 2010).

In sum, understanding how targets of scandal spillover respond to varied audiences, who act as social control agents, deserves further study. In particular, it is important to understand the ways in which targets navigate the tangible sanctions to which they are subjected, in order to more fully understand the range of potential responses to scandal spillover, and redress the disproportionate emphasis on how targets fight negative social evaluations.

EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

Tenant Management Organizations in the United Kingdom

The establishment of Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs) in the UK was the result of a long political process, kindled by the dire living conditions of social housing residents in the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the Right to Manage Act of 1994. This established that all residents living on social housing estates with more than 25 dwellings had the right to manage their own properties through a TMO, with local governments remaining the landlords and property owners. Once established, the continuation of a TMO relies on support via resident ballots held at regular intervals, producing ongoing pressure for TMOs to perform at a high level and maintain residents' satisfaction, or risk reverting to local government management.

Today, the UK is home to about 200 TMOs, each managing between 25 and 2,000 properties resulting in 80,000-100,000 dwellings under TMO management. TMOs are governed by a board of eight to 12 volunteering residents, who are legally responsible for the strategic direction of their estate. In most cases, TMOs employ between two and 15 full-time professionals, such as estate directors, finance managers, housing officers, or customer service managers who take care of day-to-day operations. Staff and operational costs are remunerated from the funds provided by their local governments and based on the number of properties managed. Consequently, TMO budgets vary from a few hundred thousand to a few million GBP (£) per year. Because TMOs have proven to be more responsive to residents' requests, given the proximity of staff as well as funds at their

direct disposal, surveys show that residents' satisfaction with TMOs has historically been higher than that with local government-managed estates (e.g., 81% vs. 73%; Islington Council, 2013).

However, at the same time, TMOs' relationships to and interactions with some of their direct stakeholder groups have historically been difficult. As the number and size of TMOs grew, their relationships with, in particular, their local governments often deteriorated. This was the result of local governments seeing TMO board members as amateurs and incapable of running multi-million GBP (£) housing estates. In some cases, this relationship was further driven by envy on the side of local governments, given TMOs' high performance ratings. In other cases, it was a result of practical concerns that TMOs were a nuisance, taking control and resources away from local governments' jurisdiction and budgets. Some TMO managers and board members have even been accused of misappropriating funds to pay themselves or investing in projects that benefitted certain board members rather than all residents.

The Grenfell Tower Scandal and its Spillover onto the TMO Sector

The Grenfell Tower tragedy generated immediate antipathy from many sides towards the TMO responsible for the tower block, KCTMO. Particularly the media, but also former employees, social housing residents, and housing experts spoke out on different aspects of how badly KCTMO had managed the estate and how negligently they had responded to residents' fire and safety concerns (Grenfell Action Group, 2017). The tragedy dominated various audiences' perceptions of and discourse around KCTMO, resulting in increasingly stark criticism. Media portrayals focused on the apparent ineptitude of KCTMO to manage the estate (Roberts, 2017). Housing experts pointed out that higher quality cladding could have been purchased preventing the spread of the fire for a mere £2 extra per square meter, but that management neglected this (Mendick, 2017). As trust in KCTMO's ability to continue to run the housing estate eroded, it was handed back to Kensington and Chelsea local government (The Guardian, 2017).

Rather than the scandal around KCTMO being contained, however, it spilled over onto the TMO sector. Messages about TMOs being generally dangerous and incompetent were propagated by the media and others, including three key stakeholder groups – first local residents’ groups and local governments and later the UK central government – who, beyond drawing attention to them, sanctioned TMOs, arising from a complex combination of their fear of similar transgressions, their historical relationships with TMOs, and their influence. For innocent TMOs across the UK, these new sanctions posed a major threat to their near-term and longer-term survival.

METHODOLOGY

Data sources

To address our research question and generate a detailed understanding of how TMOs navigated sanctions in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, we collected data from three sources – interviews, observations, and archival documents. Our data sources and their uses are summarized in Table 1, and Figure 1 shows our data collection timeline.

--- Insert Table 1 & Figure 1 here ---

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary data source and were collected by the first author between August 2017 and July 2019, commencing six weeks after the incident. In total, we conducted 75 formal interviews across two samples through a combination of purposive and theoretical sampling. Our first sample consisted of 53 interviews with individuals who worked or lived within TMOs across the UK. We initially approached TMOs in Greater London that we had identified via the website of the National Federation of TMOs (NFTMO), in local government databases, or in media outlets (such as regional newspapers) and that seemed to have similar features to KCTMO (e.g., types of building, type of layout). We started our interviews in Greater London as this was where the Grenfell Tower tragedy had occurred and is the region with the highest concentration of TMOs in the UK, suggesting that the tragedy would be a topic

of immediate concern. To obtain a balanced understanding of the reactions and responses in the TMO sector, we then interviewed in other regions with substantial TMO presence such as Central, North, and North-West England, and Scotland. To allow for a wide range of views and to let the voices of central and more marginal actors emerge, this sample included TMO managers, staff members, and residents (some of whom were TMO board members), who had been involved with TMOs between one and 18 years. This sample also included six interviews with former employees of KCTMO to help us gain a deeper understanding of how they perceived the tragedy and its implications for the TMO sector.

Our second sample consisted of 23 interviews with stakeholders who had strong ties to the TMO sector, provided services to it, or sanctioned it. Interviewees were approached based on publications on TMOs and media reports after the tragedy and included local government housing representatives, central government housing officials, social housing consultants, and social housing academics. To keep updated on developments in the TMO sector over time and to clarify additional questions that emerged in our writing and review process, we engaged in nine informal interviews with previous interviewees in 2020 and 2021.

Interviews were conducted until no new themes emerged, suggesting theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). Our interview guide contained questions about the development of the TMO sector, TMOs' relationships to their stakeholders, responses of stakeholders and TMOs in general and to one another after the tragedy, and implications of the tragedy for the TMO sector. Interviews were held face-to-face or via phone or skype and lasted from 30 minutes to 180 minutes. Most interviews were audio recorded and transcribed resulting in about 50 hours of audio and 732 pages of single-spaced text. When participants did not wish to be recorded given the sensitivity of the topic the interviewer took detailed notes to capture the content.

Observations. We conducted observations to encounter first-hand how TMO management, staff, board members, residents, and other stakeholders interacted in more formal settings in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy and to witness the discourse they engaged in with regard to it. The first author attended two annual meetings at two London-based TMOs, two three-day annual conferences of the NFTMO held in June 2018 and June 2019, and a consulting event in which TMOs came together to draw up official responses to the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Reflecting on our “position in the field” (Pratt, 2009: 859), at meetings participants were informed about the presence of the researcher and that he was particularly interested in studying TMOs and their experiences of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. This was generally received with a lot of curiosity and interest, and people signaled that they would be willing to help, particularly because, as we were told, outsiders did not often take a genuine interest in TMOs and their work. At the two NFTMO annual conferences, the researcher was registered as an ‘official participant researcher’ which gave access to all aspects of the conferences, including gala dinners where he engaged in informal conversations with participants. He wore a name tag disclosing information about his university affiliation and his role, which seemed to welcome interactions. Again, exchanges at the conference indicated a genuine interest of individuals to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their own TMOs, the sector’s development, and the tragic incident at Grenfell Tower. Field notes capturing observations and conversations during these events were typed up within 24 hours.

Archival Data. We corroborated our primary data with secondary sources. We obtained internal TMO documents including annual reports, strategy plans, and newsletters that had been sent out after the Grenfell Tower tragedy to further expand our insights into the experiences and responses of TMOs. We examined local government documents, a government report (Cairncross et al., 2002) that contained details on TMOs’ performance ratings, and two recent government

policy reports (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2018 & 2020) to put interview responses into context. To develop our broader understanding of the TMO sector and its history, we drew on books recommended to us by interviewees. In addition, media coverage was reviewed to provide up-to-date insights into the Grenfell Tower tragedy. To do so, we used keyword searches in Factiva (for terms such as “Grenfell”, “Tenant Management”, or “TMOs”) and directly consulted relevant British news outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The Times*. We also reviewed specialist sector-focused magazines, such as *Inside Housing*, and viewed and selectively transcribed relevant TV interviews and reports.

Data analysis

We analyzed our data following established methods in inductive, qualitative research in the tradition of grounded theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Glaser & Strauss 1967). As such, our analysis commenced in the data collection phase during which both authors met regularly to review incipient observations and explore how these related to the literature. It became clear early on that TMOs seemed reluctant to speak out publicly in defense of themselves or their sector, despite being broadly vilified and subjected to negative social evaluations that spilled over from the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Yet, TMOs were far from complacent and were very concerned about their interactions with key stakeholder groups and the actions these groups were taking.

Driven to deepen our understanding of these interactions and the motivations behind them (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008), we returned to the field to interview a range of new informants from TMOs of different sizes and locations and re-interviewed others. We began to see that the historical relationships TMOs held with key stakeholders seemed to inform how they responded to them and sought to understand this better. To ground our understanding of the historical evolution of the TMO sector and its interactions with various stakeholders, we wrote a 35-page chronological case narrative (Langley, 1999), which covered a period starting at the end

of the 19th century, when government provision of social housing began in the UK, and ending in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The case narrative drew primarily on seminal books and reports on TMOs and was supported by insights from our informants, particularly social housing consultants and academics. This case narrative was an important point of reference for our further analysis as it helped us understand a range of issues in the TMO sector – such as their legal frameworks, the social challenges they sought to address, and the practical challenges of their governance – as well as how they had been historically regarded by their stakeholders.

As it typical for inductive, qualitative analysis, our coding, supported by Atlas.ti software, proceeded over several rounds as we honed our analytical focus. Early rounds of coding initially paid attention to how TMOs and other actors made sense of and acted in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. To pursue our hunch that different stakeholder groups were attended to differently, we performed further coding to better capture specific stakeholders, their evaluations of TMOs, actions towards them, and TMOs' responses.

Initially this analysis yielded six main stakeholders – TMO residents' groups, local governments, central government, the media, other social housing providers, and other social housing residents' groups. The latter three were, however, infrequently mentioned, not perceived by informants to have immediate influence on TMOs, or not seen to have the ability to challenge TMOs' persistence and survival. As we progressed in our analysis, we thus focused on residents' groups, local governments, and central government in detail.

To surface TMOs' relationships with these key groups, we coded for sanctions imposed by them, TMOs' reactions and responses to these, and informants' understandings of how these responses influenced the sanctions, outcomes, and/or stakeholder relationships. For example, for residents' groups, statements such as "Residents have become quite distant. Usually there was

some level of involvement, them coming to meetings, voting. But now we've heard them say that they can't trust us anymore...and they're stepping away from being involved" (Iv40, S) were coded as *residents' sanctions – breaking ties*. Similarly, statements such as "We've worked with our residents and we've made them see more clearly how we [as TMO] are on their side" (Iv23, S) were coded as *response to residents – reframing*.

After coding for each stakeholder group in this manner, we discussed potential patterns in the sanctions imposed, responses they generated, and/or outcomes that appeared to be associated. We used tables and figures to capture and consider potential patterns by stakeholder, by type of sanction, and by outcome. Through this effort we continuously revisited the coded data and began to discern broader categories of sanctions. For example, while residents engaged in breaking ties with their TMOs by not coming to meetings or ceasing to serve on the board, central government – through different specific actions – also sought to distance themselves from the TMO sector. We collapsed these into a single type of sanction labelled *relational distancing*. Similarly, we grouped the other sanctions into broader types that we labelled *imposing requirements* and *withholding resources*. The three key stakeholders used various combinations of these when sanctioning TMOs, but TMOs' responses were not uniform by sanction.

We then considered these patterns, and the data on how TMOs had historically related to their stakeholder groups, to arrive at explanations for the specific sanctions, responses, and outcomes. Overall, we found that TMOs' active management of varied sanctions comprised both *working with* and *working on* sanctions: *working with* characterized responses in which the sanctions were kept in place but constructively accommodated to or coopted by targeted organizations; *working on* characterized responses through which the sanctions themselves were influenced and altered by targeted organizations. We saw that different combinations of these two approaches enabled

TMOs to address the sanctions and, beyond that, advantageously influence operational outcomes and recast their relationships with their social control agents. We labelled this overall process *social control work* and developed a model – first grounded in the detailed interactions of TMOs with each social control agent (Figure 2 in the Findings) and then rendered in more transferable terms (Figure 3 in the Discussion) – that captures how social control work is informed by targets’ historical relationships with social control agents, and how it leads to changes in sanctions and operational and relational conditions.

FINDINGS

When they experienced scandal spillover following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, contrary to the prevailing assumptions that targets engage to manage negative social evaluations or simply comply with demands of social control agents, TMOs exercised a range of strategic responses to the tangible sanctions levied on them. The sanctions imposed by three influential stakeholders – social control agents – coalesced around three forms: imposing requirements, withholding resources, and relational distancing. Importantly, the nature of the sanction did not entirely shape TMOs’ responses, which reflected TMOs’ historical relationships with each social control agent.

We found that TMOs engaged in *social control work*, which served to eradicate, reduce, or constructively accommodate the sanctions imposed by the various social control agents. Social control work involved both *working with* sanctions – accepting them but creating substitute opportunities or co-opting them to advance their own agendas – and *working on* sanctions – reducing or eradicating them by dissolving their basis through reframing or negotiating with social control agents. Specifically, TMOs responded to residents, with whom they had ambivalent historical relationships, by *working on* the sanctions imposed and reframing their work to convey the distinct purpose of TMOs. For local governments, with whom TMOs had historical relationships of animosity, sanctions were met by *working with* some by generating alternatives

and *working on* others by negotiating. For central government, with whom TMOs had a historical relationship of approval, the same types of sanctions were met by *working on* some through reframing and *working with* others through co-opting and generating alternatives.

In turn, distinct responses yielded different advantageous outcomes not only in terms of the sanctions themselves (i.e., an eradication, reduction, or constructive accommodation of them) but also for TMOs' operations (e.g., through improved access to novel resources or monitoring mechanisms) and TMOs' relationships with their social control agents (e.g., through reconfigured interactions and relationships with social control agents). Responding to sanctions entailed targeted organizations articulating, leveraging, or extending their own identities, enabling them to become truer to themselves. In sum, social control work led TMOs, individually and collectively, to emerge stronger from the experience of scandal spillover. Figure 2 summarizes and guides our account of the findings.

--- Insert Figure 2 here ---

Sanctioning, Responses, & Outcomes: Residents' groups

Two groups of social control agents began to sanction TMOs immediately after the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The first were local *residents' groups*, made up of those who lived in TMOs. Despite historically high levels of satisfaction with TMOs, many residents were not fully aware of how TMOs were different from other forms of social housing, including what tasks they were responsible for. This was due in part to many residents having “never lived on any other social housing estate before joining a TMO and therefore [not] seeing the differences” (Iv22, S)¹, and many not being interested in getting involved “as long as everything runs smoothly” (Iv14, M).

¹ We use the following abbreviations to identify interviewees: TMO managers (M), staff (S), board members (B), non-board member residents (R), former employees of KCTMO (FKC), experts (E) including consultants or academics, and government officials (G).

Historical ambivalence in the relationship between residents and TMOs influenced the sanctions imposed and responses to them.

Nature of sanctions imposed. Startled by the Grenfell Tower tragedy, many residents' groups began to *relationally distance* themselves from their TMOs by breaking ties between themselves and TMO management. Residents either made conscious decisions to leave their TMO's governing boards or withheld their previous ambitions of joining a board – thus diminishing interactions. Some also withdrew from attending important meetings and events. Often, this sanction was the result of an emerging lack of trust in their TMO's leadership and fear of being held responsible for potential mishaps in the future. One board member reflecting the sentiment of many remarked:

I am not going to put my neck on the line until the TMO can show that nothing like Grenfell is ever going to happen here. (...) They'll have to do without me until then. (Iv29, B)

This breaking of relational ties resulted in substantial challenges for TMOs as the essence of the organizational form relied on a strong cooperation between TMO management and residents. In particular, a fully functioning board with resident representation is legally required for a TMO to operate. Engaging with and responding to sanctioning by local residents' groups was therefore vital as residents had the power to influence the future of their TMOs.

Responding to residents' groups' sanctions. TMOs feared losing their residents as central supporters if they did not respond to their sanction of *relational distancing*. They thus started to *work on* the sanction by attempting to dissolve its basis through reframing efforts, showing that the assumptions on which residents based their sanctioning were faulty. They did this through a deliberate narrative emphasizing that TMOs existed for the sole purpose of making residents' lives better and thus could be trusted, and that if the sanctions were upheld, TMOs could not continue with that mission. TMOs offered examples of the often life-changing advantages of living on a TMO estate for residents, and the attention they were given, and contrasted their work to that of

other housing providers. This approach acknowledged that residents had historically often been uninterested in or uneducated about the housing model.

TMOs worked to articulate who they were and where they had come from, directing these messages to their residents. For example, some TMOs gave presentations to residents on the historical development of their estates to point out specifics about their layout, design, and size, and contrast these to other housing estates. Others highlighted in town hall meetings how TMOs were more proactive and accountable than other forms of social housing run by local governments due to their ability to take decisions on local issues immediately:

[TMOs] are in a much better position to deal with challenges than [local governments]. That's because we can manage the information flow much more directly. ... The staff are on the ground. The residents are there. Both can work things out together and don't have to go through a call center that is miles away like local housing associations would ask you to. (Iv27, E)

Further, TMOs highlighted how they provided much better value for their residents due to their flexible allocation of financial resources and their ability to save any surpluses:

Most [local governments] ... are not responsive to the needs of residents. But we deliver things residents want. We've got surpluses and the residents wanted a CCTV for the estate (...) and if the residents want it, they get it. (Iv19, M)

TMOs also showcased their focus on providing social value to residents, through organized events, planned excursions, and youth clubs. One TMO manager noted:

TMOs ... are all about ... the tenants, making their lives better. We deal with any kinds of issues. If people want to talk, if they need to be reminded of their medicine, we are there. [And this is] completely different to [KCTMO]. I always tell our staff and residents, we are how a TMO is supposed to be...local, inward looking. (Iv49, M)

Finally, TMOs leveraged their broader sector to help communicate their ethos to residents and assure them of the quality of their estate's management. This involved moving beyond a very "inward-looking and insular perspective" (Iv42, FKC) that had historically been focused on local

needs. By involving others, such as representatives of the NFTMO, individual TMOs added weight to their own efforts to dissolve the basis for the relational distancing sanction imposed by residents:

We go and talk to residents. They look at their TMOs on a very local level, but we bring with us the national perspective. So, talking about their performance in relationship to the national performance of TMOs and seeing how that compares with other social housing providers at the local and national level is very important. (Iv55, B and NFTMO member)

Outcomes of sanction navigation. Through their social control work that focused on engaging with both the content of the sanction and the social control agent itself, TMOs were ultimately able to convince residents to reduce the sanction of relational distancing. This, in turn, enabled ongoing and improved access to and collaborations with the residents' groups, often – through working on the sanction through reframing – achieving tenant involvement that exceeded pre-scandal levels. Many residents, for the first time in years, understood the nuances of how their TMO worked, how it was performing, and how it differed from other forms of social housing. TMOs' efforts enabled them to generate real recognition among residents of the practical value TMOs had for their lives, and the need for ongoing support and collaboration to maintain this service and relationship:

It's got a lot to do with how we communicated and how we've approached the aftermath of Grenfell, and how we've engaged with residents. Obviously, it's good for us because it means that more people are learning, understanding, sharing. (Iv70, B)

Finally, this form of social control work, which in this case involved an explicit articulation of TMOs' identities, deepened TMOs relationships with this social control agent:

[We've] experienced a resurgence of people appreciating the good work we do. Through our work more residents are realizing the benefits. The Grenfell fire, as bad as it was, has woken people up [to] what a TMO means, what [a] TMO is...and they are realizing that we are a much better alternative. (Iv58, M)

As strange as it may sound, Grenfell has been a way to get us to clarify who really makes decisions and how we as a TMO really work. (Iv34, M)

Sanctioning, Responses, & Outcomes: Local governments

The second group of social control agents to engage directly with TMOs were *local governments*. Despite some variation, TMOs reported that their relationships with local government had historically been very challenging. TMOs often felt that local governments viewed them as being managed by a “bunch of amateurs meddling in stuff that they don’t really understand (...), taking advantage of the system, [and] feather[ing] their own nests” (Iv37, M). Other accounts suggest that local governments saw TMOs as “competitors who [were] taking control and resources away” (Iv29, B) and disdained the additional workload TMOs posed. Some felt that local governments envied TMOs, given their higher resident satisfaction ratings (e.g., Islington Council, 2013; Cairncross et al., 2002). These sources of historical animosity significantly contributed to how local governments sanctioned TMOs post Grenfell Tower:

For [local governments], Grenfell Tower confirms what they thought before, that you can’t trust TMOs, and that has encouraged them to go out and ‘grind some necks’ and take an axe to a number of TMOs, where previously, they didn’t have any justification to do so. (Iv37, M)

Nature of sanctions imposed. Unlike in the case of residents, the first sanction local governments often imposed focused on *withholding resources*. In some cases, they stopped paying out the funds TMOs needed to continue their services, in other cases they paid out significantly less than had been agreed, and in some cases they “misrepresented the guidelines and used that to reduce what they had to pay out” (Iv45, M). These sanctions seemed motivated by a desire to signal control over TMOs and a felt need to punish TMOs for old grievances by showing them “who was in charge” and making their “lives more difficult” (Iv31, B). As one TMO consultant summarized the situation:

[TMOs] get funding that goes away from the [local governments’] housing revenue account, so there is a clear conflict of interest. You hear many people within the [local government] housing department quite openly say “we hope you fail.” (Iv4, E)

Next to financial resources, informational resources were withheld by local governments through reducing support for TMOs. For example, local governments refused to attend already scheduled meetings and engage in important consultations:

The [local government] has refused to come to the estate to have a public meeting with residents. They've refused it. They are not here supporting people, reassuring them. (Iv48, M)

In other cases, local governments did not keep to their committed responsibilities:

And the crazy thing is, the local [government] has responsibilities [for fire safety] on our estates, but if you look at the spreadsheet none of the works allocated to [them] has actually been done which shows the disregard for us is very much alive and kicking. (Iv58, M)

The withholding of information and support was deeply felt by many TMOs that were struggling to come to terms with the Grenfell Tower tragedy – particularly those that had recently been established, for whom local government support was crucial. These actions were seen as yet another step by local governments to increase control over TMOs and to shape their behavior in a way that provided advantage to themselves. It further was perceived as a way to slow down the overall expansion of TMOs. Without responding to these sanctions, TMOs felt that their future could be substantially threatened. Accentuating the immediacy of this issue, during our study a housing organization in London was shut down. One expert explained:

Grenfell led to the recent closing down of a [TMO] in Westminster ... It was taken back in house by the [local government], as they did not trust the residents managing that estate. (Field notes, NFTMO consultation event)

A further sanction local governments engaged in was that of *imposing requirements*, that is, they attempted to alter TMOs' actions and their oversight of these. For example, local governments imposed new requirements by forcing new regulations onto TMOs. This manifested in local governments applying 'zero-tolerance standards,' aimed at restricting certain physical items on TMO estates. Here, local governments started, for example, to forbid the use of previously permitted and "generally harmless items" (Iv18, FKC) such as plants on balconies and in hallways,

doormats in front of apartment doors, or safety gates on doors and windows. While this approach was initially seen by many as a genuine attempt to reduce health, safety, and fire risks on TMO estates, perceptions shifted when it was revealed that “a complete blanket approach was taken by local governments without any consideration for the type or the context of the estates” (Iv69, M). For example, some estates relied on safety gates to protect doors and windows as they were located in areas known for higher levels of crime. In other cases, “residents’ plants had to be removed regardless of quantity and location” (Iv18, FKC). Individual influence over their physical appearance were one of the central factors that distinguished TMOs from other forms of social housing and a blanket approach was in complete opposition to the idea of TMO governance. As such, this was seen as another way local governments sought to punish TMOs and reduce their uniqueness. Thus, beyond their practical implications, the sanctions lead to visceral challenges in that they attacked TMOs’ self-conceptions and beliefs about their practices and organizations:

We’re doing things we are proud of on our estate and we’re investing a lot of time into it. And suddenly we are being told by local government we’ve got to do x, y, z. It’s confusing, it’s demoralizing. (Iv49, M)

A second way local governments imposed requirements was through demanding more monitoring and reporting by TMOs. TMOs were asked to report on their activities much more frequently, provide documentation of what they were working on, and their future plans. This sanction was applied in part out of fear by local governments that they would be held responsible if something happened on the TMOs estates under their jurisdiction. At the same time, imposing these requirements enabled local governments to tighten their grip on TMOs and make sure that “they were acting in line” (Iv44, M). Implementing new monitoring and reporting was difficult for TMOs as it required additional staff to collect the requested data and put reports together:

They’ve stepped up the monitoring regime which often can become so onerous that it can be difficult to deliver services if you are constantly producing statistics. (Iv9, E)

But also, and importantly, it went against TMOs' self-perception. Essential to the TMO model of social housing was their ability to be flexible and respond rapidly to challenges (or opportunities) on their estates, and TMO managers saw this as a key differentiator. Reporting, producing rigid plans, and developing documents that seemed like "actual business plans" (Iv33, M) were unfamiliar to most TMOs and not true to who they were. One manager echoed others when noting:

Of course, the numbers have to stack up, but what we are really about is something you can't simply value in pounds and pence. And that focus is what sets us apart from other housing organizations. (Iv34, M)

TMOs felt local governments' imposing of new requirements exerted too much outside influence on their very personal style of managing estates and looking after their residents:

[Local government] is keeping closer track of our activities [and] that feels like going against the TMO idea. We are local, we do things our way, we don't want a parent that always watches over us. (Iv49, M)

Further, TMOs noted that there was an appetite by local governments for increased monitoring of their activities, and that local governments were getting involved in ways they had not previously:

Under the cover of reviewing our 'performance', local [governments] are now using this to actually review other aspects of TMO management, such as staffing, as the wording of the management agreement allows them to consider anything that might impact on performance. So, reviewing personnel records, reviewing governance structures, these are all things that they now think they should become involved in. (Iv18, FKC)

Responding to local governments' sanctions. When responding to local governments' sanctions that focused on *withholding resources*, the historical relationships between TMOs and these social control agents were particularly salient. Given their historical animosity and experience, TMOs realized that when it came to financial questions, trying to reason with local governments would not be very effective. TMOs thus consciously chose to *work with* local government sanctions focused on withholding resources by accepting these constraints and developing alternative routes to generate financial resources. As one manager explained, "because

allowances and funding [were] reduced, to keep going and survive TMOs [had] to look at alternative revenue sources” (Iv35, M). TMOs began to generate additional income by tapping their local knowledge and networks, enabling them to persist without having “to be at the mercy of local governments” (Iv33, M). In particular, TMOs became entrepreneurial in ways that were in line with their identities. They found innovative but frugal ways to generate revenues, by leveraging practices they were already engaged in, without neglecting to care for their residents. For example, some provided caretaking and maintenance services to other housing organizations:

We identified properties that could benefit from the services that we deliver, so we took on another 64 properties. So, we did something slightly different to get income that way, rather than be obstructed by the barriers that are in place at the moment. (Iv69, M)

Other TMOs provided new services to internal parties, such as caretaking, maintenance, and assistance with letting (renting) out, for those who owned² their apartments:

Instead of apartment owners going to the [real] estate agent we’ve set it up so that they come to us and we can do exactly what the agent does. Because we are already looking after the estate and we’re already here. And we do it for a fee which is what the estate agents are actually doing. Showing the flats around when [they’re] empty... keys, telecom, gas people. (Iv57, B)

Additional approaches included letting out seminar rooms and other spaces on TMO estates.

Crucially, all these entrepreneurial activities were undertaken in line with TMOs’ self-conceptions and identities: providing local services that made a difference to their communities.

When responding to local governments’ sanctions that withheld informational resources, such as those focusing on reducing support for TMOs, TMOs developed another form of *working with* sanctions: individual TMOs engaged in peer information sourcing. To substitute for consultation and guidance (e.g., on questions around new software systems) that was previously forthcoming

² This was enabled through the Right to Buy and Right to Acquire acts, which allowed social housing residents to buy homes on social housing estates (and thus also within TMOs).

from local governments, TMOs started to reach out to longer-established TMOs. The TMO sector began to take responsibility for its newer members:

So, in essence it's now over to us to train and help other TMOs. As Guide TMO [one with a high performance rating] we will step in and support them along the way. (Iv55, B)

When responding to local governments' sanctions of *imposing requirements*, TMOs *worked on* them through negotiating, almost bargaining. In some cases, this involved indicating compliance to aspects of the sanctions or even going beyond expectations in some areas while using this to negotiate other aspects that were important to TMOs and their residents. For example, when faced with the enforcement of 'zero tolerance' standards, TMOs showed willingness to comply by, for example, taking down old gates or even proactively installing water sprinklers from their own budgets, signalling that they were taking the new guidelines seriously and in some cases going above and beyond, but at the same time using this to negotiate and circumvent the implementation of other aspects of the sanction that were unacceptable to them and their residents. Keeping plants, doormats, and decorative items outside residents' apartments, on balconies, and in communal areas was top of their agenda as "these items enhance the visual appeal of the block and create a better, less sterile living environment" (Iv64, FKC). Not taking a blanket approach to the imposed requirements was important, because, as one resident explained, "if TMOs are just going to give in and enforce everything then they're not TMOs, then they're just like local governments" (Iv57, B). Some TMOs held meetings to discuss the sanctions and potential options with residents "who were up in arms about the zero-tolerance approach" (IV23, S), thus staying true to their local decision making approach, before going back to the local government to negotiate. Through this, TMOs leveraged their identities:

TMOs are managing issues differently based on the links within their community. They are taking a more nuanced approach and evaluating whether objects are actually a fire risk or not and whether they will hinder any evacuation. TMOs then engage with their residents, improve awareness, and

make sure any risks are eliminated without taking a blanket approach. That's what makes TMOs different. (Iv18, FKC)

This response to the sanctions was often successful as local governments became convinced that once TMOs and their residents had agreed to improvements and felt that they fit their estate, they would take responsibility for their implementation, as this was part of their self-conception: local decision making and then full local accountability.

Finally, a bolder approach was taken in response to sanctions aimed at imposing requirements through more monitoring and reporting. Here, TMOs also responded by *working on* the sanctions, again by negotiating with local governments, but primarily by 'playing on' the historical taint attached to their clientele – social housing residents³. In essence, TMOs used this negative perception to emphasize how they looked after these 'vulnerable' and 'poor' groups *for* local governments, thus helping *them*, i.e., local governments, achieve their own goals of having well-run neighbourhoods "without having to get their hands dirty" (Iv43, M). For example, TMOs argued how they helped long-term unemployed residents get back into work through job training courses, or how they looked after disabled residents who could not support themselves. Some TMOs also prided themselves in how they were able to reduce anti-social behavior or fight youth crime in their areas – notably all issues that were actually local governments' own responsibilities:

We work with a lot of young people here and we've contributed to a 15% reduction in crime in our area. So, this is about contributing something to society and taking responsibility ... and we can do this because we are local, we know the neighborhood, we know who is doing what. We can have much more targeted impact than [local government]. (Iv69, M)

Through this response, TMOs positioned themselves as being "extremely busy looking after residents" noting that new requirements around reporting or monitoring would imply "less time

³ TMOs and their residents are part of the historically stigmatized social housing landscape. The stigma is attached to assumptions around residents' characteristics (e.g., being poor or uneducated) (Hastings, 2004), making living in social housing seem not to be a choice but a last resort for people at the fringes of society (Power, 1998).

and attention to residents' problems" (Iv44, M), and more burden, as a result, for local governments, who would over time have to deal with these issues themselves. As such, the narrative that TMOs used to influence their local governments centered on the idea that the sanctions being imposed would, in the long-run, backfire and hurt the social control agent itself. In many cases, this response led to a retraction of the new demands by local governments.

Outcomes of sanction navigation. In the case of local governments, TMOs were able to constructively accommodate some sanctions (*working with*) by developing and maintaining alternative and novel routes for accessing vital (financial) resources and information. As well, TMOs were able to reduce other sanctions imposed on them by *working on* the content of the sanction and negotiating it with the social control agent directly. In particular, these sanctions were negotiated with reference to potential future challenges for social control agents themselves if the sanctions were not reduced, dropped, or adapted. Furthermore, referring to Figure 2, rather than deepening their relationships as in the case of residents' groups, TMOs' social control work resulted in looser relationships with local governments, as they worked to generate alternative means of financial and informational support. The benefit for TMOs was more independence and fewer interactions that triggered their historical animosity with local governments, enabling them to focus more on serving their residents. Here, social control work, which in this case saw TMOs leverage their identities, moved TMOs closer to their ideal self-conception: self-sufficient organizations that have freedom over how to manage their estates.

In sum, our analysis reveals how the social control work with both residents' groups and local governments in the aftermath of the scandal spillover enabled TMOs to navigate sanctions in varying and creative ways that resulted in a reduction or a constructive accommodation of them.

Beyond this, social control work led to improved access to novel financial resources, interactions, and information, and ultimately more advantageous relationships with their social control agents.

Through their efforts, TMOs increasingly began to notice the benefits of working on certain challenging issues in a more coordinated way (e.g., by exchanging ideas and sharing information):

What we've [seen] is that it can really help when TMOs work together more... shar[ing] our experience, mak[ing] sure that we all get stronger. We've seen again and again that our voices are not heard properly and there is so much against us (...) but when we work together [local] governments don't attack and manipulate us individually anymore. (Iv32, B)

While many had hoped that these efforts would have been sufficient to overcome the challenges of the scandal spillover, reality took a different turn.

Phase of Transition: Shift and Reassessment

While TMOs were engaging with their residents' groups and local governments, the general outrage over the Grenfell Tower tragedy brought voices to the fore that called for a general review of how UK social housing was run. The UK's central government responded by launching an official investigation. Initially, TMOs did not take much notice of central government's activities and believed they themselves were simply included in the investigation as a minor part of the wider social housing landscape. They felt safe, both given their strong performance ratings and because they assumed central government could tell that KCTMO was different from them due to its size (i.e., KCTMO managed c.10,000 properties compared to the average TMO managing 350 homes) and its governance arrangements (i.e., it had fewer residents on the board). As one TMO manager stated, they were confident central government saw the differences, as the only similarity between KCTMO and "real TMOs [are] those three letters that all of us have in common" (Iv69, M).

However, central government started to examine the TMO sector closely, resulting in an unexpected shift of social control agents: from local-level social control agents i.e., residents' groups and local governments, to a sector-level social control agent, i.e., central government. This

shift also brought with it a shift in the target, from individual TMOs to the entire sector. Many in the sector were “caught flat footed and shocked ... they were like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a car” (Iv61, E). Not only had TMOs envisioned that their engagement with the initial two social control agents would be recognized by central government, but they had historically enjoyed approval from central government – substantial backing from them had enabled TMOs to become established and rapidly expand in the 1980s and 1990s, and there had also been a cross-party consensus that TMOs were a valuable addition to social housing:

The British Conservatives saw TMOs as an example of how small government and decentralization could work, while the British Labor party saw them as representing ideals of community engagement. (Iv42, FKC)

Now that arguably the most powerful social control agent of all, central government, was confronting and reassessing the TMO sector as a collective, this posed a new challenge, compounded by the fact that TMOs did not have a history of working collectively. One informant noted, “TMOs never had any strong connections amongst one another. They never saw themselves as a strong collective unit” (Iv56, M). This reflected their legacy as, when first established decades earlier, TMOs focused on improving living standards for their residents given the dire state of social housing. They were thus historically “(...) territorial. They became close[d] shop[s] and look[ed] inwards” (Iv33, M). One expert explained that TMOs “behave like independent islands. They don’t even talk to the TMO over the road ... let alone think about do we need to be coordinating a national campaign” (Iv16, E). As such, TMOs found themselves having to navigate central government’s sector-wide sanctions, without much experience of working together.

Sanctioning, Responses, & Outcomes: Central government

Nature of sanctions imposed. One of the first sanctions central government levied on the TMO sector involved *relationally distancing* itself from it. Central government did not want to appear to be supporting a group of organizations, that, in the minds of many, were still seen as

very similar to the perpetrator at Grenfell Tower, KCTMO. Relational distancing in this case was undertaken by publicly questioning the TMO sector and challenging its competencies and appropriateness. This move was primarily made through the wide dissemination of a policy review paper (“Green Paper”) that questioned the need for and relevance of TMOs. Examples included:

Following criticism of [KCTMO] after the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, questions have been raised about the capability of [TMOs]. (MHCLG, 2018: 36)

Are [TMOs] delivering positive outcomes for residents and landlords? ... Do they achieve the right balance between residents’ control and local accountability? (ibid: 38)

Is the current framework for local [governments] to hold [TMOs] to account sufficiently robust? If not, what more is needed to provide effective oversight...? (ibid: 43)

Given their perceptions of being high-performing organizations that contributed to society, and their already substantial sanction navigation efforts, these critiques delivered TMOs a major shock. One interviewee asserted that the Green Paper was a direct attack on the sector “if you read between the lines” (Iv65, E). The paper challenged the TMO sector publicly and brought substantial attention to the question of how desirable and important TMOs really were as a part of social housing. As one TMO manager explained, this demanded a new form of response:

People assumed that everything will be fine, but the Green Paper made people sit up and realize [that] government is asking about all of us, and all our future, rather than just seeing this as an isolated incident in one particular organization. So, I think that necessitates a change of approach...We’ve got to get on the front foot here. (Iv63, E)

Further, the Green Paper fueled critique from other third parties:

Other groups like Defend Council Housing are using what they hear from government and are getting on the bandwagon and using this as an opportunity to blame the [TMO] sector. It’s an opportunity for them to emphasize how bad tenant management is. (Iv70, B)

Central government’s second form of sanctioning involved *withholding resources* as they withheld the transfer of financial resources to local governments that would have provided them

to the TMO sector. These financial resources were particularly important for the development of early stage TMOs and the set-up of new ones. One informant shared:

For years, central government was very pro TMOs and that has changed. They have taken a backwards step now. They aren't funding TMOs ... and that is a direct consequence of Grenfell. They feel it's just too risky, giving their money for things that can turn out like this. (Iv49, M)

Finally, central government sanctioned by *imposing requirements*, including new regulations that enabled them to intervene in the management of TMOs much more directly. Rather than leaving much of the overseeing of TMOs to their local governments, central government initiated a review and update of TMOs' management contracts. Beyond potentially exercising more control, this move was also symbolic as it signified to the wider public central government's intentions to exercise oversight in the sector. For TMOs, this sanction was threatening for two reasons. First, it was in stark opposition to TMOs' self-conceptions which focused on local-level decision making. Second, it implied that central government could close down TMOs if they perceived the management to be inadequate. This threat of increased control was difficult to counter especially as the TMO sector lacked a strong coordinating body that could step in to negotiate and interact directly with central government. Despite its role as the sector's representative body, the NFTMO was generally seen as a "weak organization that more or less only has symbolic value" (Iv27, E).

Without managing the sanctions imposed by central government, many felt it would be increasingly difficult for TMOs to continue to do their work. Many TMOs questioned their long-term viability if the most powerful stakeholder in the country was now sanctioning their sector.

Responding to central government's sanctions. Unlike their individual organizational responses to residents' groups or local governments, TMOs began to address these new challenges from central government by developing a more collective and unified approach, in part spurred by

social housing consultants and NFTMO representatives and in part inspired by their experiences of sharing information when navigating local government sanctions. One informant noted:

[TMOs] realized they had to fight back much more or they would be toasted. They came out fighting for their lives. (Iv61, E)

TMOs used specially organized consultation events and their annual national conference to motivate and promote the idea of developing collective responses to the new sanctions. As one manager commented, they had “meetings up and down the country to get everyone together and develop a response from the sector [as a whole]” (Iv68, M).

To respond to central government’s sanction of *relational distancing*, the TMO sector *worked on* this sanction to dissolve the unwarranted assumptions on which the sanction had been based, through reframing. This revolved around the sector working to distinguishing itself from and diminish its association with KCTMO to indicate that “TMOs and the TMO sector [were] not the problem ... [and that] there are a lot of benefits of [central] government and us working together” (Iv67, M). Rather than trying to appear in a generally more positive light and change how they were socially evaluated by central government, the sector’s focus here became to enable central government itself to recognize that ‘real’ TMOs were fundamentally different to the perpetrator at Grenfell Tower, KCTMO. Beyond this, it was also hoped that the sector’s actions might enable central government to signal to its own constituents – such as the media or the political opposition that had pressured central government to respond to the tragedy – that TMOs were different from KCMTO and thus could credibly be disregarded as part of the problem.

One bold and symbolically significant move by the TMO sector to convey this was to expand its footprint and reclaim the housing estate on which Grenfell Tower had stood. In so doing, the sector sought to demonstrate that it, in contrast to KCTMO, was able to build and run a successful and desirable social housing model on the estate. As social housing consultants explained:

The TMO sector is supporting the estate [where Grenfell Tower was located] to really become community [led]. It's important to show, even on the estate where Grenfell was, that a real tenant-led housing model that listens and acts can exist. (Iv73, E)

I'm currently involved in rebuilding the [Grenfell] estate ... after the Grenfell tragedy. The residents [there] are very clear on what has gone wrong. They know ... what they want and what has to change. They know that their problem was not having any kind of voice in the relationship to their board and the landlord. We are now developing [the TMO model] with them. (Field notes, E, NFTMO annual conference 2019)

In doing this, by taking on and signalling more responsibilities, the TMO sector worked to distinguish itself from KCTMO and display that it was focused and ambitious to “make a real TMO model work [at Grenfell]” (Iv59, M) and pay close attention to residents' voices.

Another way in which the sector sought to dissolve the basis for the sanction through reframing was by drawing on third party endorsements. Given how different their management was from other forms of social housing, the TMO sector enjoyed historically strong relationships with external parties who took a deep interest in their approach. In particular, social housing academics at prestigious institutions across the UK had closely studied them. Now, the sector drew on these experts to provide accounts of the benefits of TMO-run social housing and to highlight the differences between themselves and KCTMO; examples included online media contributions such as “How Tenant Management Organizations have wrongly been associated with Grenfell” (Power, 2017). Academics regarded as thought leaders in housing policy often had direct connections to relevant government ministers and shaped their understanding of TMOs. As one explained:

I talked to the [central] government directly to promote the truth and I wrote the blog to really show that TMOs are innocent. (Iv66, E)

Further, these experts helped ‘cut out’ KCTMO from the TMO sector by drawing attention to KCTMO's organisational characteristics that could reasonably be associated with that of so called ‘arms-length management organisations’ (ALMOs). Experts thus anchored KCTMO in this

different group of social housing organizations, thereby, once again, diminishing the association between the TMO model and the tragedy. As one academic explained:

I've been making the point over and over: Don't confuse KCTMO with other TMOs. It belongs to a different group. KCTMO was a borough-wide device to manage housing at arms lengths from the council rather than a democratic organisation that is there to listen to tenants and deliver services to them...which is what TMOs are really about. KCTMO was a different beast. (Iv60, E)

Beyond these efforts, to respond to central government's sanction of *withholding resources*, the TMO sector initiated discussions about how to provide sustainable funding alternatives. The sector developed a strategy of *working with* the financial sanctions by finding substitute routes for resource generation by becoming entrepreneurial. Innovating the sector-wide TMO model to move away from purely managing local government properties, to building, owning, and managing their own homes was one approach through which they accomplished this. A manager explained:

Taking more control for us means going down the self-financing option, so building homes, being responsible for the whole structure, and keeping the entire rent. And that is the way the sector is going after Grenfell Tower. (Field notes, M, NFTMO annual conference 2019)

A model was developed to drive this forward, which included access to national funding bodies and support in developing saving and investment plans. In some cases, this enabled TMOs to build new homes on their estate, in other cases they purchased already existing properties: "We recently bought properties, which we now let out to generate income" (Iv68, M). Beyond providing long-term income, many mentioned how building and owning properties also had symbolic value. It strengthened TMOs' views of themselves as a collective and helped demonstrate what it meant to be 'the TMO sector': a sector in which organizations take control and put residents front and center.

Finally, when confronting central government sanctions that *imposed requirements*, the TMO sector choose to *work with* the sanctions and co-opt them. This resulted from the sector realizing that there was not much that could stop the implementation of central government's new regulation, but that the sector also did not simply want to sit still and give up control. As such, the

sector moved to develop the capabilities and network-access to be able to monitor future central government moves closely, as well as to challenge their decisions. To do so, the sector strengthened its collective representation and developed routes to access central government. Responding to the perceived weakness of the NFTMO, characterized by some as “a bit amateurish” (Iv38, FKC), housing consultants and TMO staff created a new NFTMO governance structure, developed new strategies for funding it, and motivated more TMO residents to get involved in sector-level decision making to provide “more direct user voice” (Iv72, M). Involving more residents in sector-level decision making was important to counter developments that had been the root cause of the Grenfell Tower tragedy: KCTMO had laid too much emphasis on profitability without focusing on residents’ requests. As such, TMOs knew that they had to balance becoming more professional to present their sector and be taken more seriously by central government with ensuring that residents’ voices remained at the core of the sector’s strategy. This balancing was evident in recruiting efforts by the NFTMO for national coordinators who would “grow tenant management and provide help and support to [TMO sector] members” (Inside Housing, 2021).

In addition, the TMO sector worked to gain further access to central government by representing other UK social housing residents. It helped develop the “Voice for Tenants” steering group which was “set up in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy to (...) speak on behalf of [all] social housing tenants” (nationaltenants.org) and thereby connected its own agenda to a more general mandate. One NFTMO member explained:

None of the current housing organizations represents all residents across the UK. And we, in the light of Grenfell, are working on covering that ground [through the Voice for Tenants steering group], spreading the message that we represent and campaign for all interests. (Iv70, B)

This move helped the TMO sector – unexpectedly from central government’s perspective – to develop into an important stakeholder for central government that could not be ignored, as TMO

sector representatives now had to be included in consultations on social housing in general, through which they could also advance their TMO-specific interests:

The “Voice for Tenants” discussions played a big part in enabling central government to understand the very real operational differences [between] TMOs who care for their residents and other housing providers. (Iv64, FKC)

Outcomes of sanction navigation. When central government sanctioned through *imposing requirements* and *withholding resources*, the TMO sector responded by *working with* these sanctions. This enabled the sector to generate innovative and novel access to vital resources for its long-term development, improve its mechanisms to monitor and influence central government, and affirm a position as an important stakeholder in the UK’s social housing landscape. By contrast, through *working on* the *relational distancing* sanction, the TMO sector was able to eradicate the sanction by distinguishing itself, diminishing its association with the perpetrator in the minds of its social control agent, and refining their understanding of its work and responsibilities. Ultimately, this led to improved clarity with regard to the sector’s boundaries: central government retracted its negative labelling and sanctioning of the sector in an updated version of the initial policy document (“White Paper”) in 2020 and further declared that the TMO sector’s efforts had helped them see that “KCTMO was indeed not a regular TMO and should not be seen as representative of all TMOs” (Iv63, M). This was a milestone as the alleged similarity with KCTMO had been the initial driver of the scandal spillover:

At one of our consultation events the Government announced that it had accepted that Kensington & Chelsea was not a real TMO (...). [That was] great work by everyone involved, particularly residents and the NFTMO working together on this. (Informal interview, M)

Rather than being seen as part of the problem, the TMO sector was now being seen as part of the solution and a unique and important part of social housing with whom central government wanted to work. Informants noted:

The government is interested again and even went to some meetings and the national conference this year. (Iv64, FKC)

The government has become much more aware of what we are doing and recognizes the effort that TMOs put in. We are being listened to more, being taken more serious[ly]. (Iv67, M)

Social control work, which in this case included an expanding of the TMO sector's collective identity, helped restore the sector's relationship with central government. The restoration of the sector's relationship with central government was interestingly achieved through a combination of both deepening it to 'have a chair at the table' and loosening it to become less dependent on central government by developing novel income streams.

Taken together, the Grenfell Tower tragedy and its aftermath allowed us to examine how scandal spillover and the activation of a range of social control agents – residents' groups, local governments, and central government – led to substantial sanctioning of targeted organizations and their sector, how those targets actively and strategically responded through social control work, and how this enabled them, individually and collectively, to not only persist but thrive.

DISCUSSION

We began with the question of how organizations navigate imposed sanctions following scandal spillover, and with what consequence. Our investigation was spurred by the observation that some organizations may find it difficult or undesirable to actively engage with and counter negative social evaluations, in part because they may not enjoy broadly shared positive social evaluations to start with or because they might not want to simply comply with others' expectations but rather stay true to their practices and preserve who they are in order to do their work (Helms et al., 2019). Nonetheless, such organizations still need to secure the resources and the support from key stakeholders to survive in the aftermath of scandal spillover. Our findings show that such organizations can not only persist and survive but thrive and emerge stronger as a result of their efforts to manage tangible sanctions levied on them.

We introduce the concept of *social control work* to develop theory on how targeted organizations navigate the aftermath of scandal spillover. Social control work highlights targets' agentic and strategic yet pragmatic responses to the sanctions of influential stakeholders, their social control agents. It captures the process through which targets respond to various sanctions imposed by multiple social control agents and posits that this process alters not only the nature of the sanctions but can also generate beneficial outcomes for targeted organizations – altering their relationships with their social control agents and producing operational advantages. By engaging in social control work to navigate imposed sanctions, targets also enact their identities (in our case, articulating, leveraging, or expanding them individually and collectively), enabling them to become truer to their own ideals. Social control work draws new attention to the generative possibilities arising from scandals and directs scholars to take account of historical relationships between targets and stakeholders in understanding scandals, their spillover, and their effects. We further develop these points and discuss their implications below.

Social Control Work

Events like the Grenfell Tower tragedy generate efforts to establish blame and hold perpetrators to account. Ensuing scandals – publicized acts of misconduct (Adut, 2005) – and their spillover cause substantial harm to those caught up in them (Frooman, 1997; Clemente & Gabbioneta, 2017; Jonsson et al., 2009). Targeted organizations often find it difficult to continue to garner resources or maintain access to networks (Park & Rogan, 2018; Helms et al., 2019).

Prior work has drawn attention to the special role certain powerful stakeholders – social control agents – play in adjudicating misconduct and sanctioning those accused of it. Social control agents have the “capacity to monitor and enforce organizational behavior” (Greve et al. 2010: 78) and have been positioned as formal actors such as government agencies or professional associations. Previous studies have focused on social control agents themselves – who they are

(Greve et al., 2010) and what they do (Dewan & Jensen, 2020) – but there remains a largely unaddressed call to “investigate the behavior of [targets] and social-control agent[s] jointly” (Greve et al., 2010: 94). Social control agents can exercise discretion, stemming from “self-interest, bureaucratic routines, and societal pressures” in their allegation of misconduct and behavior toward it (Dewan & Jensen, 2020: 1654). Less recognized is the opportunity for *targets* to exercise discretion and agency in their response to social control agents’ behaviors and sanctioning efforts. Our work sheds light on this and exposes how interactions between targets and their social control agents lead not only to changes in sanctions themselves and their effects, but can trigger changes in the targets, including their operations and how they enact their identities, as well as in their relationships with social control agents.

The concept of social control work captures that targets may actively and strategically respond to social control agents and their sanctioning efforts in varied and creative ways. It counters the original assumption that social control agents impose sanctions that are often just accepted by targets and through which social control agents dictate targets’ survival (Greve et al., 2010). We found that social control work took two broad forms: *working with* sanctions involved accepting them but creating substitute opportunities or co-opting them to advance targets’ own agendas; and *working on* sanctions, which involved reducing or eradicating them by dissolving their basis through reframing or negotiating with social control agents. Thus, targets generate ways to comply with and constructively accommodate sanctions while moving past some of the limitations that the sanctions carry (*working with*), or they counter the content of the sanctions and respond to the perceived motivation behind them (*working on*). The former means the sanction itself remains in place, while the latter reduces the sanction and, in some cases, can eradicate it.

As shown in Figure 3, in which we introduce a general model of social control work extrapolated from our specific observations, the type of social control work undertaken is influenced by a target's historical relationship to their social control agent(s), rather than dictated by the nature of the sanction imposed. Importantly, each form of social control work enacts targets' identities through their specific responses, and can lead to advantageous operational outcomes and advantageous alterations in their relationships with their social control agents. In sum, social control work represents not just an immediate response to tangible sanctions levied in the aftermath of a scandal or its spillover but should be regarded as a process that comprises targeted organizations (re)configuring relationships with social control agents and influencing their behaviors – in a sense 'controlling' the social control agents.

--- Insert Figure 3 here ---

The concept of social control work carries two further implications. First, it draws attention to the need to enlarge and alter our conception of *who* may be considered consequential social control agents. To date, the work on social control has implied that the relationship between targets and their social control agents is relatively formal and somewhat static. Indeed, much of the prior work on social control explores government regulators, professional associations, or (global) governing bodies, who are deemed to have the authority to exercise social control (Bergemann, 2017; Greve et al., 2010; Vaughan, 1990). While these entities may be the "line-drawers, monitors, and enforcers" they are not the only, nor the *de facto*, ones "to which organizations must, from a practical standpoint, pay the most attention" (Greve et al., 2010: 79). In many instances, social control agents might be more intimately integrated with their targets, as in our case residents or local governments were with TMOs, versus operating at a distance, as a classic regulatory body does. In settings like schools, universities, or for-profit organizations, social control is also

exercised by parents' groups, student organizations, or activist shareholders. Theorizing how organizations targeted following scandal interact with such interdependent social control agents enriches our understanding of the potentially many forms of sanctioning they face, the varied responses they may use, and the outcomes of these for their relationships with important actors with whom they need to have ongoing interactions.

Second, the concept of social control work draws our attention to *what* we consider as central to the accomplishment of social control. Our findings show it is a dynamic, negotiated process, that involves both agents and targets. Scandals and other disruptions that force organizations to face up to their and others' understandings of who they are, what they do, and whether they do it appropriately, create openings for the potentially surprising renegotiation of control between targets and agents. These moments may give rise to organizations confronting others' misunderstandings or ignorance of how they operate (e.g., as with residents' groups in our case), or others' opportunistic moves that reflect past grievances (e.g., as with local governments in our case), alongside more expected efforts by social control agents to demonstrate that due process is being followed (e.g., as with the central government's green paper) and punishment meted out. These, in turn, trigger targets to actively reflect on who they are and how they work; and/or, they may simply trigger pragmatic responses that nonetheless enable targets to expose resources or organizational potential that had been latent or non-existent. In other words, social control work can lead to diverse responses that not only redraw the contours and rhythms of control, but also draw targets toward a greater capacity for action, alone or as a collective.

Future work can explore how social control work operates in other settings. It is likely that organizations in quite different settings from the one we explored might be motivated to undertake social control work with their social control agents, rather than (or perhaps in addition to) fighting

negative social evaluations. With growing attention to scandals in organizational and social life (Roulet, 2020; Daudigeos, Roulet, & Valiorgue, 2020), many organizations may see it in their interest to work and negotiate directly with key stakeholders rather than attempt to engage in more public impression management. This might stem from the nature of their products or services, the clients they serve, or their status, which can make them more likely to become subject to social control efforts (Dewan & Jensen, 2020; Graffin, Bundy, Porac, Wade, & Quin, 2013). As we have demonstrated, however, the way in which social control work unfolds will likely also reflect historical relationships with social control agents, as well as targets' activated identities and their mobilizing of emergent opportunities and resources.

Regardless of the setting, it is likely that most targets, as in our case, interact with multiple social control agents, who have varying approaches to sanctioning, and varying degrees of arms-length versus integrated relationships. Hence, the social control work undertaken would likely also take several forms, as we found. Working with and working on sanctions are two broad approaches that are likely to form part of a repertoire of responses. However, it is likely that in some settings these may be less of an option (e.g., when not fully conforming with sanctions leads to legal implications), or, conversely, targets may use bolder approaches, such as completely working around sanctions, where noncompliance is concealed by other actions (Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994; Bertels, Howard-Grenville, & Pek, 2016). While our study begins to address the call “to unravel ... the perceptions, motivations, and behavior of different social actors—including the involved firms, [and] social control agents, ... as a scandal unfolds” (Dewan & Jensen, 2020: 1674), further qualitative, longitudinal studies would add to our understanding of the dynamics of social control which can no longer be considered unidirectional or in relation to only formally authoritative social

control agents. Studies developing further insights into how various actors, in practice, act as social control agents, and how targets configure control through social control work would be welcome.

Scandal Spillover as Generative

The emphasis on targets' agency, central to our theorizing, has broader implications for how we think about the effect of scandals on organizations. Until recently, the literature has portrayed scandals and their spillover as predominantly damaging and harmful for those involved (Barnett & King, 2008; Jonsson et al., 2009), while indicating that some actors, such as competitors, may passively profit from them. For example, people may shift their loyalty away from a transgressor, benefiting bystanding organizations (Helms et al., 2019; Bundy et al., 2017). Some Christian denominations benefited when church members moved away from the Catholic church after a child abuse scandal (Piazza & Jourdan, 2019), and restaurants experienced positive reputational consequences following a bacteria outbreak in a competing chain (Paruchuri et al., 2019). Our findings extend this work by focusing on targeted – not bystanding – organizations and highlight that beyond the conventional wisdom of scandal being harmful (Graffin et al., 2013), if managed actively and creatively, its spillover can have not only positive but generative potential.

As in our case, peer organizations may suddenly be targeted given a perceived similarity, despite having little in common with the perpetrator beyond their presence in the same sector – or, as one informant noted (to highlight how different KCTMO was to other TMOs), “those three letters that all of us have in common” (Iv69, M). As such, they do not become passive beneficiaries of another's transgression (Piazza & Jourdan, 2019; Paruchuri et al., 2019), but are quickly forced into a seemingly defensive position. Through the process of social control work, we found that such targets may move to *articulate* who they are to bring on side stakeholders who misunderstand them and their work, *leverage* who they are to find creative ways to overcome resource constraints, and even *extend* who they are by moving in new directions consistent with their purpose. Notably,

targets' different ways of drawing on and using their identities in interactions with social control agents can be influenced by their varying historical relationships with their social control agents (i.e., in our case ambivalence gave rise to identity articulation, animosity to identity leveraging, and approval to identity expansion). Through these different forms of identity enactment, social control work can generate among targets a collective capacity to act that was not previously present. Future work on scandal spillover should explore other instances of such generative dynamics that result from the active work of targets to respond to imposed sanctions, versus the largely accidental positive outcomes that can accrue from a peer's or competitor's downfall.

These generative dynamics might, in turn, point to other instances where organizations subject to spillover would do well to resist the urge to conform to audiences' expectations or simply comply with sanctions. While organizations may prioritize staying true to themselves and continuing their work without having to give in and adapt to audiences' pressures and demands, until now, much of the literature has suggested managing social evaluations and thereby reducing the negative labelling and perceptions levied upon targets as a central strategy for survival (Helms & Patterson, 2014; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Hudson, 2008). Here the focus has often been on impression management (Zavyalova et al., 2012) to, for example, regain legitimacy via public discourse (Desai, 2011). Much of this can also be characterized as defensive work, intended to show that organizations are operating in line with or moving towards audiences' expectations, and the media is often an important channel for such messages (Roulet, 2015; Durand & Vergne, 2015). Our work moves beyond this and adds complexity by suggesting social control work and its generative potential as a new and alternative way of enabling organizations to survive and prosper post scandal, while staying true to who they are and what they do. Our work provides insights into

how targets can move beyond managing negative social evaluations in ways that help “preserve [targets’] distinctiveness in spite of pressures to conform” (Helms et al., 2019: 5).

Social Control Work as Delimited by Historical Relationships

Finally, social control work shines a light on the need to better account for the contextual conditions – namely, historical relationships between targets and social control agents – that shape efforts and outcomes of social control. Despite calling for more work on the interactions between targets and social control agents, and recognizing the importance of motivations in calling for “more systematic evidence on how social control agents choose their agendas” (Greve et al., 2010: 83), we have limited insight into what shapes targets’ responses to social control agents’ behaviours and sanctions. Our work shows that the sanctions themselves, alone or in combination, did not always lead to a certain response. Instead, the historical relationship between targets and their social control agents played a significant role in how targets responded to even similar sanctions. Further, the targets’ responses recast their relationships with the social control agents in different ways. Recall that, with residents’ groups, TMOs had an historically ambivalent relationship, but met their sanction of breaking relational ties by working on (through reframing) the sanction, enabling them to, in a way, re-educate the residents’ groups about the purpose, operations, and value of TMOs, and deepening their relationships with them. Conversely, given their historical animosity with local governments, and despite the imposition of seemingly rigid sanctions including the withholding of financial resources, TMOs worked with such sanctions to generate alternatives, and in so doing loosened their relationship with this social control agent. While we could not trace empirically the exact nature of the social control agents’ motivations in all cases, further work could explore more explicitly how historical relationships shape motivations for sanctioning, associated responses, and relational shifts. This would deepen our contribution that social control efforts are never undertaken in a vacuum; in addition to the recent attention to

social control agents' behaviours and how they perceive targets (Dewan & Jensen, 2020), we add much needed attention to targets' behaviours and how they perceive their social control agents.

Further, beyond the dynamics of social control, the broader ideas of social evaluations, scandals, their spillover, and responses to them would benefit from being set in a richer historical context. We know that negative social evaluations are extremely 'sticky' (Phung, Buchanan, Toubiana, Ruebottom, & Turchick-Hakak, 2021), but much of the literature on scandals and social evaluation focuses on immediate triggers and their aftermath. What if we were to consider the role of history as itself a force (Hatch & Schultz, 2017) in driving not only the judgement or labelling of what comprises scandal or misconduct, but also the behaviours of social control agents, their targets, and hence their ongoing interactions? Further, what might we learn by taking the seemingly surprising events surrounding scandal as triggers themselves that shape "when history becomes activated or when it sinks into latency" for organizations (Hatch & Schultz, 2017: 30)? For example, in the absence of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, would it have been possible for TMOs to individually and then collectively orient to old grievances with local governments and find new ways of working together as a sector? We urge further work that takes these contextual and longer term factors into account to more deeply understand the emergence, evolution, or persistent effects of scandals and their spillover.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in the UK, we examine how organizations struck by scandal spillover navigate sanctions imposed by multiple, powerful stakeholders – social control agents – to persist and survive. We unpack the unfolding interactions between social control agents and their targets to develop theory on how the navigation of sanctions following scandal spillover comprises *social control work*. This social control work can help targeted organizations to eradicate, reduce, or constructively accommodate the sanctions and,

surprisingly, also enable them to emerge operationally and relationally stronger than they were before the experience of the scandal spillover. Further, our case gives rise to the idea that, in some situations, rather than managing negative social evaluations by conforming to stakeholder expectations and adapting to their demands, organizations may benefit from engaging directly with the sanctions and their social control agents to navigate and overcome scandal spillover.

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1
Description of Data Sources

Data Types and Dates	Amount (and Location)	Use in Paper
Primary Data	TOTAL	
<u>Interviews</u>		
Semi-structured interviews with TMO members (management, staff, residents, board), incl. former KCTMO employees (09/17-07/19)	52; resulting in 568 pages of transcription	75 Interviews Detailed understanding of implications of Grenfell Tower incident for TMOs and how they reacted and responded to this. Insights into history, development, and functioning of TMOs and generating an overview of developments in the TMO sector as a result of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Insights into recent developments; checking specific assumptions; following up on newly emerged questions.
Semi-structured interviews with social housing consultants, academics, professionals (08/17-07/19)	23; resulting in 164 pages of transcription	
Informal interviews	9	
<u>Observations</u>		
National Federation of TMOs annual conferences (June 29-July 1, 2018; June 7-9, 2019)	22h; Blackpool, UK 25h; Brighton, UK	57h observations Participant observation during first major TMO conferences since the Grenfell Tower incident. Focus was on how TMOs continue to develop their responses to the scandal. Participant observation yielding insights into how the Grenfell Tower scandal featured in TMOs' discourse. Participant observation to learn more about how TMOs are specifically responding to the aftermath of the tragedy.
TMO annual meetings (October 19, 2017; February 7, 2018)	2h; London, UK 3h; London, UK	
TMO Grenfell consulting event (September 26, 2018)	5h; London, UK	
Secondary Data		
<u>Internal TMO documents</u>		
Annual reports and strategy documents (2015-2020)	9; 117 pages	Develop understanding of TMOs' general challenges (pre- and post-Grenfell). Identify managements' immediate internal responses.
Newsletters (after Grenfell)	7; 33 pages	
<u>Local and central government documents</u>		
Performance evaluation of TMOs by local governments (2010-2017)	12; 276 pages	1,813pp archival documents Assess how TMOs perceive their performance versus what their performance official is. Corroborate historical antagonism between TMOs and key stakeholders and compare with what interviewees stated. Explore attitudes of central government to TMO sector.
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: An Evaluation of TMOs in England	1; 166 pages	
Central government social housing policy reviews	2; 154 pages	
<u>Written accounts</u>		
Books on the history of tenant management	3; 806 pages	140min visual materials Contextualize primary data and learn about the history and emergence of TMOs in the United Kingdom.
Academic articles on tenant management	8; 188 pages	
<u>Media</u>		
Mainstream print media	87; 144 pages	Contextualize primary data and learn about the history and emergence of TMOs in the United Kingdom.
Specialist housing magazines	26; 83 pages	
TV documentaries and interviews	6; 140 minutes	

FIGURE 1
Data Collection Timeline

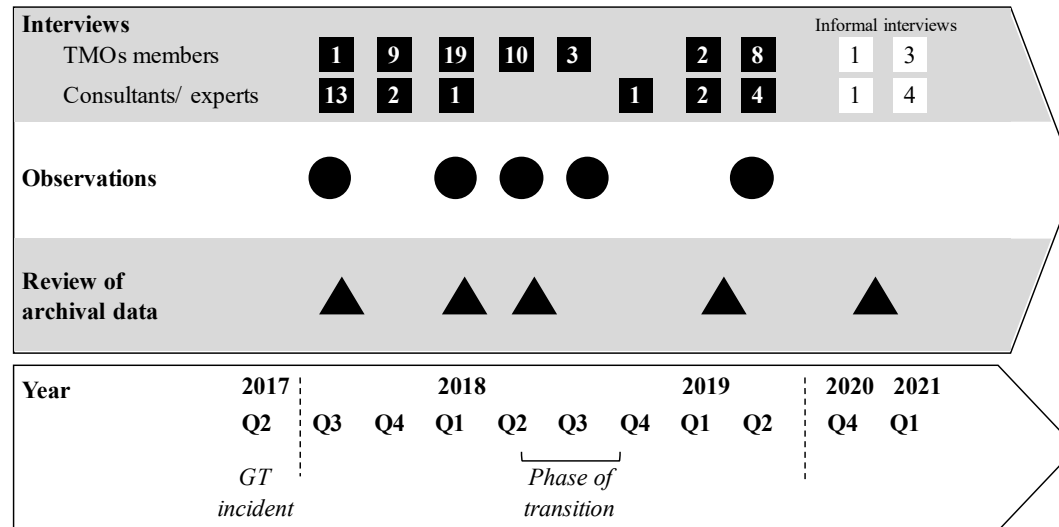


FIGURE 2
Social Control Agent–Target Interactions and Outcomes Following the Grenfell Tower Tragedy

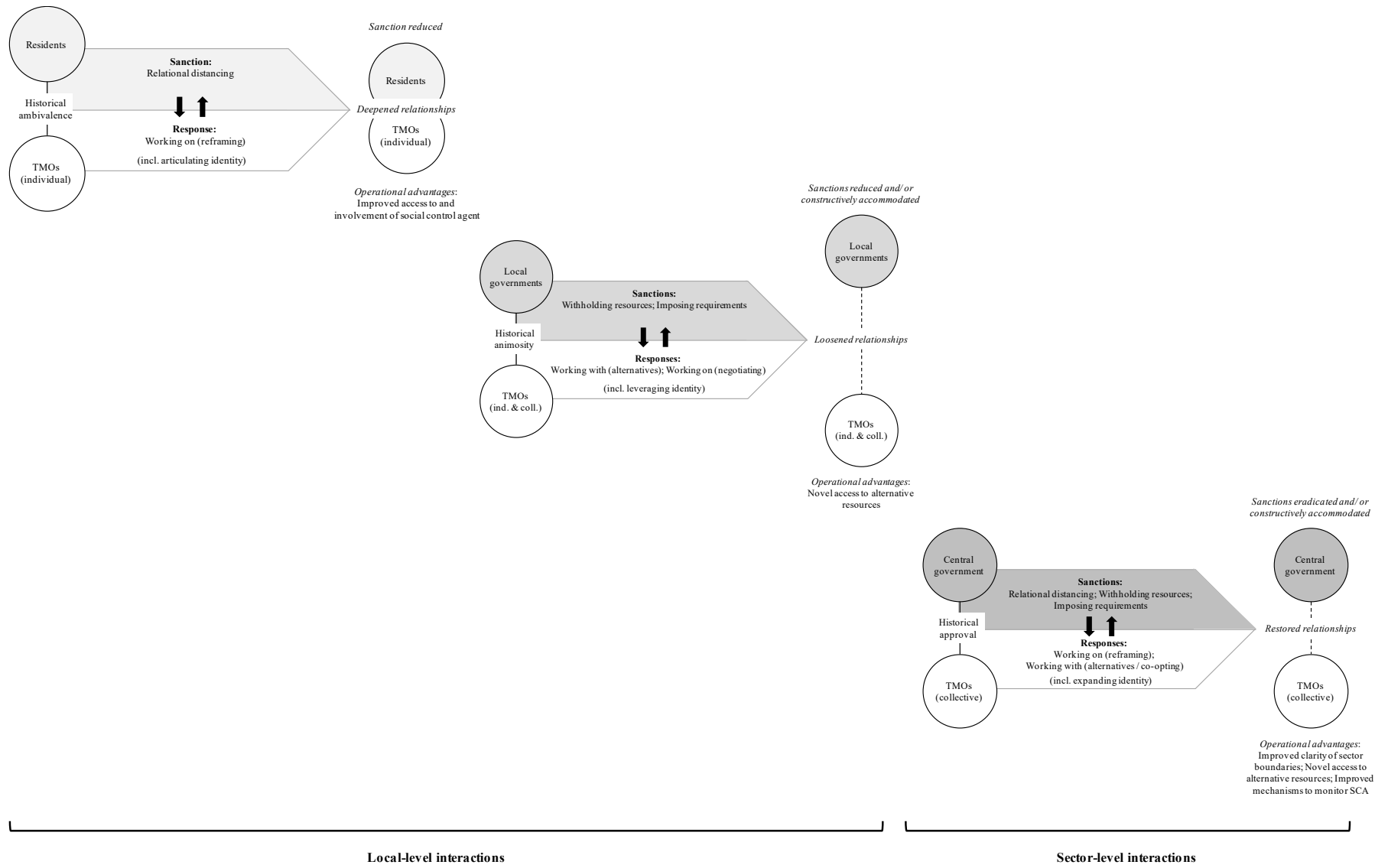
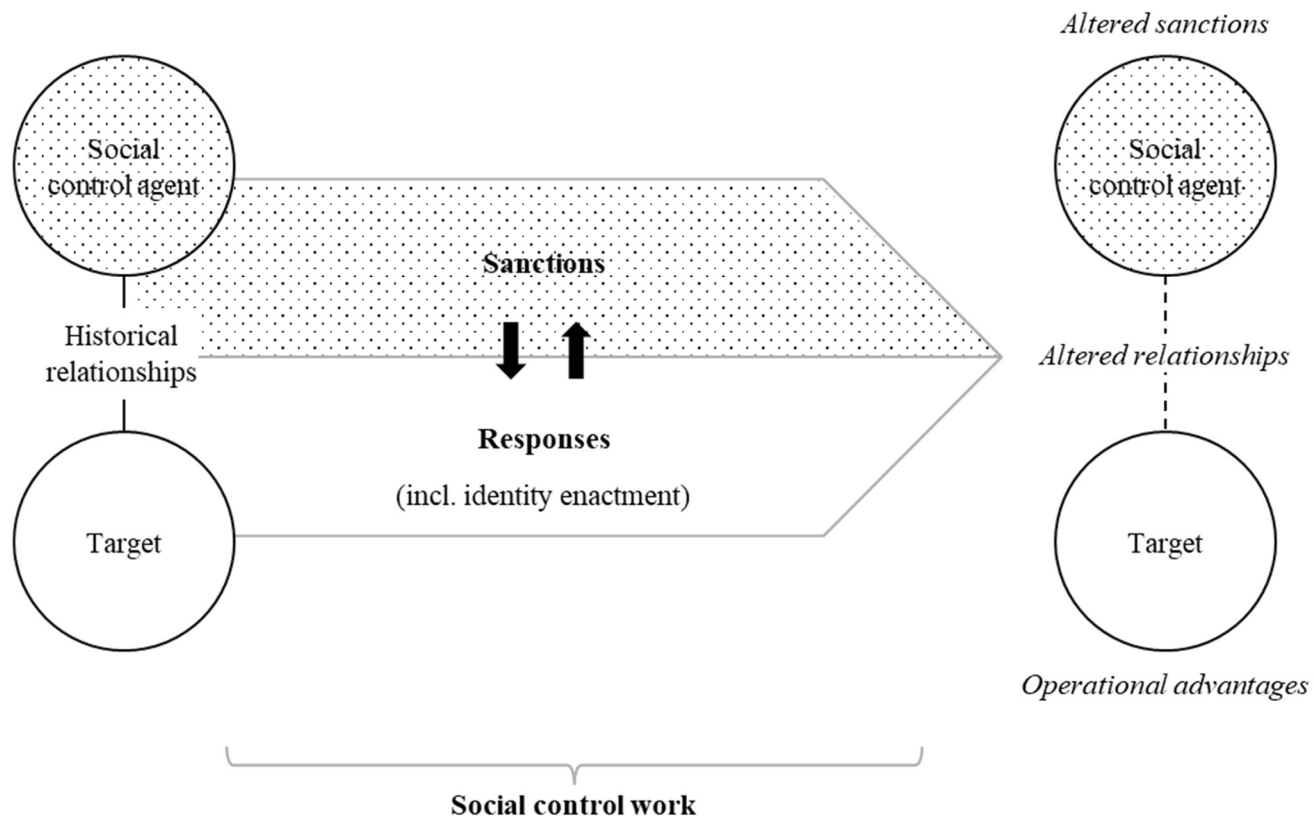


FIGURE 3
A General Model of Social Control Work and its Outcomes for Targets and Social Control Agents



Chapter 3 – Sustaining compassion as central organizational competence

ABSTRACT

In this study, we explore how organizations sustain compassion as a central organizational competence over time. While previous work has primarily focused on actors' responses to discreet and one-off expressions of peoples' individual suffering, we suggest that for many organizations conveying compassion is not an optional element, but central to them achieving their organizational goals. Drawing on the case of a reentry organization, we focus on the staff's daily efforts to proactively convey compassion towards ex-offenders over time, in order to help them join and remain in the reentry program to ultimately gain employment. Interestingly, we find that the staff utilizes a set of behavioral approaches to convey compassion, which, however, over the course of their casework create challenges for them with individual ex-offenders, hampering their ability and willingness to continue treating them compassionately. This then triggers efforts by reentry staff to rebuild their ability to convey compassion. Based on our analysis we develop theory on how compassion is a much more relational concept than has been previously suggested and propose a more proactive view of compassion in organizational contexts. Given the central aim of actors in our case to help targets, we use our analysis to also make contributions to the literature around helping activities in organizations between help-givers and help-seekers.

INTRODUCTION

Adversity and suffering are inevitable parts of organizational life (Dutton et al., 2006). Learning how to respond to and deal with these elements is important in order to navigate their potential negative consequences (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014) – both for the individuals who are suffering and for the organizations in which such suffering takes place (Schabram & Heng, 2021). Increasingly, scholars and practitioners alike have thus recognized that *compassion* – defined as a process of noticing, feeling, and responding to another’s pain (Kanov et al., 2004) – plays a vital role in organizations. Studies of compassion in organizational contexts have broadly examined individual instances of suffering that lead to compassion, such as after a tragedy (Peticca-Harris, 2019; Dutton et al., 2006), and have addressed its positive implications on those receiving and sometimes also on those conveying it (Bolino & Grant, 2016).

Yet, for some organizations – for example those that focus on helping vulnerable groups – compassion may play a much more central role in their daily operations, given the nature of the stakeholders they engage with (Frost et al., 2006). Accordingly, compassion may not always be an ‘optional’ part of organizational life (McClelland & Vogus, 2020; Lilius et al., 2011) that is drawn on from time to time when individual instances of suffering emerge (Atkins & Parker, 2012; Cocker & Joss, 2016), but employed much more directly and may even be necessary for organizations to achieve their intended goals in the first place (Frost et al., 2006).

Such environments, in which compassion transcends being an optional response towards another’s suffering and becomes crucial for an organization to achieve its goals, shift our attention towards a number of aspects beyond a traditionally reactive account of compassion. In particular, these environments raise questions about how this more proactive compassion is deployed, how it may evolve over time, and what the consequences for the actors who convey it and the targets who receive it may be. Indeed, while viewing compassion as proactive and sustained could potentially

provide useful insights for the helping activities of organizations (Lilius et al., 2011), there is also the danger that compassion as a central organizational competence may become overly formalized and even routinized, potentially challenging its ultimate success (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014). Yet, to date, scholarship on compassion in organizations offers little insight into whether and how this might happen, despite scholars calling for more attention to compassion when it is enacted deliberately (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014). In this study we attend to this oversight in the literature, guided by the question of how organizations deploy compassion proactively to achieve their organizational goals, and to what effect.

We do so by examining the case of ReOrg, a UK-based reentry organization that supports ex-offenders back into sustainable employment. In particular, we focus on the reentry staff's interactions with ex-offenders and their efforts of proactively conveying compassion towards ex-offenders over time, as they help them join and remain in the reentry program, with the goal of ultimately finding employment. We find that reentry staff engage in three behavioral approaches to convey compassion in order to attract and integrate ex-offenders into their reentry program. However, interestingly we find that this proactive deployment of compassion creates challenges for reentry staff over the course of their case work with individual ex-offenders, hampering their ability and willingness to continue treating them compassionately. Given the importance of compassion for the success of their case work as well as for the organization as a whole, we observe how reentry staff work to rebuild their ability to convey compassion. Our analysis suggests that the process of conveying compassion, experiencing challenges to it, and working to rebuild it is a frequent experience of reentry staff in their day-to-day case work.

This enables us to challenge conventional wisdom in two particular ways. First, our work suggest that compassion is a much more relational construct than has previously been theorized.

Far from actors simply acting compassionately and thereby achieving their goals, we show how targets play a crucial role in how compassion can be performed and whether it is ultimately successful. Adding nuance to conversation around the challenges of compassion, this relational lens allows us to argue that challenges can come about due to the actions of targets in response to efforts of compassion by actors, rather than challenges to compassion emerging purely from actors' emotional distress. Further, rather than maintaining compassion through pure distancing efforts from targets, as previous literature suggests (Margolis & Molinsky, 2008), our relational view indicates that in order to sustain compassion over the long run, actors need to balance their efforts between distancing from challenges posed by targets and reconnecting to these targets. Through this, we suggest an extended understanding of compassion in organizations as an important organizational competence that is proactively deployed to achieve organizational goals, rather than only as a reactive process in response to individual occurrences of suffering. Viewing compassion in this way is important as we might otherwise overlook compassion's generative potential in the absence of clearly defined instances of individual suffering.

Further, if organizations do not learn how to garner and deploy compassion more proactively, they may forgo opportunities to help, for example, those (vulnerable) groups they intend to serve, which leads us to our second contribution. Through our analysis of how reentry staff attempt to move ex-offenders back into employment, we also contribute to literature around helping in organization context (Grodal, Nelson, & Siino, 2015). In particular, we move beyond previous studies by providing a view of the 'double-edged sword' of helping in that it can lead to positive but also to more adverse outcomes for actors and targets. Further, we suggest that understanding how targets perceive those organizations that want to help and judge to what extent and how they will be helpful for their own journeys is important and something we to date know little about. As

such, our work advances literature on help-giving and help-seeking by suggesting that help-seeking actors actively evaluate not only the actual content of the help provided by organizations, but the ways in which such helping is performed.

COMPASSION IN AND BY ORGANIZATIONS

Hardship and suffering are common occurrence in organizations and can be encountered in many different forms. In some cases, organizations may be faced with shocks, such as tragedies, that lead to suffering by their own members (Peticca-Harris, 2019; Dutton et al., 2006). In other cases, organizations may exist for the sole purpose of helping individuals and groups at the fringes of society who suffer in their daily lives (Lawrence, 2017; Maestri & Monforte, 2020).

Given the prevalence of these situations, scholars have increasingly taken an interest in the role that *compassion* in and by organizations plays (Kanov et al., 2004) and how this can improve the situation for the sufferer (and other related parties) (Lilius et al., 2011; Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014). Although compassion has been a subject of interest in many academic fields such as medicine or religion (Frost et al., 2006), only recently has it entered the field of organizational and management studies (Dutton et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2008; DeCelles & Anteby, 2020), making empirical scholarship on compassion in and by organizations relatively scarce (for exceptions, see DeCelles & Anteby, 2020; Lilius et al. 2008).

Scholars traditionally conceptualize compassion in organizations as a process through which an actor notices and empathizes with an individual's or group's suffering and engages in an attempt to lessen it (Kanov et al., 2004; Schabram & Heng, 2021). Here, scholars often define compassion as a specific process that includes “noticing, feeling, and responding” (Kanov et al., 2004: 810) that “alleviates the suffering of another person” (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014: 277). It, as such, differs from other forms of pro-social behavior as compassion specifically involves active attempts to alleviate suffering (Bolino & Grant, 2016). For example, it is distinct from empathy,

which purely focuses on a “felt relation” (Lilius et al., 2011: 275) with other peoples’ both positive and negative emotions (Davis, 1996). Crucially, viewing compassion as a process that dynamically unfolds over time has enabled scholars to move away from seeing compassion itself purely as a trait or emotion (Lilius et al., 2011).

To date, scholarship on compassion in organizational contexts has heavily focused on understanding its important positive consequences for the targets receiving it, and in some cases for the actors providing it, as well as for the wider organization in or through which it occurs. For example, research has shown that receiving compassion can enable more rapid “recovery from pain, reduce anxiety, and make people feel valued” (Schabram & Heng, 2021: 8) or can lead to post-traumatic growth (Dutton et al., 2002) and a “positive identity” (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014: 352) following shocks. Others demonstrate how those who provide compassion may benefit from their actions as they may be evaluated more positively by peers for their service (Melwani, Mueller, & Overbeck, 2012). In terms of collectives, compassion can lead to “increased positive affect, enhanced coworker relationships and increased organizational commitment” (Peticca-Harris, 2019: 593). Beyond occurrences in existing organizations, some scholars have also pointed to the positive implications of compassion as a force to establish new ventures: Miller et al. (2012) explore compassion’s centrality to the founding of social enterprises.

However, at the same time, the literature around compassion in organizational settings has received some criticism for being too idealistic (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014). As such, some scholars have started to examine the potential downsides to compassion, including, in particular, compassion fatigue. This concept highlights that when actors behave compassionately towards targets, they may, over time, experience “sadness, anxiety, (and) psychological distress” (Bolino & Grant, 2016: 47) because of being too involved with targets and caring too much for them. More

specifically, this often results from a combination of being exposed to others' suffering while not being able to sufficiently help (Halifax, 2011). Over time, experiences of compassion fatigue may result in actors' emotional distance to targets (DeCelles & Anteby, 2020), poorer attitudes to jobs (Grant & Schwartz, 2011), or diminished work effectiveness (Bolino & Grant, 2016).

What these studies examining both the positive and negative cases of compassion in organizations have in common, is that they conceptualize compassion largely as a *reactive* process that follows and gets triggered when actors occasionally detect or witness an instance of suffering. For example, studies highlight how nurses act compassionately towards patients by holding their hands after noticing that they are unsettled from their experiences in hospital (Kanov et al., 2004) or how coworkers respond to others compassionately by taking on some of their assignments after suffering has been noticed at work (Simpson, Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020). This is of course not to suggest that acting compassionately is seen as an unforeseeable, chance event in organizational scholarship (Kanov et al., 2017). To the contrary, studies have, for example, shown how organizations may provide training to staff in order to make them more alert to individuals' episodes of suffering (Atkins & Parker, 2012). In some organizations, rather than being a process "that is informal and emergent" (Lilius et al., 2011: 281) compassion may even become institutionalized so that organizations and their staff are ready to act when situations of suffering emerge. For example, in some hospitals there are specific trained nurses who are there to step in and act compassionately towards patients or relatives, freeing up other nurses to continue dealing with the medical cases at hand. This is sometimes attempted by building a culture (Madden et al., 2012) or climate (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012) that is better able to recognize episodes of suffering and in which compassionate responses to targets are rewarded (McClelland & Vogus, 2020). Some also refer to this as "compassion labor" where acting compassionately is demanded by employers

(O'Donohoe & Turlet, 2006: 1445) and actors are “expected to respond to others’ pain with compassion as part of their job description” (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014: 355). Yet, even here, it remains the case that these acts of compassion are described as unfolding in a specific “sequence” (McClelland & Vogus, 2020: 62) in response to a certain event or a certain shock, or, as put by Lilius et al. (2011: 891): “existing research on compassion has tended to examine one-time expressions of compassion in organizations, often following a crisis.”

While this view of compassion has been foundational in examining how organizations and their actors can navigate suffering when it arises, there are increasing indications that in practice, compassion in and by organizations does not only unfold and is not only accomplished in this manner – especially considering organizations whose sole purpose revolves around helping suffering groups in society (Maestri & Monforte, 2020). In particular, questions have been raised as to whether and how compassion may be deployed in a more *proactive* way by organizations towards stakeholders in order to achieve certain organizational goals, and what the overall consequences of viewing and approaching compassion in this way may be (McClelland & Vogus, 2020; Lilius et al., 2011). In other words, scholars have wondered whether and how compassion may function and be seen as a distinct organizational competence essential to organizations’ work in the first place, given the nature of their goals or the nature of the stakeholders they engage with, and not just as an ‘optional’ capability (Frost et al., 2006).

In this context, some scholars have suggested that examining how compassion may impact how organizations connect with their stakeholders (Miller et al., 2012; Cardon et al., 2012) or how compassion might influence cooperation (Lilius, 2012) would have merit. In particular, question have been raised about how such proactive deployment of compassion may shape or play a role in targeted audiences’ decision to interact with organizations in the first place: Sensing an

organization's compassion could be an important factor in targets' decision making when choosing to interact with organizations, which to date we know little about. Interest in this more proactive perspective on compassion has been further heightened by recent suggestions that in practice compassion in organizations does not always proceed via the traditional structure of noticing, feeling, and acting on suffering (Simpson & Berti, 2020; DeCelles & Anteby, 2020) and that scholars refer to "instances of compassion that are generalized to broad social problems and issues, as well as to suffering communities, as opposed to isolated cases of individuals in pain" (Miller et al., 2012: 620).

Moving beyond the traditional conception of compassion in organizations as a reactive process to individual events of suffering appears important as for many organizations compassion may be a central element, competence, or resource that is required to enable and legitimize their important work in the first place. Overall, it appears crucial to understand how such organizations create, apply, and sustain proactive compassion in order to foster organizational goals, and what the consequences of this approach may be. This is especially important for the growing number of organizations that seek to help others as part of their daily activities. Such organizations include, for example, social enterprises, charities, or human service organizations, that often work in socio-economically challenging settings in which they seek to interact and help marginalized and stigmatized populations.

Organizational efforts of creating social value through helping

In recent years, management scholars have taken a substantial interest in examining how organizations can create social value through *helping* individuals and groups, often located at the fringes of society. In this context, scholars have made great advancements in both our theoretical and practical understanding of the needs and requirements of targeted groups and how

organizations can act on their behalf (Lyons, Pek, & Wessel, 2017; Helms, Patterson, & Hudson, 2019). For example, studies have shown how organizations can work to reduce the public negative labelling of targets (Tracey & Philips, 2016), how organizations can provide resources for individuals to engage in their contested practices (Lawrence, 2017; Lawrence & Dover, 2015), or how organizations can support individuals to live with their negatively evaluated characteristics (Hudson, 2008). In so doing, these studies have emphasized the role that organizations can play in supporting targets at the fringes of society and also, crucially, how important it is that these targets engage with organizations to receive help, given that many of the challenges they face are difficult to overcome by themselves.

However, while the literature has tended to highlight a prevalence of positive cases in which organizations are able to help targets (Lawrence, 2015; Roulet, 2020), recent work encourages us to re-examine organizations' acts of helping and their consequences for targets (Lanaj, Johnson, & Wang, 2016). In particular, scholars have hinted at the idea that little is known about the dynamics of interactions between organizations and the targets they attempt to help and that some organizations, even with the best intentions of helping, may actually make things worse for targets (Roulet, 2020; Helms et al., 2019; Smith, 2012).

First, the literature of 'helping' in organizational contexts (Flynn, 2003; Miller, Bersoff & Hardwood, 1990), has often focused on the decision-making process of whether or not to engage and give help in the first place (Toegel, Kilduff, & Anand, 2013). Indeed, Flynn and Lake (2008) assert that this question has been the primary focus of the literature around helping, while others have increasingly acknowledged that the process of helping is much more complex and multifaceted than this (Grant & Patil, 2012). Here, it seems that scholars have left underexplored the dynamics and the challenges of helping between the help-seekers and help-givers beyond such

first interaction. In particular, we know less about how the relationship and interactions between these two parties may play out over time (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Miller et al., 2012; for an exception see Grodal, Nelson, & Siino, 2015). This oversight may be especially problematic (and important to consider) for organizations in which helping others is one of the organization's central reasons for existing, and where helping is both necessary and extremely difficult. In such contexts, helping must occur and recur over time, and depending on the nature of the interactions and the nature of the stakeholders, may sometimes also be experienced as an unpleasant "necessary evil" (Kahn, 2019: 1471; Margolis & Molinsky, 2008). Together, these factors make the overall experience of helping worthy of further investigation. Organizations in which helping others is central to their mission would thus seem to provide a very important context to examine the interactions of help-seekers and help-givers and how these play out.

Second, authors have recently started calling into question whether those organizations and actors that proclaim to be willing and able to help, are actually able to do so, as in reality they might not be familiar with or may misjudge the needs and requirements of targets (Claus & Tracey, 2020; Mair, Wolf, & Seelos, 2016; Markham, 2003). Some even suggest that the well-intended helping actions of organizations can make things worse for help-seekers, intensifying differentiation and feelings of marginalization (Holt, 2004) or by leading to "confrontation (...) and interpersonal power dynamics" (Smith, 2012: 259). Even though we have such indications in the literature, we still know relatively little about the experience of help-seekers' interactions and engagement with helping organizations and the consequences for them. Understanding this 'double-edged sword' of organizational helping that may sometimes be beneficial but in other cases may increase suffering for targets offers ample opportunity for deeper exploration.

Taken together, while interacting with and receiving help from organizations can evidently be a great solace for targets and important for their lives, understanding organizations' helping behavior and targets' experiences of it, and how it relates to the generation and sustaining of compassion, may be an important step to create a deeper understanding of ways in which organizations can help to create social change.

Working at the nexus of the literature on compassion in organizations and organizational helping, we ask the following research questions: *How do organizations proactively employ compassion in their efforts to help targets? How are such efforts sustained over time?*

EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

To answer our research questions, we focus on the daily work and experiences of a UK-based reentry organization and its staff in their endeavors to help ex-offenders gain employment. Specifically, we explore how the reentry organization's staff actively works to convey compassion in their interactions with ex-offenders in order to attract, integrate, and move them through their reentry program, ultimately helping them back into employment. We then explore how this proactive conveying of compassion plays out as reentry staff's case work unfolds. Using a reentry organization that supports ex-offender is an ideal setting to explore the proactive deployment of compassion and organizational helping dynamics, as helping is the central reason for the organization's existence in the first place.

Organizations Supporting Ex-Offenders Into Employment

In the UK alone, c.85,000 individuals are incarcerated with c.18,000 being released from prison every year (Ministry of Justice, 2019). The process of moving back into society and finding employment is long and challenging (Toubiana, 2020). Firstly, there are many practical difficulties including finding a home, setting up a bank account, having financial means to support oneself, or having to deal with missing skills that one needs for available employment (Blowman & Ely, 2020).

Secondly, ex-offenders frequently experience discrimination in both being invited to interviews and being accepted for positions (Lam & Harcourt, 2003), because many company policies do not allow the hiring of individuals with a criminal background or because HR managers are wary of hiring such individuals as it is seen as risky or even dangerous (Harding, 2003).

As a result of this, especially since the early 2000s, there has been an increasing awareness that in order to bring about social change and reduce reoffending rates in the long term, many individuals who leave prison need to be supported in their move back into society rather than being left to their own devices (Ndrecka, Listwan, & Latessa, 2017). In particular, over the last 20 years the UK has witnessed the emergence of a novel organizational form that takes on the specific task of helping ex-offenders back into employment – the so called ‘reentry organization’ (Prior, 2020). Reentry organizations are mostly charities or social enterprises. In some cases, they will employ ex-offenders themselves and thus provide them with sustained employment. Prominent examples in the UK include Redemption Roasters, a coffee roaster and café chain that employs ex-offenders, or Freedom Bakery that trains and employs ex-offenders as bakers and pastry chefs. In other cases, such reentry organizations function as an intermediary between ex-offenders and employers and facilitate their transition into employment. This means that rather than employing ex-offenders themselves, they help individuals through training, consultations, and job search support in order to increase their odds of gaining employment in the open market. Through this, these organizations support people with conviction not by giving them jobs but by helping them find sustained and meaningful employment.

The Case of ReOrg

The reentry organizations we studied – which for the purpose of anonymity we term *ReOrg* – is one of those organizations that function as an intermediary. ReOrg was founded in 2010,

currently employs between 15-20 staff, and helps approximately 400 ex-offenders back into employment every year (i.e., full-time and permanent work, not short-term placements or job experiences). The organization was set-up with the aim of helping ex-offenders back into employment, irrespective of their background, their social status, their religious beliefs, or most importantly, their offence. This means that ReOrg's reentry staff engages with individuals who have gone to prison for acts of fraud or tax avoidance as well as those that have been incarcerated due to violent offenses, sex-offenses, and pedophilia. ReOrg's reentry staff works from many different locations of the UK, often remotely. Some staff members have prior experience of working in the criminal justice system, others joined ReOrg wanting to do good and help individuals who may be experiencing a lot of hardship and suffering. In terms of the process, ex-offenders can reach out to ReOrg while they are still incarcerated, which is then facilitated by prison officials, or, which occurs more frequently, by themselves when their sentence has finished.

ReOrg's work involves both practical (e.g., helping with errands; applications; interview training) and emotional support (e.g., pastoral care), but the cornerstone of the program is their 'employer database.' The employer database is an online portal that contains c.140 companies from across the UK who have committed to giving ex-offenders that approach them via ReOrg a fair chance in the application process without directly dismissing them for having a criminal record – an approach that is, unfortunately, still very common in many employers across the UK. Ex-offenders can search the database and identify fitting jobs by filtering for role descriptions, location, or any limitations (i.e., some jobs are not available for sex-offenders as they entail interactions with minors). In order to be able to do their work, an important part of this process involves ReOrg's reentry staff building relationships with ex-offenders and getting them to join and remain in the program in the first place, in order to get them the best help possible.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

To explore our research question, we drew on an extensive qualitative dataset including interviews, observations, and secondary data. Our data sources and their uses are summarized in Table 1.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

Interviews. The primary source of data consisted of 47 semi-structured interviews across two samples. We used purposive sampling to make sure to cover a variety of relevant actors within our context and later supported this through snowball sampling (Denzin, 1989).

Our first sample comprised 14 interviews with ReOrg's reentry staff. The first author initially became interested in ReOrg given that it is the largest reentry organizations in the UK with a nationwide presence and a broad network of employers, ex-offenders, and prisons. This matters, as it allows the uncovering of a large variety of experiences by the reentry staff in dealing with different cases of ex-offenders. Further, ReOrg is one of the only reentry organizations that supports all people with convictions irrespective of their crimes. Covering the full breadth of crimes again allows us to better understand the varying challenges of reentry staff in helping ex-offenders. Having reached out to ReOrg we gained access through an agreement with management to study the broader implications of how the reentry organizations supported ex-offenders' move back into employment.

We commenced interviewing ReOrg's management who then introduced us to other reentry staff in the organizations. All of the reentry staff we spoke to had between one and eight years of experience of working in their role. During our interviews with reentry staff we asked open-ended questions about their daily work. Here, we were interested in experiences and stories around their interactions with ex-offenders over the duration of their casework. This allowed reentry staff to

focus on episodes that were important to them. We then engaged in more specific question around their work, what challenges they frequently encountered, and how they went about managing such challenges.

Next to the reentry staff, we also decided that it was crucial to learn about the experiences of ex-offenders who took part in the reentry program. Our aim was to ‘evaluate’ the information reentry staff provided and to see how their work resonated with the targets they were attempting to help. In order to access these individuals, we initially asked ReOrg to recommend four ex-offenders to us who had had a lot of experience of the reintegration and employment process and thus could give us a nuanced understanding of working with ReOrg. After that, we sent an invitation to ReOrg’s entire database of ex-offenders, inviting them to take part in our study about the experience of moving back into employment after leaving prison. 35 ex-offenders responded, 29 of whom ultimately agreed to an interview. As such, our second sample consisted of 33 interviews (first four, then followed by 29) with ex-offenders who were receiving help from ReOrg. Most of the ex-offenders we interviewed had joined the program over the last few months and were still very actively involved with ReOrg. Some of the ex-offenders we talked to had been able to find a job, others (the majority) were still looking for work. Ex-offenders represented in our sample had engaged in a variety of different crimes (e.g., fraud, theft, drugs, violence, sexual assaults, pedophilia). Prison sentences among our interviewees ranged from approximately one year to ten years, with an average of four years. The interview protocol for ex-offenders included open question such as their general experiences with ReOrg or their general experience of the reentry process, and more focused ones such as why they had chosen this specific reentry organization. Further, we asked about the specific support they had received from ReOrg and to what extent and how that helped them in search for employment.

Overall, Interviews were conducted either face-to-face, via online video conferencing, or via phone and lasted from 40 to 110 minutes, with an average of 66 minutes. With the permission of interviewees, all interviews were recorded and transcribed, except for two cases in which ex-offenders chose to answer questions via email to protect their identity from the research team. Interviews were conducted until no new themes emerged, suggesting theoretical saturation had been reached (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

Observations. We supported our interviews through observations. In particular, the first author took part in two of ReOrg's annual gatherings (in 2018 and 2019). These events were held in London and brought together a range of different actors including ex-offenders (both those still looking for and those in work), ReOrg's reentry staff, government workers, and (potential) employers. While these events had the official aim of showcasing ReOrg's achievements and enabling participants to network with each other, we were more intrigued by the opportunity to witness interactions between reentry staff and ex-offenders firsthand, given that much of their work otherwise happened remotely. In attending these events, we were able to shadow a number of conversations between reentry staff and the ex-offenders they supported. In these interactions we were interested in how staff treated ex-offenders, what they discussed, and how they seemed to help ex-offenders with specific problems. In addition, the first author held informal conversations with six ex-offenders that were not part of the semi-structured interviews to learn more about their motivations of engaging with ReOrg and their experience of their services.

Furthermore, to build a more detailed understanding of the reentry journey, the first author visited two prisons in the UK. The aim was to gain a deeper feeling for the challenges ex-offenders faced when moving out of prison and back into society. Informal conversations with prison officials directed our attention even more to the psychological challenges the move back into

society entailed for offenders (e.g., such as having trust issues), next to the more practical challenges of finding work. Field notes capturing observations were typed up within 24 hours.

Secondary sources. To corroborate our interviews and observations and to contextualize our understanding, we also collected secondary data. In particular, we gathered materials that had been produced and published by ReOrg to advertise their services to ex-offenders or that were used in reentry staff's work with ex-offenders (e.g., brochures, annual reports, twitter posts, online videos). This helped us gain more understanding of the topics reentry staff addressed, and the approaches they took to attract ex-offenders and show them what ReOrg could do for them. We also gathered information from ex-offenders on email exchanges with reentry staff. This enabled us to gain even more detailed understanding of how ex-offenders were approached and supported and how they responded to the services they received. Finally, we reviewed news articles (mostly in the UK press), government reports, and publications by charities on the broader topic of supporting and employing ex-offenders. We also drew on TV documentaries and debates on the topic.

Data analysis

As a result of the limited understanding of how organizations proactive employ compassion to achieve organizational goals, how these efforts are sustained, and what the consequences may be, we inductively analyzed our data following established methods in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Analyzing our data was thus an iterative process with the aim of discovering and developing new theoretical insights (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Throughout the data collection and analysis phase, both authors worked together but took on different roles. The first author was the 'insider' with in-depth experience and knowledge of the context. The second author took the role of the 'outsider' and provided the perspective of an interested yet not fully emerged researcher (Bartunek & Louis, 1996). This enabled us to have

engaged debates about the data from different perspectives, often leading to puzzles and questions that we then addressed in our data collection efforts.

The original motivation of our study was to examine how ex-offenders, as a broadly stigmatized population in society (Goodstein, 2019; Toubiana, 2020), experienced the process of socializing and settling (back) into employment. However, during our early interviews we quickly realized that the phase before the transition into employment, i.e., the case work phase between ReOrg's reentry staff and the ex-offenders they attempted to help, was filled with a lot of interesting interactions and unexpected tensions. In particular, reentry staff often talked about the need for actively showing compassion in their interactions with ex-offenders as well as the challenges this created for them. Similarly, in interactions with ex-offenders we noticed that they often landed on the topic of compassion and how important this was when deciding on which reentry organizations to seek help from in the first place. Together, these observations intrigued us: firstly, we had not expected compassion to be used in a relatively direct and proactive way by the reentry staff, nor had we expected that conveying compassion could become very challenging in this context of organizations that exist to help targets. Secondly, we became curious about ex-offenders' remarks that they were deliberately looking for organizations that were very compassionate, as our expectations had been that more or less all helping organizations would be similar in that way. As such, these early reflections during our data gathering led us to refocus our research approach to examine the proactive use of compassion by organizations that exist to help targets and the outcomes of such approach. In particular, we focused on the behavioral approaches of reentry staff through which they expressed compassion. Evidence of compassion, in these cases, entailed reentry staff's behaviors that aimed at mitigating ex-offenders suffering or helping them

navigate obstacles in their reentry journey. Often, these behaviors indicated clear signs of empathy or even pity, which further indicated instances of compassion (Frost et al., 2006).

The first author read transcripts, field notes, and contextual secondary data as they became available in detail and conducted open coding (Van Maanen, 1979). Open coding took place mostly at the paragraph level, marking these with descriptive sentences or in-vivo codes through the qualitative data coding software Atlas.ti. In this phase, both authors met regularly to review incipient observations and explore how these related to the literature on compassion and helping in organizational contexts. This was continued until we reached a stage of thematic saturation, and as a result, a promising range of first-level codes.

Once this stage had been completed, we then moved our analysis beyond open coding. Here, we worked to deepen our understanding of how specifically ReOrg proactively conveyed compassion and to what effect, through focused coding (Locke, 2001; Charmaz, 2006). This process entailed grouping empirically-driven first-level codes into more theoretically-driven second-order themes. For example, the first-level codes of “focus on the here and how”, “never asking about offence”, and “asking for help as sign of readiness” were grouped together in the second-order theme of “taking individuals at ‘face value.’” The first-level codes of “unrealistic expectations” and “too many demands” were grouped together in the second-order theme of “feelings of exploitation.” This process led to 11 second-order themes, which comprised the practices of reentry professionals conveying compassion over time in our findings, as well as the different consequence of these practices for reentry staff and ex-offenders in this process.

Taking our analysis further, we then moved from the second-order themes to aggregate dimensions, which represented the theoretical building blocks of our study and indicated how the interactions of reentry staff and ex-offenders unfolded over the duration of their case work. We

did this by, once again, moving between literature on compassion and helping in organizational contexts and our analyzed data, in order to uncover novel insights and new perspectives as to the role of proactively using compassion to achieve organizational goals. For example, the second-order themes of “building community beyond simple support”, “taking individuals at ‘face value’”, and “providing customizable and personal reentry journeys” were grouped together in the aggregate dimension of “conveying compassion to enable organizational goals.” The second-order themes of “confrontation with unsettling revelations”, “neglect of commitments”, and “feelings of exploitation” were grouped together in the aggregate dimension of “recurring challenges to conveying compassion.” This process led to four aggregate dimensions. Our corresponding data structure can be found in Figure 1.

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Overall, this concluded our move from the initial data collection efforts around ex-offenders’ move into employment and their interactions with the reentry staff along that journey, towards the theoretical insights we capture to elucidate the proactive role of compassion in this process, how this evolves over time, and what the consequences are.

FINDINGS

The Centrality of Compassion in Ex-offenders’ Reentry Journeys

The staff at the reentry organization we studied overwhelmingly discussed that getting ex-offenders to a stage where they were “work ready” (Staff06)⁴ and getting them into sustained employment was only one part of their job. Another substantial yet often less recognized challenge was getting ex-offenders to join, integrate into, and then remain in the reentry program in the first place:

⁴ Quotes by ReOrg’s reentry staff are indicated through ‘Staff’ followed by a number; quotes by ex-offenders are indicated through ‘Ex’ followed by a number

We've got all these relationships with employers, and we've got our program set up,...but in order to make it all work we have to have new [ex-offenders] join and we need them to stay and go through with it all, and that's often a major headache for us. That side of the work. (Staff08)

When discussing this situation with ex-offenders directly, we uncovered that the reason for their frequent hesitancy to join or remain with such programs were at least twofold. One the one hand it appeared that there was a lot of *fear of interactions* with actors outside of prison in ex-offenders' minds, even the ones that promised to help. Here, a central issue appeared to be a substantial distress from the stigma that ex-offenders felt attached to their situation. Interestingly, this fear often didn't seem to depend much on the crime or the length of the sentence. Additionally, ex-offenders anticipated there to be a lack of understanding of their situation in general, which further resulted in substantial feelings of fear among ex-offenders regarding their interactions after prison and their move back into society and employment. As was mentioned by one ex-offender:

My fear came from what the people would think of me (...) still now. It's just a case of me getting out there and doing it, and not being scared of rejection, you know? I believe in this world that things will either come in two forms: either fear or love. And at the moment, I have a certain amount of fear around getting a job, or even applying for jobs, and that's one of the things that has prevented me from getting out there and asking for help. (Ex10)

In particular, many feared that even organizations that had the best intentions of helping them in their move back into society and work – such as charities, social enterprises, or government organizations – were going to trigger some of their negative past experiences and emotions in interactions, or accentuate their experience of stigma:

So, I would not engage that much with anybody. Even to the extent of going to the shops. You have this psychological feeling that everybody's looking at you, judging you, even though they don't know who you are. They wouldn't have a clue who you are, but you have a feeling that they probably do, and so therefore you try not to engage too much. So, there's always this underlying fear of interacting...with any kind of interactions frankly...and funny enough that was how I felt about reaching out to [supporting organizations]. (Ex20)

In some cases, this fear was increased even more by a lack of confidence in their own abilities brought about by their stay in prison, making their move back into society and ultimately into work even more worrisome. As one ex-offender recalled:

You're almost deskilled when you're in [prison]...you literally don't have to make any decisions. You're told constantly where to go, what to do. Even your food is almost chosen for you. We used to call it prison brain. Where you'd be sitting there, and you wouldn't remember how to spell something. And you come out, and prison brain's still there. It's like you've got to relearn all these skills again, you've got to relearn how to communicate with people, how to make grownup decisions. How to be responsible for yourself, because you haven't had to do that, and that creates a lot of worries and anxiety, because you just don't know how this is going to affect you in trying to get back on your feet. (Ex12)

On the other hand, ex-offenders who had overcome their initial fear and did indeed reach out to organizations reported how they had *negative past experiences* with organizations that had promised to help:

With some [reentry organization], it was a box ticking exercise: "Oh, sign up [here]. Oh, you're done? Ok here's some advice." But there was no real practical support. And then even in my CV that was written, I don't know if it's me being a bit ... What do you call it? Paranoid. But they wrote on this letter, "In my *pervious* jobs." Instead of *previous*, I thought, "Was that intentional?" Probably not, but I thought perhaps it was as if to say you're a perv, you're into that sort of thing. And it was full of spelling errors in all the rest of it. (...) And they were national careers advi[sors], but they stigmatize you because they just say to you, "You can do this course, but I won't really bother because you're not going to get a job when you get out basically." So, I left. (Ex22)

This led to a deep sense of disappointment and mistrust towards organizations and questions around whether organizations that "say they can help, can actually help" (Ex32) and whether those organizations actually have any "understanding of what it's like to be in [ex-offenders'] shoes" (Ex15). As such, these experience in turn made those individuals even more skeptical about the whole reentry process and the role organizations could actually play in helping them back into employment. As some mentioned, they were tired of encountering unkept promises:

It's just one of those things...I don't want to be let down again. You know, been there, done that. That's a big part of the problem, you get all these people telling you "do this, go here, do that, we can help"...so you are, they are, building up hope and stuff...and then when it all doesn't work out because something's gone wrong again, then that's when you feel even more hurt and disappointed...and you've just had enough of it. (Ex23)

From a mental point of view, I could've tipped over quite easily, and gone to a point of no return. Like I said, the important thing was to focus on those positives, to believe in myself, to kind of not believe everything that people said. (...) Because when I was in [prison], there are services that say they can help, but there's nothing with any kind of tangibility. (Ex12)

Similarly, reentry staff recalled encounters with ex-offenders that had just left prison:

Definitely, when they've just come out [of prison], I tend to see ... they tend to come across as being quite a lowly mood and often very very skeptical. Like, "How can you help me? How can you really help me because I don't think I'm gonna be able to get [any job]." There's kind of a low mood. Not really much confidence in themselves or in us or others, and that's largely based on previous experiences. That's at the beginning of the process when they're just starting. (Staff09)

Taken together, our conversations revealed a liminal experience in which ex-offenders were seeking help to get into employment after prison, yet at the same time were either fearful of interactions and did not know who to trust or had been disappointed before, often holding them back from reaching out or engaging deeply with organizations.

As a result of this, most reentry staff in the organization we studied saw deliberately and openly conveying a deep sense of caring for and understanding of individual ex-offenders' situations, their needs, and their suffering as a central and sometimes even as the most important part of their work, as it enabled them to attract and integrate individuals into the program and make it possible to help them. In other words, as many of the staff put it, purposely and intentionally conveying 'compassion' was a central part of facilitating ex-offenders' reentry journey and providing necessary help. This was often invoked by reentry staff acknowledging that ex-offenders had already "paid their price in prison" (Staff08) and had "owed up to society (...) by spending time behind bars" (Staff01) but still were treated badly once they rejoined society, making them undeservingly suffer. Expanding on this, some reentry staff said:

They have no other hope and quite a few of them have been trying for years to get back into work but have not [gotten] anywhere...and they keep finding their conviction as a barrier... so it's hard to build yourself up again and put yourself out there at the risk of facing rejection once again. So, quite often they come to us and they have no hope, which is why it's so important that we welcome them and we take care of them and show that we really understand their challenges. (Staff11)

A lot of our work is about compassion, you know. And not only being compassionate ourselves but making that visible and making that part of the whole experience of joining us, of being with us, of getting our [ex-offenders] back into work. (Staff09)

And what we do is we give them a sense of they've got somebody on their side that's advocating for them, that is genuinely interested in them and them being successful. I think that's the positive thing about my job. (Staff02)

Ex-offenders themselves also referred to this, many stating how they were looking for organizations that rather than “just provid[ing] a service...and seeing [them] as another number” (Ex06) actually “understand what [they are] up against and how that makes [them] feel...[and] take a genuine interest in [their] fate” (Ex16):

What I was really looking for is something that is relatable, personable...a welcoming face. Someone, “Hello, [first name redacted],” rather than looking at a piece of paper, “Oh, hello Mr. [surname redacted].” It’s about familiarity. It’s nice...and that’s what I need to feel that someone is supporting me, not just processing me. (Ex17)

I have seen a lot of employment courses, supposedly preparing people for work but they’re not because they never ask people what they need, their support is really generic, “go and build a CV, here’s a book!” Well, a lot of the guys that I’ve spoken to, first, they might not even be able to read and, second, they need to sit down with them and actually help them to work these things through. (Ex22)

Based on their experience, reentry staff reflected on how only if they were able to convey compassion and convince ex-offenders that they really cared would the individuals open up, share stories, and provide “uncomfortable but necessary details about their lives” (Staff01), which were important in order to get them the best help possible and determine fitting employment opportunities.

Conveying Compassion to Enable Organizational Goals

Our conversations revealed that purposely and deliberately conveying compassion was a crucial and ongoing part of reentry staff’s work to enable their organizational goal of helping targets ultimately find employment. Through compassion, the aim was to overcome fears, insecurities, and ultimately suffering and foster feelings of acceptance and inclusion to enable ex-offenders to join, remain in, and successfully complete the reentry program. In order to convey compassion, we identified that reentry staff engaged in a range of behavioral approaches to demonstrate to ex-offenders that they had a deep understanding of their life situation and needs, felt for them, and were going to support them in alleviating their troubles.

Building community beyond simple support. One approach that reentry staff focused on to convey compassion was to demonstrate and build a sense of community for ex-offenders rather than just acting as an anonymous service provider. This was motivated by their sense that the move out of prison and back into society was often a difficult and lonely journey.

A starting point for reentry staff's efforts to convey compassion through building a sense of community was to consciously design and use language that would be least threatening and most welcoming and inclusive to ex-offenders. Central to this was not calling individuals that had come out of prison 'offenders' or 'formerly incarcerated' but using the phrase 'people with a criminal conviction'. Those that ultimately joined the program were then called 'members.' As one of the more senior reentry staff recalled:

[Using that terminology] was a decision that [our founder] and the board made when first setting out. We wanted people with convictions to feel part of something, part of something good. We want them to feel part of [our organization]. They can be a real community member of [our organization]. And that's why they also made the choice to steer away from the more anonymous terminology of a client, or a stakeholder as their general name [which many other organizations use]. (Staff03)

This resonated with many who sought to join the reentry program:

It just gives you a sense that they want to treat you right. It feels respectful. Not calling us criminals or offenders or so. I remember that was one of the first things that stood out, also on their website or so. Them calling you a member. (Ex02)

My experience was that others just called you an applicant or what it was, but here it was all about membership. And so that felt good, because it gave you hope of being part of something bigger, somehow. (Ex30)

Emphasizing the use of this language further developed out of an awareness that ex-offenders who were moving out of prisons often experienced the sensation of a "sentence beyond the sentence" (Staff05) where they felt that others in society continued to treat and talk about them as if they were still prisoners and had not yet served their time. As some recalled:

There are times when I sit here and feel that I'm just not allowed to move on. I'm not allowed to forget that I've been to prison. People talk to you about your "offence" or "offender"...kinda mak[ing] life as difficult as possible for you. You might have served your time, but we're not going to make it easy for you and let you move on. (Ex20)

Even when I saw my probation [officer], she's like, "Oh, here's your sentence plan." And I'm like, "What?" And she's like, "Yeah. Well, you're still doing your sentence." And it's a bit like, "Hang on a minute. I thought I've done that, but you haven't. You're still under. You're just serving it outside." Which I think is hard to get your head around at first, because it's kind of like you're still being punished. (Ex24)

Further, we learned how conveying compassion through community was additionally heightened by reentry staff emphasizing the exclusivity of their program and the employer database that was at the core of their offerings. Reentry staff recalled how many different ex-offenders had wanted to access the database before joining the reentry program "to see what they were going to get" (Staff01) or how some employers or other charities wanted to access the database as well. This access was denied on grounds of this being a special service to the ex-offenders they supported, who should feel comfortable making use of the offer and treat it as a real opportunity rather than just as a given. Access was only granted once one had entered the program:

It was really a breath of fresh air seeing that they had this database, only for people who had signed up. And it helped me look further afield than my current search. (...) In some way it was a bit of a signal that there are things especially for us that others can't access just like that. So that was nice for a change. That made me feel valued. (Ex32)

Finally, to further indicate a sense of community and to emphasize that their overall support was something reentry staff and the entire organizations took very seriously, there were expectations and responsibilities tied to participating in the reentry program. In other words, reentry staff highlighted that there was an active part ex-offenders had to play if they wanted to join and remain part of the community and that this was the only way to keep an enterprise that had the goal of helping individuals back into employment alive:

We move [ex-offenders] away from a mentality that everything is structured, everything is done for them, and move them towards actually understanding "you've got to take initiative, you've got to own your journey." So, what we are doing is putting a lot more of the responsibility on the members than they are used to. Firstly, we expect members to login and search employer's directories for vacancies, so we're not just giving them those on the plate. Secondly, we encourage them to apply for vacancies. Thirdly, we encourage them to keep in contact with our employment advisor and respond to our communication. Because from that, we expect that they're becoming more work ready. But all of this happens in a safe environment. We are always here for them. (Staff09)

You know, no matter where it is or what it does, all communities need to distribute responsibilities. Otherwise, things don't get done. It's always a combination of giving and taking to make communities work...and last. And that's how it works here too. (Staff08)

Next to highlighting such expectations verbally, staff got new ex-offenders to take a membership test and sign 'the pledge' which indicated what the reentry organization expected from each ex-offender that joined their organizations. In line with this, reentry staff also provided opportunities for ex-offenders to take on responsibilities and a role within the organization itself. For example, ex-offenders were invited to take part in events and discussion or represent the reentry organization in meetings during which they could tell their own stories and share their experiences of the criminal justice system and finding employment. This provided opportunities to take on responsibilities in order to help ex-offenders deal with their past:

[Our employment event] was so fruitful. There were so many conversations in between employers and employers and prisons. Employers were getting in contact. (...) And that's also where we give our members the opportunity to tell their story and give some inspiration and hope to everyone in the room...and also to inspire more employers to hire people who come out of prison. (Staff12)

A substantial number of ex-offenders recalled how they valued this approach as it gave them the feeling of "for once (...) not being spoken *at* and not being told what to do" (Ex01) but being able to participate in and contribute to something, which made them feel part of a community, and helped reduce their fear and unsettledness. It also re-emphasized to ex-offenders that reentry staff were really interested in seeing individuals achieve and overcome adversity and suffering. As some ex-offenders highlighted:

So, it feels like you're doing something proactive, it gives you something to do, and it's bit of a two-way thing: You've signed up, you're a member so to speak, they're going to help, but you have to pull your weight. So having that arrangement, being part of that organization, you feel like you're worth something. (...) Being a member of something is good. (Ex24)

Simply knowing that they had these expectations had a very motivational effect, because I felt that I would be letting them down if I just said, "you know what, I can't be bothered". It's almost like a little bit of a kick up the backside to keep focused on looking forward rather than dwelling on just nothing. I found it very helpful. (Ex22)

I'm happy to help out...because I think from a certain point of view, with the experiences we have, at the end of the day, we [as ex-offenders] can get to [other offenders] a lot better than even [the reentry organization] can...we've experienced what they're going through. (Ex19)

Taking individuals at 'face value'. A second approach that reentry staff emphasized to convey compassion was to take ex-offenders at, what they referred to as, 'face value' – in other words making individuals feel that they are valued and accepted just as they are, whatever their past may be. This was motivated by reentry staff's awareness that ex-offenders, both in prison and after leaving it, were overwhelmingly being questioned about and then judged based on their past and on decisions they had taken years if not decades ago.

One way to convey compassion in this way was to focus conversations on the here and now and treat targets accordingly. In particular, this meant that reentry staff talked to individuals about their lives with a complete focus on the present situation and then extended this to talk about the future and associated plans of getting back into work. These conversations often revolved around individuals' skills, their ambitions, and the plans they had and how the reentry staff assigned to their cases could support them in this. As reentry staff recalled:

They've been stretched and there's a lot of "you've done this, you've done that" and "you're not capable of that". And so we come in and change that...focusing on where they are now, what they want to do in future, just seeing them as a real human being at this present moment. And that often goes a long way when you've come out of prison. (Staff06)

I think our role is very much about not being negative and to actually see, "They've done their time, and now let's move on and let's support this person and get behind them because they're changing their life round"...and accept that person for what they're doing in that moment rather than what they've done previously. (Staff05)

This focus on the here and now was deeply felt and valued by ex-offenders:

[The reentry staff] are very personable people. They treat you like just a normal person that wants to get on with life. Whereas the likes of probation, they still treat you like an offender, like it's all about what you've done back in the day. You still feel like a naughty boy going into the probation office, which is nonsense at 37, I've done my time. But [with the reentry staff], I've never felt like that. They're very helpful, very friendly, very optimistic, very forward looking, it's just like chatting to a mate really, and you know they help you where they can. So, it's very supportive. (Ex25)

Ex-offenders' past only became part of the conversation when they themselves wanted to talk about it, highlighting feelings or experiences they had had, for example, in prison. In such cases, reentry staff often made ex-offenders aware that everything they had gone through should be consciously understood as a valuable asset, that could be put to positive future use:

Everything they've seen...they've done...they've been through can in one way or the other be used as something. Something to learn from, something to share, and sometimes even some kind of skills that can be taken from that. (Staff09)

Again, this resonated with many ex-offenders as it helped them to make sense of their journey and gave them a new perspective of how to perceive themselves and their past. It gave them the feeling that their time in prison was not a waste:

After dealing with [the reentry staff] and speaking to them I felt that I have actually got things to offer, that I can contribute positively to the society. And I guess for me that was the biggest thing, the shame and the guilt. And you probably hear this from other people, it's that at the time you felt that you're not worth, you're a lower class almost, a lower part of society. That actually you're not worthy at times. But those feeling have dissipated a lot for me. But they do occasionally come back and [the reentry organization], the emails and the people there, have shown me that I have got something to offer, I am worthy. I have skills. It's always boosted me in that way. (Ex26)

Relatedly, another avenue to make ex-offenders feel that they were taken completely at face value and were not judged but accepted, was a heavy emphasis on reentry staff never asking about the offence the individuals had committed. One reentry staff said:

A lot of members start communicating with me, and they think I know what their conviction is for, and actually I'm saying to them that "actually, I don't know anything about your conviction." Some people are like, "Oh, okay." But there are definitely quite a few people who are like, "But, if you knew what I did then you wouldn't wanna work with me." And so they say that they would rather tell me. I'm like, "If you want to tell me, that's absolutely fine. That's your choice. But we never ask, because a lot of people have had that kind of rejection once they've told people and we don't want to let any of that come up." (Staff04)

Providing customizable and personal reentry journeys. A third approach that reentry staff emphasized to convey compassion was to provide customizable journeys throughout their time with the reentry organization, with only a relatively small range of mandatory interactions. This was based on reentry staff's knowledge that ex-offenders' needs and requirements of moving into

employment as well as the reasons for their distress varied substantially. This flexibility was well received as this individuating approach was in stark contrast to how ex-offenders had been treated throughout their journey during and while leaving prison, or how some other organizations had treated them after having left prison. This approach was again used to demonstrate that reentry staff truly cared about individuals and worked to reduce their sense of suffering.

Tailored services were offered in a variety of ways. For some ex-offenders, reentry staff played the role of supporting them in preparing their job application documents and getting their CVs edited: “For me, the biggest help was when they reviewed all the work I’d done in custody in terms of how it looks on my CV and how to make it look good” (Ex07). Others recalled how for them the biggest hurdle was to write a disclosure letter, which reentry staff were able to assist with: “They do quite a lot of information on how to disclose [one’s crime to employers], which is obviously a very worrying thing. So, it’s quite nice to use that to actually write a disclosure statement with their help” (Ex20). In other cases, particularly for ex-offenders who had no problem in putting these documents together, reentry staff were able to offer more support on the employer side, such as suggesting a range of jobs, selectively making connections with employers, or following up with employers if something went wrong. This customization also related to the amount of interactions. Some ex-offenders recalled how for them it was extremely helpful and desirable to have very frequent interactions with reentry staff, others required only very targeted interactions to discuss specific topics and otherwise wanted to be left alone. Together, these options enabled ex-offenders to seek the support they individually felt was most necessary to their journey and strengthened their sense that reentry staff were dedicated to helping them individually overcome their specific troubles.

Another approach reentry staff took was to create a space for ex-offenders to ‘open up’ and “try and let go of anything that is bugging them” (Staff01). They thus encouraged ex-offenders to feel free to talk about any topics they pleased or to ask any questions they had on their mind. This emerged out of a realization that many ex-offenders had very different experiences with the employment process and thus many different questions or concerns. At the same time, reentry staff realized that a lot of the concerns ex-offenders had were things they could not or did not want to discuss with their family and friends (often out of embarrassment or because they did not want to trigger negative feelings) and were also things they had not been able to discuss with acquaintances in prison because avoiding any kind of weakness or insecurity was often top of the agenda there. Providing these spaces to exchanges thoughts, ideas, and concerns or to simply vent disappointments appeared very important for ex-offenders who overwhelmingly recalled how talking with reentry staff about a lot of non-employment related issues gave them hope, motivation, and some peace of mind. Rather than restricting negative feelings it was all about giving ex-offenders a space to let these feelings go in any way they saw fit. Ex-offenders recalled:

Coming out prison is difficult because the stigma’s there, and I think you can’t get away from it, from that side of things, you can’t remove the stigma and it’s there. I did end up on antidepressants because of it. In a sense, I was quite fortunate because [reentry staff was] always there to speak to about anything...not just about work. So, you can actually speak to someone even when it’s just a case of, you know, how are you feeling, just a general conversation but it was more than just, you know, never just how are you doing, kind of thing, it was genuine interest and care and that’s what actually kept me going. (Ex31)

You know, it was the chats that I was able to have just like “we understand where you’re coming from, a lot of people feel it...eventually that there will be a break, it may not feel like it but there will be a break eventually.” It was that kind of sounding board that comes back as a positive thing. You’re feeling negative now but you’re accepting the negatives, turning midway and into the positive. So, I think it was their kind of response, and them providing that space, that actually in a sense kept me going and that there will be something around the corner. (Ex33)

In so doing, reentry staff once again conveyed the feeling that the ex-offenders were at the center of this enterprise and staff were there to provide support in ways that worked best for them, instead of simply providing a standardized and prescribed offering that might not help individuals at all,

or even alienate them. Further, these tactics enabled reentry staff to build a strong contrast between the experiences of ex-offenders in prison where things were often very regulated and anonymous and their often very personal interactions in the reentry organization:

And we try and (...) record information on our secure systems so that we can ask personal questions. Like one of them, his mum was in and out of hospital. So, I ask him, "So, how's your mum doing now?" It's those personal questions that develop trust. Remembering to ask about the stuff that they mentioned. So, I think and when you've got that kind of relationship it then becomes a lot easier when they do phone up. I mean I rang this one guy about a month ago and said, "Hi, (...), [h]ow are you?" And I could just feel him smiling down the phone. It was just the most wonderful conversation and he said "I'm getting ready to go on shift." (Staff07)

Finally, compared to many other reentry organizations in the UK, the case work of the reentry staff we studied also did not automatically end once ex-offenders had found employment. As we were told: "People's journeys do not come to an end just because they now have work...what's really happening for them and for us is that this is a start of a new journey" (Staff11). This added another dimension to the providing of customizable and personal reentry journeys through a flexible support duration. As such, reentry staff offered many different options through which they and ex-offenders could continue their relationship, even after employment had been gained. For some staying in touch was a great motivator as they enjoyed being part of the community, which also aided them when facing new challenges, for example, in work. These individuals, in regular intervals still received emails or phone calls from reentry staff to see how they were doing in their new job and were encouraged to reach out again if ever things were not going to plan. Others decided that reentry staff had done their job and decided not to remain on the member database, thus departing the reentry program after gaining employment. Reentry staff recalled:

So [we] usually follow up with people who are in work. So, we follow up one week, one month, three months, six months, 12 months. And we're starting to build up a picture as to what's happening. Some people really appreciate that. (...) Some people when they get work ask to come off our system and ask us to delete them so obviously we don't know the longer picture with them, but that's also absolutely fine. So, it's really about what works for them. (Staff07)

We're happy to have [our members] stay with us as long as they like...I've got somebody that's been out [of prison] for a good five, ten years and still need[s] our help. Also, we offer our members the

opportunity to always come back to us. Once they're in work, that's great, but if they decide to move on we always say to them, "Please use our service again if you're wanting help finding your next job." (Staff05)

Recurring Challenges to Conveying Compassion

We have seen that conveying compassion is a central part of reentry staff's day-to-day work that often results in ex-offenders successfully joining and remaining in the reentry program, feeling supported and more at ease with their situation. Through conveying compassion, reentry staff is frequently able to create a relational bond between themselves and the ex-offenders they intend to serve, which helps them in their process to ultimately move targets back into employment.

Yet, when asked to reflect on how their interactions with ex-offenders unfolded over time, reentry staff often quite reluctantly discussed that focusing so heavily on conveying compassion to ex-offenders also took its toll. Our conversations revealed that, far from being a purely generative and positive experience, reentry staff frequently experienced challenges to their work with ex-offenders and in their continuous efforts to convey compassion to them. In discussing their case work, reentry staff, often seemingly embarrassed or initially wary to share these confessions with us, explained how they, through the intense focus on conveying compassion in their work and the resulting interactions that followed, often came to a point where they felt their "willingness to help and hold ex-offenders' hands" (Staff11) fade or sometimes completely disappear:

There is so much emphasis on interacting and helping people, and you know we give it everything, being caring...and then when things go wrong, and it doesn't go to plan and this happens, well, quite often...that's when I just feel...well sometimes I just feel that enough is enough. (Staff02)

How can I describe it...it's like my positivity is being sucked out of me and I'm just fed up...But of course, somehow the show must go on...but it can become very difficult to maintain my positive attitude and my attitude of helping and supporting. (Staff05)

For reentry staff, these were particularly difficult realization as this experience was often in complete opposition to their initial reason of working in the reentry sector: their desire and ambition to help others had often been motivated by religious beliefs of treating all people equally

and giving people a second chance or by personal experiences of having had relatives suffer in the criminal justice system. So, what was challenging reentry staff's work and their ability to convey compassion? Our conversations revealed three recurring experiences.

Confrontation with unsettling revelations. First, the ability to continue to convey compassion became challenged due to ongoing confrontations with unsettling stories and confessions by ex-offenders. As hinted at earlier, many ex-offenders saw reentry staff as the only people they could talk to honestly about their experience without fearing judgement. For many, talking to friends and family or even probation services was not possible in this way. While enabling such open discourse was valuable and important to build relationships between reentry staff and ex-offenders in the first place and to create non-judgmental environments in which ex-offenders could feel comfortable, it also resulted in ex-offenders often sharing unsettling details about their crimes, the often harrowing consequences for the victims, or the abhorrent impact on their own families. As some ex-offenders recalled:

I told [reentry staff] everything. They said I could tell them anything, so I did...also some of the bad stuff I did, which I'm not proud of. I've done quite a bit of harm to others...to my own family. The reason I wasn't looking for jobs was because I had plans to kill myself...so [jobs] weren't top of my list. (Ex15)

And it's caused lot of mental [health] problems for [my] family. It took a big toll on my son who didn't really talk about it. He went through a lot of mental issues. To be honest, I mean, he's lucky he's here, because he's [was] trying to commit suicide, and that's all my fault. (Ex03)

Encouraging ex-offenders to disclose as much as they want and vent their thoughts and feelings thus often put a heavy burden onto reentry staff, which resulted in them sometimes feeling their positive attitude and their willingness to help the individual they were intended to support drift away. Such interactions highlighted that "some [ex-offenders] have done really bad things and have caused a lot of harm. (...) I know it's not my place to judge, but sometimes not judging can

be really difficult...even if you've chosen this job, like I have" (Staff02). Reentry staff's change in perceptions were also felt by ex-offenders. For example, one recalled:

I remember telling [them] about what I did and you could hear the voice dropping immediately and the conversation being kinda stuck...somehow. And then I didn't hear back from them for quite a while...and I didn't know what was going on...which was unexpected and, it just felt very weird. I'm thinking: are they judging me now? (Ex05)

In some cases, reentry staff recalled how, although they initially had had a lot of respect for ex-offenders who had shown that they wanted to turn their lives around, it was difficult to stay engaged and provide help after one had been confronted with details of their crimes. In some cases, reentry staff even recalled starting to think more about and feel empathy towards the victims of the ex-offender, rather than the ex-offender they were supposed to be helping back into work:

I was trying to help this one guy but it's difficult...you know, after they tell you things, sometimes I catch myself going off script and...you know, you start seeing the other side of all of this ...the victims and all of that and the harm that has been caused. (Staff04)

This lead reentry staff to sometimes feel that they needed some space from the particular ex-offender and "get it back together again before our next meeting, or the next case...otherwise I might be quite short with them" (Staff03). In other situations, reentry staff recalled that they had to be careful about maintaining their "politeness, which is quite tough...to say the least...but also that sense of feeling for them, that can go out the window" (Staff08). In another case, staff recalled how such encounters resulted in struggles "to continue to provide a level of support that is in line with the compassion that [we] usually strive for" (Staff11).

Neglect of commitments. Second, the ability to continue to convey compassion became challenged due to frequent encounters in which ex-offenders neglected commitments they had promised to make and the responsibilities they had agreed to take on, when signing the pledge and joining the reentry program. Given their ongoing support and the effort they put into helping ex-offenders move back into employment – often going above and beyond what their job description

required – reentry staff were frequently confronted with situations in which ex-offenders did not “play their part (...) [and] keep their side of the bargain” (Staff06). Reentry staff recalled how during the job search phase, for example, ex-offenders often were found to be unprepared for meetings or had not updated their documents such as CVs or disclosure letters in time for a review. Sometimes ex-offenders were also found not to attend agreed upon meetings at all, leading to “a waste of everybody’s time” (Staff01). This felt particularly frustrating for reentry staff given the scarcity of their own time and resources:

I think it comes down to the volume of people that would need our help that we don’t have the resource to be able to help. There is such a need for [ReOrg] in the community and such a need to support people individually into employment, but there’s not the resources to be able to do that adequately and help everyone that we would want to help. And so when we have these encounters where our members don’t take it seriously, that’s very frustrating, because we are dedicating time to them but they’re not making use of it. (Staff12)

In other instances, after having received employment, reentry staff explained that some ex-offenders simply quit their job after a few days, often for, as we were told, “minor reasons” such as the job being “not enjoyable...or a bit too stressful” (Staff08). This further felt particularly frustrating, given the amount of time and effort it took reentry staff to get ex-offenders to this stage. Reentry staff suggested that sometimes there was even a sense of ‘pickiness’ among ex-offenders as to their immediate employment after prison, which felt somewhat misplaced given how difficult, in the grander scheme of things, it was to secure jobs for ex-offenders and how much effort went into this process on the side of reentry staff:

You get frustrated that people have thrown the opportunity away ... and that can be very emotional for me. It’s emotional when we’ve put in all the effort and they don’t get anywhere ... so that’s upsetting, of course for them, but also for us. (...) With some of our members there’s sometimes a sense of “I’ve got to take [a job] that’s lesser than what I had before.” We have a lot of these highflyers that are sex offenders so they can’t go back to what they were doing. So, then it’s trying to find something that utilizes their skills but doesn’t put them in a position where there could be difficulties. So that’s sometimes a problem because they often want the job back they had before. In a way, getting on the job ladder is the most important thing but often they don’t see that, the bigger picture. Almost no job is good enough for them. (Staff02)

And the employer called me up first and said “we’ve given this guy a chance. Do you know of anything, why isn’t he coming into work?” So that’s a really big thing...and I thought “not again”, because with this person it was a constant back and forth and at some point it just makes you wonder “do they really want my help”...or are they always going to act like someone who has been to prison. I don’t know, and that makes compassion difficult. (Staff09)

In some cases, ex-offenders’ behavior also challenged reentry staff’s sense of their own expertise, i.e., of determining whether an ex-offender was ‘ready to work’, leading to questions about whether or not they had made the right call to move the individual into employment. This challenge to their own expertise made reentry staff wonder about their relationship to ex-offenders and made them question their assessment of treating them at face value:

Sometimes, when bigger things happen...we heard of one guy that we got into work and he then started fights and stuff at the company...the problem with that is that it makes...how should I say, it makes me wonder whether I’ve judged people properly. Have they just acted something out in front of me, for me to quickly get them a job...but actually they weren’t ready to work? And so from time to time that will make me be stricter with people, take a no-nonsense approach, scrutinize things much more,...which I guess is not my usual, friendly, open way of doing things. (Staff05)

Experiencing these behaviors of not playing their part challenged reentry staff’s willingness to help and provide the best support possible to ex-offenders in their move back into employment. For many, this made conveying compassion in their interactions difficult. Some, for example, explained that these behaviors made them seriously question ex-offenders’ “deservingness” of receiving help and being part of ReOrg’s program, wasting resources and opportunities that others in their position “would give an arm and a leg for” (Staff08):

I deal with a lot of members who really need help. I do have a couple of clients who have clinical depression, for example. And just despondent I guess is the way I’d describe them. They really don’t feel there is any future, there isn’t a sense of things getting better. And then on the other hand I have to deal with people who don’t ... I mean, there’s some people you think “you haven’t even tried to look for a job yourself” (laughs) and they don’t really seem that interested to be honest, and that can be quite disheartening because it takes me away from the people I really need to and can help. So why am I paying attention to those who don’t want to be helped? (Staff02)

Feelings of exploitation. Third, the ability to continue to convey compassion became challenged due to feelings of exploitation and being taken advantage of by ex-offenders. In some situations, reentry staff found themselves confronted with interactions in which they felt that ex-

offenders had extremely unrealistic expectations or misconceptions about the journey back into employment and what reentry staff could practically do for them:

It's quite frustrating when they get onto me and want me to be able to provide what they need straight away and instantly and that's not how it is, you know. I mean I've often had to tell people on my case load, I can't wave a magic wand, you've still got to do the application, you've still got to turn up for your interview, you've still got to iron your shirt and you've still got to turn up at work on Monday morning at 09:00 and then the following Monday at 09:00 when your shift starts. And you can hear them kind of grinning in the background and just going, "Yeah, yeah." (Staff07)

In other cases, reentry staff reported how they felt that, over time, ex-offenders also started to demand too much support from them. They mentioned how some ex-offenders, for example, assumed that reentry staff would do all their paperwork or lead the entire job search process for them, finding jobs with very specific and particular characteristics ex-offenders desired:

And most of them get it but some of them go, "Oh, are you not doing the job application for me?" And I'm like, "No, that's not part of our role. That's not what we ... that's not in our mission statement as it were." You know, that's not something that we promised to do. (Staff13)

We sometimes get to a point where our members say to us "yeah, you're the people that find jobs for me, so I want a job that's about x, y, z, and in this location." But of course, that's not how it works. We're not some kind of à la carte job agency. So, if they have problems with applications they can come back to us and, yes, if we find jobs we will suggest them but actually continually shifting the ball back into their court and saying "this is an opportunity but you need to respond to it" is important. (Staff06)

This realization created a sense among reentry staff of being taken advantage of and resulted in a significant drop in their motivation to go "above and beyond" (Staff12) for ex-offenders and help them navigate their anguish. Ultimately, these encounters lead reentry staff to experience a shift in their attitudes towards ex-offenders and their willingness and ability to convey compassion, even though they were often aware that they "shouldn't really be having negative feelings...as that's part of the job...dealing with this messy business" (Staff05).

Crucially, a central point that emerged was that in many cases these challenges to reentry staff's willingness and ability to convey compassion were *directly linked* to the initial behavioral approaches of deliberately conveying compassion to attract, integrate, and help ex-offenders

through their reentry program. In other words, the things that enabled helping in the first place interfered with helping as time went by and the case work developed.

Regaining the Ability to Convey Compassion

Given the centrality of conveying compassion in their work, reentry staff were aware that regaining their ability to convey compassion, even if difficult given the experiences they faced on a regular basis, was essential to enable the success of their own case work as well as that of the reentry program as a whole. We identified three responses to the recurring challenges that we theorize enabled reentry staff to regain their ability to convey compassion. We suggest that this was accomplished by cognitively and emotionally working to once again move closer to targets through *agency-focused* narratives and through building a temporary relational distance through *shifting the patterns of interactions* and *altering the content of interactions*.

Agency-focused narratives. One approach we identified through which reentry staff attempted to regain their ability to convey compassion was by constructing what we term agency-focused narratives. Through these narratives, reentry staff engaged to re-evaluate their own as well as ex-offenders' roles in and influence on the reentry process. We theorize that developing these narratives enabled reentry staff to regain their ability to convey compassion by putting their negative feelings into context, making sense of them, gaining perspective of the situation they were encountering, and ultimately cognitively and emotionally reconnecting with targets. Reentry staff engaged in one or a combination of three narratives.

One narrative focused on reentry staff reassessing their own impact on ex-offenders' journeys back into work. They reminded themselves how arbitrary and uncertain the entire reentry process was, given the "many different parts that have to work together, to ultimately succeed in gaining employment" (Staff01). As such, they brought to mind that even with their best efforts it could

take years for ex-offenders to find employment, or, how they were not able to help some at all. This prompted reentry staff to feel that in this often bleak situation the only thing they themselves really had control over was conveying a deep sense of caring and compassion for ex-offenders and, crucially, continuing to do so even if it was difficult due to the recurring challenges to such compassion. As some said:

Sometimes [members] fixate on “I just need a job. I just need a job and that will fix everything” but actually it’s not just that...actually they need health support. They need a place to stay. My hands are totally tied. We don’t have a holistic approach from all the different agencies or government departments or whatever. It’s really frustrating because actually there’s a limit to what I can do, what I can control...and realizing that, particularly when my work gets complicated with members points me back to the one thing I can actually control. What I definitely can be and need to be is that friendly face and that helping hand and that sense of security for our members. (Staff06)

Of course, as I said earlier, there are always bumps in the road. But then, it comes down to “what’s my part in the grander scheme of things, in helping them find work and go through that process.” And then I kind of go back to thinking “the one thing you can do for the member is be there, as promised”, even if that’s sometimes [difficult]. And so getting back into that mindset then leads me back to work again. (Staff01)

So, what I do then is...I’ll just sit there and I’ll think of some of the old cases I’ve worked on. And many of those were not straightforward at all, lots of twists and turns...also unexpected things. And so, that then is a bit of a wakeup call again to say, the only thing I can really make sure to do is to show that I’m willing to help...keeping up the compassionate side of things really. (Staff04)

A second narrative focused on actively trying to see ex-offenders’ misbehavior in the reentry program not as something that was due to their own shortcomings, but something that was triggered by societal or environmental factors, such as the ongoing experiences of stigma or constant rejections from society:

This gentleman applied to 614 jobs, just phenomenal, in a 12-month period. I don’t even know how somebody can do that (...). His determination was just incredible but it took him absolute ages to get any kind of interview. And so, remembering this brings it back to me that something is just wrong with how individuals coming out of prison are seen by employers,...but also the public in general. And so, when we have cases where we struggle to get members to act in a certain way or follow our advice, it’s almost as if “yeah, no wonder that they are down and unresponsive”...and consciously thinking about that, realizing that puts things into perspective. (Staff14).

Through this, reentry staff perceived that a lot of the observed misbehavior was triggered by such discriminatory contextual factors and, in a sense, was not ex-offenders' fault and largely out of their immediate control:

It's sometimes easy to forget that for our members, employment is only one part of the journey...of course an important one, but housing, finances, family, sometimes divorce, kids, that comes on top. (...) and that's definitely one thing I always try and remember when I feel challenged by my work [with our members]. That they might have reasons for not doing things in a way that I'd like them to. (Staff08)

This enabled reentry staff to limit their overall expectation of what ex-offenders could achieve, even if they followed all the appropriate steps. We theorize that this narrative was thus about shifting blame away from ex-offenders for their behaviors. Reflecting of this narrative, reentry staff said:

Overall, I then get to a stage where I think that what they are doing and why they are doing certain things [that upset me]...it's circumstances, more than characteristics. It's not their personality that is the reason why things go wrong, it's things outside of their own control. Some people obviously do have really supportive families and partners. And I think, often they will talk about the motivation from that...but then a lot of members who are really isolated don't have that. And so I try to get in that frame of mind and really focus on that, to get back to work with them. (Staff11)

I still get surprised when I just see [our members] that have a master's degrees and are still held down, still don't find work. They have all the right skills, but society does not accept them. So yeah, that makes me realize that a lot of things that go pear-shaped are not their own fault, and it's not a surprise anymore that they can become frustrated...and realizing that, I don't know,...it's important to realize that, and what that means, or what that shows me is that I really need to try my best to emerge from any kind of frustration with them when things don't go to plan...and that does actually help deal with those sort of situations. (Staff09)

A third narrative focused on reentry staff reminding themselves that for many of the ex-offenders their service was the only real hope of dealing with their suffering and getting the help they needed to move into employment. This narrative was thus about re-acknowledging and emphasizing the desperation of ex-offenders and their situation. As staff mentioned:

I know I've said it's not always easy to work in this job and that our members can be challenging. And then when I get to that situation where I feel like, I need a break, this and that, then I often...to be honest, if we don't help them...who will? Prisons don't, probation can't or won't do it properly. And by themselves, well, often they've tried it by themselves and haven't gotten anywhere. So, for many we're kind of "this or back to prison." So, saying "no, I'm not going to let that happen," that's one thing I find comfort in and kind of draw on, particularly when I'm on difficult cases where it can be tough to be kind and helpful. (Staff02)

Another thing that I do, when I sense that I'm getting frustrated,...how to say this...when I feel that I'm not doing my best job, then it's one of those things where I have to be really honest with myself and say "if I don't pick them up, reach out, make them feel like a human being, make them comfortable, then chances are that not many others will." So just saying that, talking to myself, it sounds crazy doesn't it, but just having that voice in my head then is a way for me to get back on track and,...make sure I'm understanding and friendly and all those things. (Staff04)

Temporarily shifting the patterns of interactions. Alongside narratives, we found that reentry staff worked to regain their ability to convey compassion by engaging in a set of practices. In particular, they shifted the patterns of their interactions with ex-offenders in order to gain some physical and temporal distance from the specific case, as close interactions and their outcomes had often been the cause of the challenges they experienced. We suggest that shifting the patterns of interactions allowed reentry staff to, on the whole, spend more time on and pay more attention to less demanding cases, which enabled them to see first-hand again the importance and the impact of their work and the role compassion can play in this. This provided the motivation to move back and tackle the more difficult cases and continue to convey compassion to them.

One approach of doing this was to temporarily shift from the usual, very personal communication, which mostly centered on regular phone calls, to one that was less personal, such as engaging in communication via email. This temporary change was seen as a valuable intervention to gain distance from the challenges reentry staff were facing in their roles:

I like the work on the phones, talking to people. But I've found that that can become too much, because you hear their voices, their feelings, it's like you are there in the same room with them. And so, when I get too drawn in and, you know, I feel like I'm too involved I move to 100% email for a while because that helps me step out of that whole thing for a while. (Staff06)

Another way of shifting patterns of interactions involved creating much narrower interaction times with ex-offenders. Rather than responding to ex-offenders rapidly after having received a request at any time of the day (or night), which was something reentry staff usually prided themselves on as many other organizations were not that responsive, reentry staff shifted to only operating within a strict time window. Some suggested that this also helped to reestablish a certain

power balance in cases where ex-offenders had taken the help of reentry staff for granted and had seemingly attempted to exploit their help:

Getting your timing right can help a lot when you feel that members and what they do is all getting a bit too overbearing and is affecting you. So, what you'll find is that if they've been in prison for a long time they particularly don't have lots of understanding of professional boundaries. Usually, we try and go along with their schedule but when it gets too much I have to become very strict on not contact members outside of the 9:00 to 5:00 bracket. I do get emails from members at 3:00 AM, 4:00 AM, expecting a reply, but when it gets too much I reply at 9:00 AM and say, "I'm terribly sorry. I wasn't working at 3:00 AM." You see, we are a very soft and cuddly bunch. It's very easy for us to get too drawn into the whole thing, and from time to time we have to be very careful not to. (...) Deciding when to offer my time is one thing that I can be in charge of...and that also helps me carve out time for all the other great things we do. (Staff11)

What you'll find is that looking at when you interact is extremely important. And this is a way how I can control some of the process...also making sure that I can really approach each member again with the help and compassion they deserve...because getting request left, right, and center and at all hours of the day and night...that's difficult to manage. So, it's really about setting time aside for the tough cases but then spending time to recover, if you like,...getting some quick wins, getting some experiences that tell me "this is how it can and should be"...and that again helps with the whole compassionate side. (Staff13)

A final and somewhat more extreme approach, was to temporarily rotate cases amongst reentry staff to create some distance from particularly challenging ex-offenders:

These interactions can get too much sometimes. And when that happens I often try to move some of my cases on for a while. Have somebody else come at it with new enthusiasm, with new willingness to take on the case. I get [the case] back after a few days or weeks but it's really a big deal to just get that space to regroup. Luckily we've got that option because it's intense stuff. If you're interacting with people, interacting for hours with people that are really upset and irate that they can't get a job, then it takes its toll on you as a team member. So not having those interactions for a while helps me to settle down, put things into perspective. That gets me back to a state where I'm all about "Yeah, I'm focused again. Ready to help." (Staff08)

Temporarily altering content of interactions. Finally, we found that reentry staff engaged in practices through which they worked to alter the content of their interactions with ex-offender. This involved moving from the proactive help they usually provided to ex-offenders to a more reactive help. In other words, rather than continuing to be very hands on, making suggestions where to apply, or interacting with employers on behalf of ex-offenders, reentry staff became more passive and only responded when ex-offenders reached out. We theorize that engaging in altering the content of interactions helped reentry staff regain their ability to convey compassion by

temporarily reducing their emotional investment in the specific case, thus leading to less negative feelings towards ex-offenders and a resumed awareness of their precarious situations and their need for help. As some recalled:

Yes, definitely, I mean, it would be weird if didn't affect you, right? It's people's future...and their families'. But there does come a point where...well I've had it a few times where things happen and you become too involved and then frustrated. And so consciously saying I need to be not that involved and it's ok if I am just there for [members to approach me] is ok too. So, that really helps me to step out of it all and,...kind of see things for what they are...that these are people that need help and yes, they don't always make the right choices but it's my job to help. (Staff07)

A lot of the work I do is about getting in touch [with members], incentivizing, making suggestions "have you looked here, have you done that.". So, for me that's one of the first things [that] goes out of the window when I'm feeling a bit low about the case work. I mean, I still do my job, but it's about how much I want to invest. Usually, I invest a lot, but in those cases, I take a step back and that helps deal with the situation, recover..."time heals all wounds" as they say. (Staff14)

Further, reentry staff reduced their own openness and started to manage disclosure of private information more deliberately when interacting with ex-offenders. Usually, as part of their work with ex-offenders, to build a relationship and trust, reentry staff from time to time shared some of their own stories and anecdotes. As part of this intervention, however, reentry staff started to substantially cut any kind of personal interactions and focus purely on reentry-specific topics in order to reduce or restrict emotional investment:

I tend to cut back on the whole personal part. We're there to be a listening ear and all that good stuff, but at some point I draw the line because it'll often be, "and how are you?" or "where're you going on holiday?" And I'll be "I'm fine...but it's not about me, it's about you."...I sometimes need to draw a line somewhere and decided that's not appropriate to not get too close, too familiar to the whole thing. (...) Taking [myself] out of the equation helps give me some space and not be too involved. It's not always easy but it is necessary. (Staff11)

Even when things are up in the air or you're dealing with a quite stressful and upsetting case, of course you still need to be polite, ask how they are doing. But then I really do leave it at that. Usually, I'll be a more open and bubbly and share things, but in these situations I just stay shut...try to focus it more on the member. Get them to do the talking. That helps a lot. (Staff05)

Crucially, we came to see that the above approaches were used as *temporary* interventions by reentry staff to regain their ability to convey compassion. This temporary nature appeared important as many of the above approaches could actually, if carried out over long stretches of

time, reduce ex-offenders' own sense of being treated compassionately and cared for. Letting this happen was undesirable as being treated compassionately was a major reason why many of the ex-offenders we engaged with joined this specific reentry program in the first place. The danger was that through a prolonged enactment of the interventions the closeness and the familiarity between reentry staff and ex-offenders could be eroded and the program thus perceived like any other that ex-offenders had not wanted to join for the lack of these characteristics. We thus witnessed a constant balancing act of reentry staff conveying enough compassion to get offenders to join, integrate, and go through the program and these actions eroding reentry staff's own ability to convey compassion, as well as the balancing act of reentry staff regaining their ability to convey compassion without alienating ex-offenders in the process. By utilizing narratives, temporarily shifting the patterns of interactions, and altering the content of their interactions with ex-offenders, reentry staff was often able to make sense of the situation they were facing and move back towards conveying compassion in interactions with ex-offenders. Of course, the approaches worked in different ways for different reentry staff. For some, actively engaging in narratives was enough, some focused more on changing their interactions, and for others again it was a combination of these that helped them regain their ability to convey compassion.

Taken together, our investigation revealed how conveying compassion, facing challenges to one's ability to convey it, and working to regain it were ongoing occurrences and a central part of the experience of working in the reentry organization.

DISCUSSION

We began our study with the question of how organizations proactively employ compassion to achieve their goals of helping targets, how such efforts are sustained over time, and what the consequence are. Our investigation was spurred by the observation that although for some organizations compassion may be an essential competence in order to facilitate their work in the

first place, literature to date treats and examines compassion much more as a reactive process in response to single and often infrequent instances of suffering (Dutton et al., 2006; Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014; Peticca-Harris, 2019). Studying the case of a reentry organization that worked with ex-offenders to attract, integrate, and move them through a reentry program to ultimately gain employment provided a strategic case to explore the proactive use of compassion in more detail: While reentry staff engaged to convey compassion, challenges to their ability to convey compassion emerged, which they then worked to overcome. Figure 2 shows a diagrammatic representation of these findings. Below we elaborate on our analysis to articulate three contributes to the literature.

--- Insert Figure 2 ---

Proactive compassion and its consequences

First, our central contribution is demonstrating how organizations proactively employ compassion to achieve organizational goals, and how this plays out and is managed over time. To date, compassion has largely been characterized as a reactive process that follows when actors witness the suffering of targets (Dutton et al., 2006). Often this goes hand in hand with studying one-off expressions of compassion, such as in the aftermath of a shock or a crisis (Lilius et al., 2011). However, studying the daily work and struggles of reentry staff to help ex-offenders join and go through a reentry program aimed at getting them back into employment, enables us to see compassion differently.

Our case suggest that compassion can be proactively deployed through three behavioral approaches by organizational actors – *building community beyond simple support, taking individuals at ‘face value’*, and *providing customizable and personal reentry journeys*. This is essential in making the organization’s goal of helping targets in their reentry journey, which

requires their trust and willingness to participate, possible in the first place. Translating this into broader terms, building community is about generating a sense of membership and responsibility. It highlights compassion as a relational construct that does not only entail an actor conveying compassion to a target but the important role of targets accepting and engaging in those efforts themselves. Taking people at face value is about dealing with suffering in the moment, which makes it potentially easier for actors to be compassionate on an ongoing basis because one is not ‘burdened’ by the entire history of targets’ suffering. It also enables targets to feel ‘seen’ for who they are now, not who they were in the past. For both actors and targets, the compassion relationship thus becomes somewhat bounded, which enables them to focus on achieving their (mutual) goals. Finally, customizable and personal journeys point to an important element of ‘tuning’ compassion, rather than following a generic form of response. This shines further light on the relational dimension of compassion in that compassion needs to be performed flexibly in responses to targets’ unique situations and needs to be accepted by targets. Through eliciting these behavioral approaches, our investigation suggests that compassion does not necessarily have to follow the traditional process of noticing suffering, empathizing, and responding but that organizations and their actors can become alert to the need for compassion without actually witnessing the suffering directly. In our case, the actions taken by ex-offenders (i.e., them reaching out to ReOrg) were used as cues to judge the need for compassion and care and to start proactively conveying compassion towards them. This points to a more context-specific understanding of the start of the compassion process.

This view also adds nuance to recent debates around the role of compassion in organizations: While previous work has examined how targets, particularly, as in our case, those from stigmatized populations, work to gain support and acceptance from organizational actors (Helms et al., 2019;

Helms & Patterson, 2014) we reveal the opposite, namely, how actors work to gain acceptance and trust from the targets they intend to serve through conveying compassion. An important implication of our analysis, particular for organizations for whom conveying compassion is central to their operations and not an optional competence that is drawn on from time to time (Frost et al., 2006), is that organizations may need to work to make compassion more visible and perceivable for targets in early interactions (or even before interactions have taken place). From an organizational perspective this seems important as knowledge of compassion can shape targets' attitudes about the organizations they engage with (Lilius et al., 2008).

We believe that this proactive view of compassion brings up interesting new research directions. One avenue to explore proactive compassion in organizations in more detail would be to investigate more fully the relationship between conveying compassion, power, and control (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014). Although this was not the direct focus of our investigation, our analysis provides empirical indications of this, in that it sometimes seemed that conveying compassion through our documented behavioral approaches was used to control the reentry journey of ex-offenders by reentry staff, influencing them to take certain decisions. Similarly, sometimes the fading of compassion experienced by reentry staff seemed linked to a disregard of such power relationships when ex-offenders did not follow guidance, disregard expert advice, or started to 'use' reentry staff. As such, we encourage further work on compassion to unpack the relationships between compassion, power, and control.

Second, our study also adds new insights to the 'dark side' of compassion in organizations. Although most work on compassion, particularly in organization and management studies, has addressed the important aspects of how compassion can produce positive outcomes for individuals and organizations (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014), some scholars have taken an interest in the

potential downsides of compassion following calls that more understanding needs to be generated about “when and how the presence of compassion can have negative repercussions” (Lilius et al., 2011: 282). This line of inquiry is, however, still in its infancy. Overwhelmingly, scholars interested in the potential negative repercussions of compassion in organizations, largely inspired by research in healthcare (Vogus & McClelland, 2020; Abendroth & Flannery, 2006), have noted that at the center of this lies compassion fatigue, comprised of “burnout and secondary traumatic stress” (Voth Schrag et al., 2011: 3). Such compassion fatigue, triggered by overwhelming exposure to others’ suffering, can have negative implications for actors’ own health as well as their professional performance. Further, compassion fatigue has been shown to negatively influence actors emotionally (Simpson & Berti, 2020) and lead to “sadness, anxiety, psychological distress, and suffering because they care too much” (Bolino & Grant, 2016: 47). Based on our analysis, we propose, however, that the challenges to compassion in organizational life go far beyond the emotional experiences of concepts such as compassion fatigue. Rather than suffering negative consequences because one feels too much for the targets (Figley, 1995) and thus experiences secondary trauma (Cocker & Joss, 2016), we argue that compassion can become costly to those conveying it when they recognize that their efforts are not acknowledged and valued by the targets. In other words, given that actors invest a lot of efforts and resources to act compassionately, seeing that those efforts are not taken on by targets or even seeing that those acts become sabotaged may diminish one’s willingness and ability to continue acting compassionately. This was evidenced in our case through discovering how reentry staff were faced with feelings of *exploitation*, a *neglect of commitments*, and *unsettling revelations*, which provided barriers to their ability to continue conveying compassion in their case work. Further we also showed how such experiences can

trigger strong deliberations about the question of whether or not targets actually ‘deserve’ compassion, ultimately leading to targets being treated worse.

Based on these observations, we expand the current understanding of the negative consequences of compassion in organizations by arguing that the challenges to compassion can come about due to the actions of targets in response to efforts of compassion by actors, rather than challenges to compassion emerging due to emotional responses by actors to the suffering of targets. We thus suggest that the actions of targets in response to acts of compassion are an important new dimension to consider for discussions around the cost of compassion and a reason why compassion can be difficult to be maintained over time (Lilius et al., 2011). Such viewpoint extends our understanding of the nature of actors’ and targets’ relationships in such challenging context: We show that even within organizations that are committed to aiding vulnerable populations, staff that is highly trained can sometimes fall prey to engaging in stigmatizing language and behavior towards those they serve. In other words, even with the best of intentions, actors might not always be able to maintain their professional role (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) and may drift into situations where they implicitly or sometimes even explicitly stigmatize their clientele. Crucially, one interpretation of this is that being a good and willing person may not be enough to maintain compassion over time. Unpacking this in more detail may provide an interesting opportunity for scholars of stigma in organizational contexts (Roulet, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021) as well as those studying passion at work (Wolf et al., 2016; Jachimowicz et al., 2019) or work as calling (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017), given the rapid and extreme shift from compassion to negative social evaluations that can deindividuate targets (Devers et al., 2009).

Third, in line with previous studies, our analysis shows that when actors’ abilities to convey compassion become challenged, they will attempt to rebuild it (McClelland & Vogus, 2020).

Previous work that considers this rebuilding phase has either focused on strategies outside of work (e.g., restorative activities such as holidays; Westman & Eden, 1997) or on overcoming compassion fatigue through distancing strategies such as ‘suppressing empathy’ or ‘depersonalizing targets’ (DeCelles & Anteby, 2020; Newton, 2013). However, particularly in contexts where actors and targets need to uphold a strong relationship over time to achieve organizational goals – such as, in our case, helping ex-offenders back into employment, which can take months or years – such pure distancing approaches may neither be feasible nor sufficient. This suggests that greater attention to organizational context is important for it will influence whether and how compassion can be feasibly rebuilt. Our study indicates that in order to rebuild compassion and sustain it over the long run, employees need to balance their efforts between distancing from challenges posed by targets but also reconnecting to these targets. In our case, reentry staff did this by engaging in a combination of temporarily distancing themselves from the situation to regroup emotionally – as was shown in our data through *temporary efforts to shift patterns* and *alter the content of interactions* – and actively finding ways to reconnect with targets – as was evidenced in our data through the *agency-focused narratives* of reentry staff. This balancing of cognitively working to move closer to targets while at the same time temporarily building a relational distance enabled reentry staff to regain their ability to convey compassion time and time again. In more general terms, we propose that if actors only engage in distancing, which is currently the conventional wisdom in the literature on how compassion can be rebuilt (Rynes et al., 2012), they might lose touch with targets and start treating them in a way that is irreconcilable with or can even harm their organizations’ goals. However, at the same time, if actors only engage in ardently trying to reconnect to targets, ignoring the need for temporary distance and space from their work, they might never be able to rebuild the cognitive and emotional

capacity needed for such demanding work. Our insights thus counter the view that the act of distancing and letting go (both outside and during work) is a universal strategy that enables the rebuilding of compassion in organizations. While this approach might be fruitful for infrequent events of rebuilding compassion, which most literature to date is concerned with (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014), we argue that in order to rebuild compassion on a sustained basis, a ‘both-and’ approach of working to generate distance and closeness is required.

Organizations and their best intentions of helping

While there is increasing scholarly interest in the role that organizations play in helping groups, often those at the fringes of society, achieve their desired goals (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Tracey & Phillips, 2016; Lawrence, 2017), the literature has often treated helping as an individual and isolated interaction between help-seekers and help-givers (Grant & Patil, 2012). This has meant, that although often alluded to, the dynamics of helping remain underexplored (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Grodal, Nelson, & Siino, 2015). Particularly in contexts in which helping others is one of an organization’s central reasons for existing and where helping is both necessary and extremely difficult, the overall experience of helping is in need of further exploration. Despite scholarship on successful examples of organizational efforts to help marginalized and stigmatized targets, we know much less about the potential barriers to helping by well-intending organizations and how these unfold and are resolved in their interactions with targets (Chalmers, 2021). Our study contributes new insights into this line of inquiry.

First, in exploring reentry staff’s efforts to help ex-offenders move through the reentry program and ultimately back into employment, we saw that the actions reentry staff engaged in to provide the basis for helping over time created a range of problems for staff to continue their important work with and for ex-offenders. In a number of cases, ex-offenders did not cooperate or follow

guidance and even took advantage of the helping behavior, resulting in reentry staff's inability and unwillingness to continue to provide high quality help. As such, our analysis counterintuitively suggests that the precise actions organizations and their actors may take to help targets may in fact be the exact things that can, over time, make the act of helping increasingly difficult. One possible interpretation is that in our specific case reentry staff might have provided 'too much' help that ultimately made ex-offenders overly reliant on the reentry organization or made ex-offenders take advantage of their help, thus leading to disappointments and struggles on the part of reentry staff. We thus advocate for more research on this potential double-edged sword of helping and see viable connections to the literature on 'unhelpful help' (Dalal & Zheng, 2019).

Secondly, by also capturing the full lifecycle of the helping process between ex-offenders and reentry staff, our work starts to suggest that organizational efforts of helping can become hindered, not as previous work suggest mostly by organizations' inability to recognized what kind of help targets practically need (Mair, Wolf, & Seelos, 2016; Markham, 2003) or offering help that is rejected by targets as it challenges conventional norms (Claus & Tracey, 2020), but by organizations not accounting for the *fear* that targets may have of interacting with organizations when attempting to seek help. The issue at the center of this observation is that when engaging with certain populations, particularly those that have long been repressed, excluded, and sanctioned, and which have as a consequence often self-internalized such feelings, past experiences will shape how they relate to and interact with organizations (Tyler, 2020; Tyler & Slater, 2018). They might, for example, fear the consequences of interactions with organizations. Such interactions can trigger negative past emotions, feelings of being misunderstood, or sensations of being singled out as the one that 'needs help.' This can often mean that even if individuals feel that they 'should' engage with organizations or have been told that certain

organizations can help, they will often hesitate or not engage at all, presenting a barrier to organizations' abilities to help. In other words, even with the best of intentions on the side of organizations that want to help, getting targets to engage cannot be taken for granted, but is often assumed in other studies on helping targets (Lawrence, 2015; Tracey & Philips, 2016; Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2019). We thus suggest that understanding how targets perceive those organizations that want to help and judge to what extent and how they will be helpful for their own journeys (as well as how organizations might go about creating this perception) is important and something we to date know little about. As such, our work advances literature on help-giving and help-seeking by suggesting and then showing how help-seeking actors actively attempt to evaluate help-giving organizations before (or even while already) engaging with them. In our empirical case, we witnessed how ex-offenders, often based on previous negative experience with organizations, sought and evaluated organizations that had specific characteristics – in our case those that demonstrated the conveying of compassion and care. In doing so, we add to the literature by suggesting that help-seeking targets not only judge whether organizations can credibly help – which is something they will often receive guidance on from other parties (such as prison or probation staff) – but crucially also judge *how* these organizations will conduct that helping, i.e., how they will treat and relate to targets in the process. We thus argue that in many cases having the right resources and strategies to help (such as in our case ReOrg's employer database or the means to conduct training) is only a necessary condition and not sufficient for organizations to provide real help, particularly when dealing with marginalized and stigmatized groups. The real ability to help over the long run is, based on our analysis, only achieved when help-giving organizations understand targets' wider contexts, their lived experiences, the difficulties they are

facing, and the fears they have, and take this explicitly into account when attempting to provide help.

Extrapolating from this, we finally suggest that our findings may have implications and raise further interesting questions for scholars studying allies and allyship in organizational contexts (Sabat, Martinez, & Wessel, 2013; Goffman, 1963). Significant work in this area has focused on the allies themselves, their motivations, actions, or tactics to help targets (Russell, 2011; Dillon et al., 2004). Less work has, however, examined the targets in this dyadic relationship and their experiences with their allies (Mikolon, Kreiner, & Wieseke, 2016). As such, the emphasis has been on those that want to help, not those that receive help (Sabat et al., 2014). Drawing on our findings that show how some ex-offenders struggled to find a fitting supporting organization, although organizations (e.g., government organizations, other charities) had proclaimed a willingness to help, it might be the case that while allies have the best of intentions of supporting targets, those targets may not necessarily want their support or recognize them as credible, legitimate, and ultimately helpful allies at all. Thus, we suggest that there may be opportunities to study in more detail how targets evaluate organizations proclaiming to be allies for genuine allyship, beyond instrumental attempts by organizations to capitalize on supporting marginalized communities in society for their personal gain (e.g., brands celebrating LGBTQ+ month for marketing purposes; Abad-Santos, 2018). One approach, which the present study points to, is that perceiving compassion may play a central role in identifying genuine allies, but many other aspects and processes remain to be uncovered. Given a growing interest in the work of allies inside of work (Roulet, 2020), we thus encourage future research to examine the experience of the targets of allies in much more detail.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the case of a UK-based reentry organization, ReOrg, which guides ex-offenders through a reentry program with the ultimate aim of gaining employment, we explore the proactive role of compassion in this endeavor. By examining ReOrg staff's behavioral approaches to deploy compassion, we are able to move towards a more proactive conceptualization of compassion in organizational contexts. However, our work crucially also shows the cost of such proactive deployment of compassion in that over the course of their casework staff experienced challenges with individual ex-offenders, hampering their ability and willingness to continue treating them compassionately. Finally, we demonstrate how staff rebuilt their compassion. Overall, this study thus moves beyond actors' responses to discreet and often infrequent acts of peoples' individual suffering and suggests that for many organizations conveying compassion is not an optional element, but central to them achieving their organizational goals, which, however, can be difficult to sustain.

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1
Description of Data Sources

Data Types and Dates	Amount (and Location)		Use in Paper
Primary Data		TOTAL	
<u>Interviews</u>			
Semi-structured interviews with ReOrg staff members	14; resulting in 259 pages of transcription	} 47 interviews	Insights into the daily work of reentry staff and their efforts to help targets.
Semi-structured interviews with ex-offenders working with ReOrg	33; resulting in 634 pages of transcription		Detailed understanding of ex-offenders' experience of working with ReOrg.
<u>Observations</u>			
ReOrg's annual gatherings (November 2018; November, 2019)	5h each; London, UK	} 16h observations	Participant observation with focus on observing reentry staff and ex-offender interactions first hand.
Visit to Prisons (January 2019; September, 2019)	4h; Peterborough, UK 2h; London, UK		Meetings with prison staff to see first-hand the facilities that are in place to prepare ex-offenders for employment.
Secondary Data			
<u>ReOrg communication materials</u>			
Brochures	4; 53 pages	} 642 pages archival documents	Develop understanding of ReOrg's efforts to attract and integrate ex-offenders into their program.
Annual reports	2; 61 pages		
Twitter posts	82		
Online videos	5; 33 minutes		
<u>Ex-offender and ReOrg staff email exchanges</u>	7; 12 pages		Explore in more detail how ex-offenders were approached and supported and how they responded to the services they received.
<u>Media</u>			
Mainstream print media	43; 35 pages	} 208 minutes visual materials	Contextualize primary data and develop deeper understanding of the reentry journey in general.
Government reports	4; 95 pages		
Charity sector publications	4; 386 pages		
TV documentaries	5; 175 minutes		

FIGURE 1
Overview of Data Structure

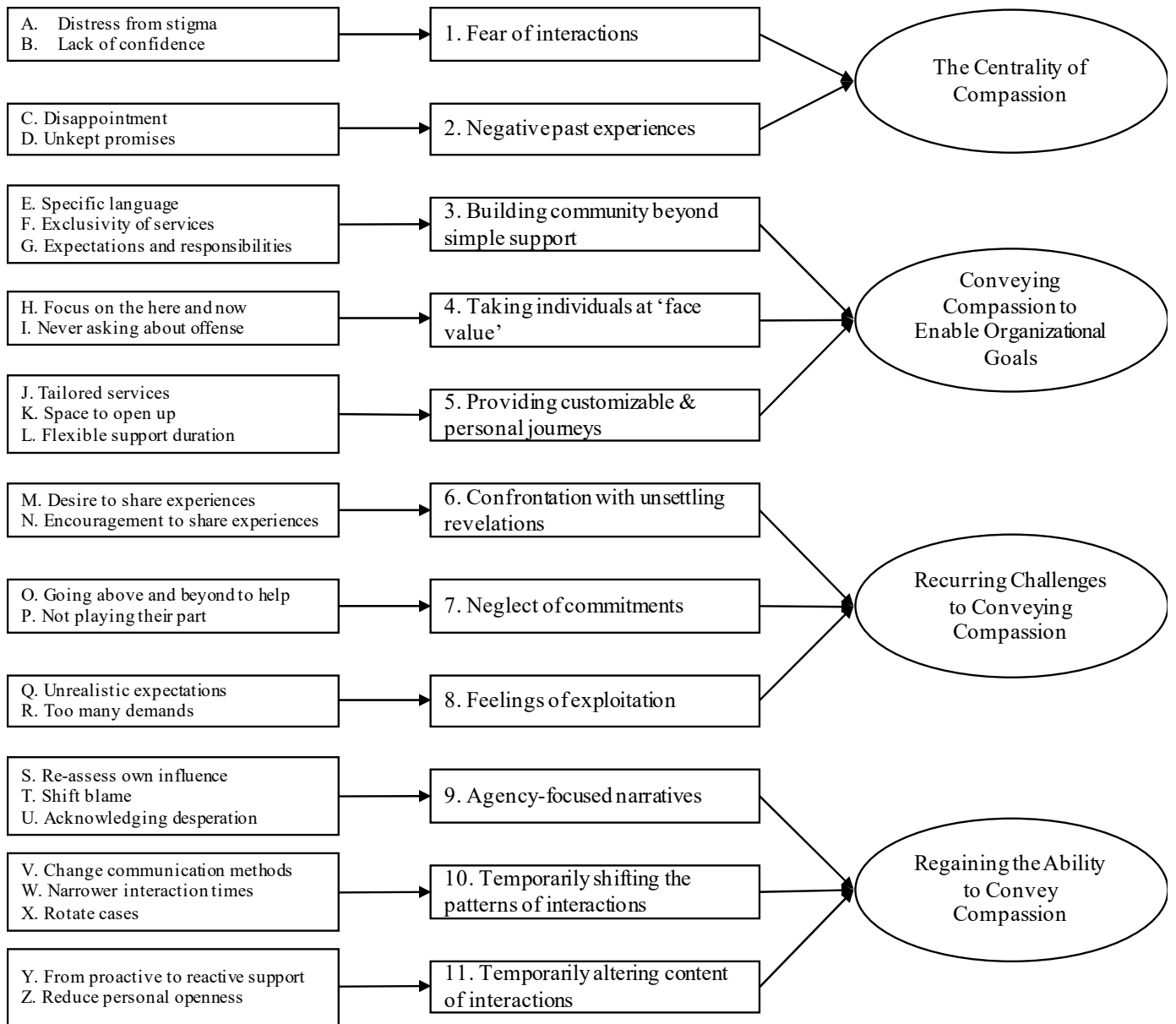
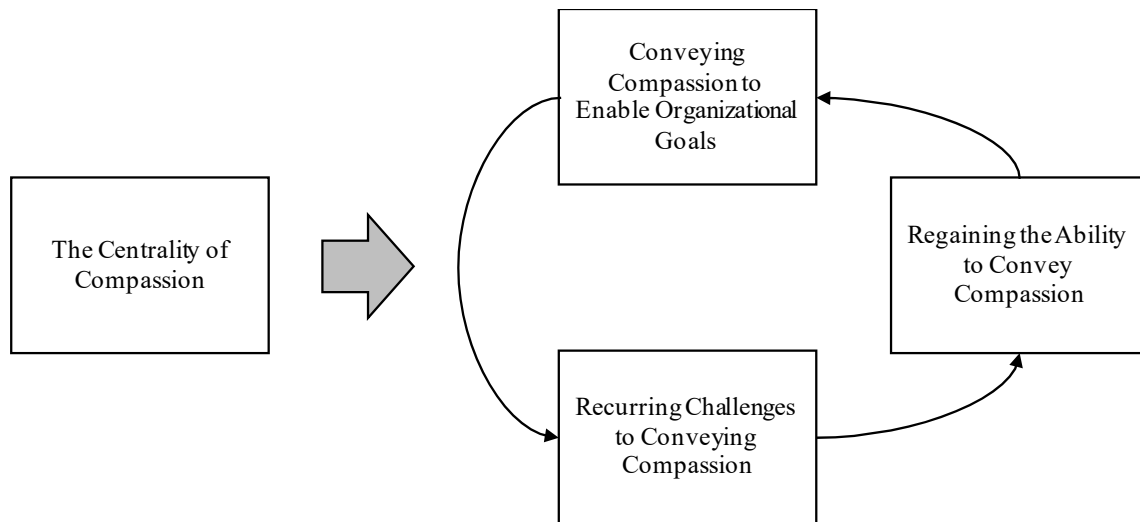


FIGURE 2
Conveying Compassion, Recurring Challenges to Compassion and the Rebuilding of
Compassion by Reentry Staff



Chapter 4 – How organizations form relationships with stigmatized groups: Theorizing organizational members’ relational stigma management

ABSTRACT

Stigmatized groups can be central stakeholders that organizations want to connect to and interact with, for normative or instrumental reasons. However, prior research has shown that this can be notoriously difficult to accomplish. In this paper we build theory on how organizations can form positive relationships with stigmatized groups. According to Goffman (1963), actors vary in their capacity to relate to the stigmatized depending on their social position. We build upon this argument to unpack the role of stigma-interactional scripts – schematic patterns for navigating interactions around targeted individuals’ stigmatized attributes. Based upon combinations of stigma-interactional scripts internalized by organizational members from past experiences, we propose an initial typology of six stigma-relational identities for how organizational members can relate to stigmatized groups. Subsequently, we develop a model of *relational stigma management*, theorizing how stigma-relational identities provide organizational members with linguistic and behavioral guidelines to navigate diverse stigma identity management strategies deployed by stigmatized stakeholders. While existing theory on stigma management has focused upon how the stigmatized gain acceptance, our paper flips this perspective and extends this work by building relationship-centered theory on whether and how external organizations and their members can garner acceptance from those groups they seek to serve.

“The term stigma, then, will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself.” – Goffman (1963: 13)

INTRODUCTION

As originally defined by Goffman (1963: 3), stigma is “an attribute, behavior, or reputation which is socially discrediting.” To date, studies examining stigma in organizational or market contexts have primarily explored how organizations can navigate the effects of the taint that comes with this extreme form of negative social evaluation (Tracey & Phillips, 2015). For example, organizations can deal with stigmatized attributes by attempting to alter them (Lashley & Pollock, 2020) or by reframing such attributes so that they are perceived in a more positive light by audiences (Helms & Patterson, 2014). They can also work to develop mindsets and practices that help organizational members to cope with the experience of belonging to a stigmatized organization or community (Ashforth et al., 2007; Toubiana, 2020).

Beyond such tactics to mitigate stigma, recent research highlights that organizations may seek to form bonds and establish close relationships with stigmatized groups outside of organizational boundaries – and that they may do so for both instrumental and normative reasons (Dwertmann et al., 2021). Association with stigmatized groups can, for example, generate reputational benefits and be seen as a form of corporate social responsibility (Kulik, Bainbridge & Cregan, 2008). Genuine proximity with and understanding of stigmatized groups can further generate favorable evaluations, as audiences often react positively to efforts designed to integrate stigmatized groups (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Milfed, Haley & Flint, 2021). The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, prompted organizations to think about how they could integrate racially stigmatized groups with businesses, such as Microsoft setting up a plan to better build

stronger relationships with diverse communities.⁵ Other organizations may simply feel that engaging with and supporting the targets of stigma is, from a normative perspective, ‘the right thing to do’ in order to create social value and effect positive change in communities (Tracey & Philips, 2015).

However, while an important concern for many organizations, forming relationships with stigmatized groups can be a challenging and complex undertaking. There are a number of reasons for this: First, targeted groups’ stigmatized attributes (Becker & Arnold, 1986; Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000) as well as the products, services, and contexts they engage with (Slade Shantz et al., 2019) are diverse in nature, with groups living with invisible stigmas presenting particular challenges when it comes to identifying and interacting with them (Blascovich, et al., 2001; Kende & McGarty, 2019). This means that the sheer complexity of different types of stigmas, and the various ways in which they are experienced, may undermine the efforts of organizations to connect with stigmatized groups. At the same time, there is much diversity in the ways in which the stigmatized themselves evaluate and manage their attributes and activities (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, research suggests that members of stigmatized groups engage with products and services designed to address their needs in variety of ways (Ndichu & Rittenburg, 2021): Some users of illegal drugs may seek specific products from their interactions with organizations (e.g., clean injections), others may want the service to help them overcome their addiction (e.g., through Narcotics Anonymous). Such relationship reinforces the complexity faced by organizations seeking to interact with and support the targets of stigma.

Second, the motives of organizations also affect their ability to engage with stigmatized groups: eliciting the acceptance of stigmatized groups can often be driven by self-interest and can

⁵ <https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2020/06/23/addressing-racial-injustice/>

come at the expense of the stigmatized (Helms & Patterson, 2014). For example, while attempting to support targets of stigma, organizations may additionally try to profit from targets' labor and coopt their attributes and activities for commercial gain. Such instrumentality may negatively impact trust among targets, again making interactions and relationships difficult to bring about (Dwertmann et al., 2021).

Finally, even if the active public stigmatization of targeted groups is reduced in some contexts, many group members remain marginalized, which makes the establishment of relationships with outside organizations challenging. Long periods of social and economic ostracization due to stigmatized attributes can lead to a self-internalization of such attributes (Corrigan & Rao, 2012; Corrigan, Watson, & Barr, 2006) and impede relationships with broader communities (Tyler, 2020; Tyler & Slater, 2018). This dynamic helps to explain why many historically marginalized groups tend to ignore, and even actively avoid, organizations seeking to interact with them (Mitchell et al., 2021).

In this paper, we theorize how organizations, through their organizational members, can connect and relate to the stigmatized groups they seek to interact with and support. While organizations may have instrumental and normative motives to form bonds with stigmatized groups they may also possess valuable resources, relationships, and practices through which they can support targets in managing their experiences of stigma (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). As such, in this paper, we depart from an existing focus in organizational scholarship on the strategies through which organizations and their members seek to manage levels of stigma for themselves and others (Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Helms & Patterson, 2014), and instead seek to theorize how organizations, through their members, can relate to stigmatized stakeholders. Doing so allows organizations and their members to effectively interact

and develop relationships with and gain acceptance among stigmatized groups, to ultimately support them in their own stigma management efforts. Without investigating this gap in the literature, namely around how organizations form relationships with stigmatized groups, and advancing theory in this way, we may lack important insights into how organizations can successfully interact and work with targets of stigma in society – in particular, as targets, given their negative past experiences, are often wary of opening up to and trusting organizations.

To generate our theory, we build upon Goffman's (1963) initial observations that people vary in their capacity to relate to, and form relationships with, stigmatized groups. Drawing from research that suggests that individuals' experience in both personal and professional roles provides them with 'scripts' for how to interact with others (Jackson & Hogg, 2010; Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Gioia & Poole, 1984), we conceptualize *stigma-interactional scripts* as interactional schemata that organizational members draw upon to form bonds with stigmatized groups (Avery et al., 2009; Carmack, 2010). In particular, these stigma-interactional scripts are used to navigate interactions with targets' stigmatized attributes as well as navigate interactions around the products, services, or contexts they draw upon and engage in. Based upon the internalization of various combinations of stigma-interactional scripts from experiences in their personal and professional roles, we propose an initial typology of six internalized *stigma-relational identities* of organizational members that provide the foundations for how they (can) relate to and orient themselves towards (Brickson, 2007; Brickson, 2005) the stigmatized they intend to serve. Subsequently, given the language and behaviors that scripts provide to enable interactions between different groups (Lee, Mazmanian, & Perlow, 2020), we put forward a model of *relational stigma management*. In this model, we delineate the key role that the relational identities of organizational members play in navigating the stigma identity management processes of targets during both social and

transactional interactions, in order to form relational ties of varying strength among stigmatized groups. Next to having implications for the literature on stigma and its management, our theorizing has implications for practice by highlighting the importance of employing individuals who have appropriate backgrounds, experiences, and scripts to connect to and build strong relationships with those stigmatized populations organizations might want to connect with.

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STIGMATIZED GROUPS

Table 1 provides a summary of research on the different roles of organizational members in the management of stigma. We use four observations from this work to motivate our focus on scripts to theorize how organizational members build positive relationships with stigmatized groups in their work to support them.

--- Insert Table 1 ---

How Organizational Members Relate to Stigmatized Groups

The first observation driving our theorizing is that while it has been established that organizational members vary in how they relate to the stigmatized groups they work with (Lyons, Lynch, & Johnson, 2020), less attention has been paid to conceptualizing how and why they do so. Existing work has, instead, overwhelmingly focused upon the stigmatized themselves and their behaviors. Using the language of relational identity theory as well as drawing on conversations around the interactions and assumed relationships between organizations and their stakeholders (Brickson, 2007), studies of stigma and its management have focused upon how being tied to stigmatized attributes impacts how targets “enact their respective roles vis-à-vis” (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 11) the actors they encounter in organizational and societal settings. In these settings, rather than just accepting their ostracization, targets draw from their personal and professional experiences to shape how they approach their stigmatizing attributes in interactions

(Slay & Smith, 2011). While this has been formative in understanding targets' activities, it is, we argue, only half the story: less attention has been paid to how the personal and professional experiences and backgrounds of organizational members impact how they relate to the stigmatized attributes of targets and enact their roles towards them.

This lack of attention is surprising if we consider the early foundations of stigma research in and around organizations. In his original work, Goffman (1963) emphasized the central influence of organizational members (such as, for example, professionals) on enacting and managing the relationships of their organizations with stigmatized groups, by focusing on how they performed their roles and how it could either mitigate or exacerbate the negative experience of stigma among targeted groups. He went so far as to categorize how organizational members enacted their roles during interactions with stigmatized groups as normal, own, and wise. "Normals", following Goffman (1963), are those actors who are seen by the stigmatized as out-group members. They do not bear the mark of stigma themselves and do not relate to stigmatized groups. The "own" are recognized by the stigmatized as fellow members of the group, often sharing the very same experiences of stigma. The "wise" are those who are accepted among stigmatized groups despite not sharing the mark of stigma themselves. Recent research has empirically validated these three categories, additionally finding that the experiences and backgrounds of such actors will shape how actively they engage with, manage, and ultimately challenge stigma in their efforts (Smith, 2012). For example, while some wise individuals in society will actively campaign on behalf of the stigmatized, other wise individuals will act more passively, accepting targets but only helping when they feel it to be absolutely necessary or when being asked for help. Or, in a more specific scenario, while an organizational member's personal experience of having a family member who uses illegal drugs can make that organizational

member wise and more comfortable towards the stigmatized attribute, activity, and group (i.e., individuals taking illegal drugs), that organizational member may lack professional training or work experience associated with illegal drugs, preventing them from engaging in detailed exchanges around particular drugs (i.e., the products) and supporting targets in this situation. This logic also applies to scenarios involving more visible stigmas, such as when an organizational member has a family member of a different race, making them familiar with how to avoid stigmatizing language and behavior during interactions. However, despite being wise with regard to targets' stigmatized attributes, these individuals can still lack professional experience around how to avoid salient stereotypes during transactions around particular products, services, and contexts. Key to conceptualizing how organizations build positive relationships with stigmatized groups is thus understanding the diverse manners by which their organizational members relate to such group.

Organizational Members' Efforts to Support Stigmatized Groups' Identity Management

Our second observation is that while it has been shown that stigmatized targets engage in stigma identity management – defined as “the choices about whether and how to communicate about a stigmatized identity” (Lyons, Pek, & Wessel, 2017: 618) – to form relationships with others, less is known about the role that organizational members might play in enabling and empowering these efforts. While organizations and their members seek to develop positive reputations in social contexts when working with or on behalf of stigmatized groups (Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Helms & Patterson, 2014), little attention has been paid to how those organizational members build and maintain those reputations during interactions with the targets of stigma themselves.

A central line of inquiry in stigma research concerns how some actors stigmatize others through vilifying language and behaviors (Becker, 1963) and how targets then deal with it. Smith

(2007) and other scholars have, for example, examined how actors deploy cues (or signals) in interactions with the stigmatized and engage in communication that categorizes targets unmistakable as out-group members, leading them to experience feelings of distrust and isolation. During such encounters, stigmatized targets then face decisions around the disclosure of their stigmatizing attributes. In this context, scholars who have explored stigma identity management dynamics and outcomes have found that targets vary in the degree to which they choose to divulge information about their stigmatized attribute and trust others with that information (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Frantsve & Kerns, 2007). While there has been interest in how organizational members actively engage in a range of stigma reduction strategies to build accepting organizational (Ashforth et al., 2007) and social contexts (Helms & Patterson, 2014), less attention has been paid to how organizational members engage with and effectively navigate different stigma identity management strategies of targeted group members to support such group members and reduce their uncertainty around stigmatized attributes, products, services, and contexts and build trust.

Theorizing this process is important, yet challenging for two reasons: First, the identity management strategies of stigmatized targets are diverse (Sabat et al., 2020) ranging from concealing and avoiding disclosure of their tainted attributes to revealing efforts of signaling and sharing information openly with others (Jones & King, 2014; Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013). Second, individual stigma identity management strategies may heavily depend upon the setting in which they take place. While some targets may prefer to be more revealing of attributional information during social interactions in some contexts (e.g., in more accepting and forgiving environments; Hudson & Okhyusen, 2009), in others (e.g., those that are transactional or highly sanctioning) they may prefer to conceal their membership of a stigmatized group (Geiger-Oneto, Gelb & Simkins, 2020; Ndichu & Rittenburg, 2021). As such, we assert that in order to build

relationship with and trust among the stigmatized (Misztal, 2001; Jones & Archer, 1976; Thompson & Seibold, 1978), organizational members need the capacity to demonstrate a familiarity with the stigma associated with targeted groups. Further, they also will need to adapt their language and behavior in interactions to engage with the diverse stigma identity management strategies of targets (Sabat et al., 2020).

Understanding Stigmatized Groups' Selection of Buffering Ties

Our third observation is that while stigma can serve as a social and relational barrier to targeted groups' acceptance and integration in society, organizational members might be able to establish relationships with targets that 'buffer' these individuals from stigma's marginalizing effects (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Hite's (2003) theory on relational embeddedness – developed from foundational arguments by Uzzi (1996) and Granovetter (1985) – argues that organizational members form relationships within networks that vary in their strength and multidimensionality. From this perspective, relationships are established based upon three factors: the degree to which members are *liked* by others on a personal level, the evaluation of their *competence* in transactions, and their *reputation*. To date, existing research on stigma management has largely focused upon the work of organizational members as advocates, forming relationships with external audiences in order to reduce the social and economic sanctioning experienced by targeted groups (Helms & Patterson, 2014). Much less is known about the nature of relationships brokered by organizational members with targets as well as how such relationships may 'buffer' targets from the experiences of stigma. The central ideas that the literature hints at, but does not fully explore, is that whether these relationships will form is largely determined by whether stigmatized targets actively select organizational members as relational partners (Hudson, 2008; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009).

Conceptualizing these buffering relational ties and their formation is challenging. Individuals in stigmatized groups may face uncertainty in establishing relationships and often avoid engaging with organizations and contexts that have historically vilified them – even when these organizations and their members make conscious efforts to provide resources and opportunities (Smith, 2012). In this context, Krackhardt argues (1992: 216) that “people resist change and are uncomfortable with uncertainty. Strong ties constitute a base of trust that can reduce resistance and provide comfort in the face of uncertainty. (...) change is not facilitated by weak ties, but rather by a particular type of strong tie.” Drawing on this perspective, it can be suggested that organizational members must form strong relationships with stigmatized groups in which they are, at a minimum, perceived as understanding of stigma, in order to access and remain part of relationship networks of stigmatized groups over time (Hudson, 2008).

The Key Role of Scripts in Relationship Formation

The final observation driving our theorizing is that key to understanding how organizational members relate to, interact with, and form relationships with stigmatized groups are the scripts they have internalized for managing stigma. Overall, just like with stigmatized group members themselves, the personal and professional backgrounds of organizational members shape how they relate to stigmatized individuals’ attributes and the associated products, services, and contexts that they engage in, as well as how they enact their roles in such settings. In particular, an organizational member’s socialization into personal (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Wahl & Harman, 1989) and professional (Fagan & Geller, 2015; Gordon & Nelson, 2012) roles leads to the internalization of scripts for addressing targets and their stigmatized attributes. Building on Goffman’s work (1959), scripts are schematic patterns of interactions for engaging with others. Scholars of organizations (Gioia & Poole, 1984) and professions (Ashforth & Fried, 1988) have

found that the scripts internalized by organizational members resulting from formal education and training (Fagan & Geller, 2015; Gordon & Nelson, 2012), as well as through informal encounters with family members and friends (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Wahl & Harman, 1989), shape how they relate to and interact with stigmatized groups by providing language and behavioral guidelines. For example, the language and behavior patterns associated with scripts for addressing stigmatized attributes or the products, services, and contexts the stigmatized engage in can enable organizational members to limit targets' experience of otherness in these interactions. Table 2 provides an overview of the role of scripts in organizational members' navigation of stigma.

--- Insert Table 2 ---

Based on this, we suggest that central to theorizing how organizational members relate to and become accepted among stigmatized groups and enact their roles as normal, wise, and own, is understanding the scripts they internalize based on their personal and professional experiences. Drawing from Sluss and Ashforth's (2007) emphasis on how the personal and professional experiences of organizational members shape how they relate to others, we define how organizational members relate to stigmatized targets in their roles as *stigma-relational identities*.

We suggest that whether organizational members can ultimately adapt to the stigma identity management preferences of targets and ultimately form trusted relationships will depend upon the professional and personal scripts they have internalized. Research on stigmatized populations (Corrigan & Rüsch, 2002; Howard, 1984; Pinel, 2002) has emphasized that – even when enacted with the best of intentions – organizational members' adherence to broader professional and social scripts often lead to the pejorative labeling of targets, and to linguistic and behavioral accounts that can make stigmatizing stereotypes salient – i.e., cuing them among targets –, and thereby ultimately disrupting organizational members' efforts to help. However, less

attention has been paid to those scripts used by organizational members to limit and reduce the cuing of stigmatizing labels as well as the uncertainty among targets regarding how information associated with their stigmatized attributes, products, and services will be handled. Here, scripts provide language (e.g., labels and accounts) and behavioral patterns (e.g., awareness of facial and physical responses) to avoid cuing and heightening stigmatization associated with an attribute or activity (Wooten & Rank-Christman, 2019). Examining this in more detail, personal or “weak” scripts are often informal guidelines (Gioia & Poole, 1984: 449) providing less structured content for language and behavior to engage in or avoid, in order to signal familiarity with targets and their disclosure preferences. Research on visible stigmas on physical appearance (Manago, Davis, & Goar, 2017) and race (Crockett, 2017) has found that organizational members’ personal experiences of engaging with targeted groups enables language and behaviors that reduce the negative experience of stigmatization. For example, the use of language that demonstrates a personal understanding of targets’ stigmatized attributes as well as the capacity to enable disclosure by own organizational actors has been found to establish a sense of intimacy-driven trust with stigmatized group members (Segalovich et al., 2012; Thompson & Seibold, 1978).

Meanwhile, professions that work with marginalized groups often have “strong” scripts specifying not only which behavior to engage in or avoid, but how to sequence such behavior based upon the contexts in which they take place (Gioia & Poole, 1984: 551). As such, professional scripts can often be more focused on the transactional components of interactions such as avoiding stigmatizing cues, rules, and prescribed procedures. For example, Alcoholic Anonymous counseling group services are tied to pre-defined scripts that include disclosure and treatment processes characterizing drinking as negative. Further, scripts used in the context of law enforcement are tied to mandated sequences for whether and how to approach information

associated with stigmatized products and illegality (e.g., illegal drugs). Adherence to professional scripts can establish a sense that an organizational member will not do anything with stigmatizing information that will harm a stigmatized individual's interests (Ashkanasy, 2005).

Overall, we suggest that key to building positive relationships and trust between organizational members and stigmatized groups is conceptualizing the diverse content of scripts that enable communication and signal familiarity with targets' stigma identity management preferences. Rather than simply reinforcing existing relationships, we suggest that the scripts utilized by organizational members during interactions can repair and foster positive new relational dynamics previously defined by distrust and animosity (Lee, Mazmanian, & Perlow, 2020). This is consistent with research on the use of scripts in highly contested settings, which has shown how scripts can encourage interactions characterized by respect (Carmeli et al., 2015), openness (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987), and a sense of connectedness (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008). As described by Lee, Mazmanian, and Perlow's (2020: 100) work on the strategic use of "interactions scripts," such scripts function as guidelines between parties "providing parameters around the content and sequence of the interactions and reducing the uncertainty and risk associated with interactions that were counter-normative for the team". In plain terms, scripts can allow organizational members to restructure interactions and form new relationships with stigmatized group members.

A TYPOLOGY OF STIGMA-RELATIONAL IDENTITIES

Drawing from the above observations about the key role that scripts play in shaping how organizational members relate to and navigate interactions with targeted groups, we now seek to develop theory on how organizational members build relationships with stigmatized groups. Following our observations that the backgrounds and experiences of organizational members across various settings provide them with scripts that shape their interactions with targets, we

systematically theorize a set of six stigma-relational identities of organizational members (see Table 3). We do this by arguing that the combinations of different stigma-interactional scripts influence how organizational members relate to targets as either normal, wise, or own, and that across these three types of organizational members we need to distinguish between how ‘actively’ or ‘passively’ they engage in navigating stigma during interactions (Smith, 2012). In so doing, and moving beyond conventional wisdom that individuals’ identities generally shape interactions with others, we delineate in detail how and why certain individuals with backgrounds, experiences, and resulting scripts may be more or less able to form successful relationships with the targets of stigma.

--- Insert Table 3 ---

Actively- and Passively-Normal Organizational Members

Many organizational members that engage with stigmatized groups have neither personal experience of relating to them (e.g., through family or social networks), nor professional experience of transacting with them. These organizational members belong to the ‘normal’ group, following Goffman (1963), and will often come into contact with stigmatized groups more or less by chance, given their employment situation (Thompson & Seibold, 1978). In other cases, they might work with the stigmatized based upon a desire to help those with ‘less fortunate’ lives. For example, an organizational member without personal and only limited professional experience of illegal drugs and drug users may seek to ‘improve’ targets’ lives through religious scripture that, however, does not address the implications of stigmatization at all. With such limited personal and professional experience of targeted groups and their lives, organizational members will often not have the opportunity to internalize linguistic and behavioral patterns that would be required to effectively and sensitively address and navigate stigmatized attributes. This will often limit organizational members’ understanding of when and how targets prefer to manage their

stigmatized attributes. We define those organizational members without internalized personal and only limited professional stigma-interactive scripts as having *passively-normal* relational identities.

In other instances, despite lacking personal experiences and the associated scripts that emerge from relating to stigmatized targets, organizational members' professional backgrounds can provide them with training, education, or mentorship experience for navigating the stigma of targets and associated products, services, and contexts (Carrara, 2020). For example, despite not having personal experience with the groups they intend to serve, many health professionals are educated and trained in how to interact with individuals with particular stigmatizing attributes during their service provisions (e.g., mental health issues; illegal drug abuse; visible disabilities) (Friedrich et al., 2013). Scholars have, for example, examined how actors from religious organizations engage in anti-stigma training and education to better serve targets of stigma (Berkeley-Patton et al., 2013). Therefore, while not having internalized personal stigma-interactive scripts through familiarity and interactions with stigmatized group members in their broader life experiences, the education and training of organizational members can provide them with professional stigma-interactive scripts that focus more on actively navigating transactional dimensions of interactions around, for example, products, services, or contexts of the stigmatized. We term these organizational members *actively-normal*.

Actively- and Passively-Wise Organizational Members

Other organizational members may have experiences of interacting with the stigmatized in personal encounters, such as through friendships (Herek & Capitanio, 1996) and family ties (Wahl & Harman 1989). These experiences provide organizational members with language and behavioral patterns through which they can learn how to interpersonally approach stigmatized

targets and their attributes as an out-group member. For example, both experimental (Avery et al., 2009) and qualitative (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2019) investigations have been conducted into interactions between individuals within racially and sexually stigmatized groups and non-stigmatized actors who had prior personal experiences of people with these stigmatizing attributes. They found that these actors were able to develop scripts that guided and enabled ongoing interactions with targets. Another example are LGBTQ “allies” in the workplace who are seen as outside the stigmatized group but still involved in normalizing it and bridging the gap between the group and other organizational members (Roulet, 2020). The personal backgrounds and experiences of these non-stigmatized actors provides them with stigma-interactional scripts to navigate stigmatized attributes as part of an out-group. We term organizational members who can draw on such scripts as *passively-wise*. While passively-wise organizational members’ personal backgrounds may make them comfortable discussing stigmatized attributes and behaviors with targets, this may not extend to transactions around products, services, or contexts that targeted groups engage in (Geiger-Oneto, Gelb, & Simkins, 2020; Slade Shantz et al., 2019). For example, while some passively-wise organizational members may be comfortable and competent discussing illegal drug use, they may have problems and feel less comfortable engaging in specific conversations about drug users’ product preferences.

Some wise organizational members will, however, also have professional training, education, or mentorship experiences enabling them to deal with stigma in transactional exchanges more directly (Chaney, Sanchez, & Maimon, 2019). In other words, the professional experience around targets’ products, services, and contexts can lead to the internalization of stigma-interactional scripts for actively managing the transactional dimensions of stigma. We differentiate

those organizational members that have both internalized personal and professional scripts for actively managing stigma during interactions as *actively-wise*.

Actively- and Passively-Own Organizational Members

Finally, unlike the wise and the normal, organizational members that belong to the own have a personal background of being a part of a stigmatized group themselves (Duvnjak et al., 2021; Wyatt et al., 2020). Experiences of being part of such an in-group provide organizational members with insights into how to comfortably engage with the bearers of stigmatized attributes during a broad range of social interactions. As such, over time, the repeated patterns associated with the lived experiences of these organizational members help establish scripts for addressing stigmatized attributes more easily as part of the in-group during interactions. We term these organizational members *passively-own*.

As with the other categories of organizational members we described above, we suggest that own organizational members vary in their familiarity with processes of managing stigmatized attributes attached to groups or the products, services, and contexts they draw on or engage in. Own organizational members can also have various degrees of exposure to professional training and education around certain stigmas, as well as their internalization of transactional scripts for actively managing stigma associated with products and services (Byrne et al., 2019). Cumulatively, a combination of both personal lived experience and professional experience around stigmatized groups can enable some organizational members to be *actively-own*. In other words, they are not simply able to relate to a stigmatized attribute as part of the in-group themselves, but to actively manage stigma during interactions around products, services, and within contexts.

A MODEL OF RELATIONAL STIGMA MANAGEMENT

Drawing on our organizational members' typology of stigma-relational identities and Sluss and Ashforth's (2007: 11) argument that relational identities shape the processes by which organizational members enact their roles vis-à-vis others to "knit the network of roles and role incumbents together into a social system", we now move to develop a *model of relational stigma management*. In this model we theorize four pathways via which organizations, through the scripts and resulting stigma-relational identities of their organizational members, establish relationships that vary in strength among stigmatized groups. To do so, we draw on Hite's (2003) conceptualization of different relationships that organizational members can build with others, namely relationships that are *latent* (i.e., suppressed or unrealized), *unidimensional* (i.e., relatively weak), *multidimensional* (i.e., relatively strong), or *divisive* (i.e., strong among supporters within groups, but weak among others). Our model of relational stigma management thus outlines the pathways through which organizations, through their members, can achieve these four different relationships among stigmatized group members, given various scripts and resulting relational identities. Specifically, we theorize that the scripts that define the stigma-relational identities of organizational members provide them with linguistic and behavioral guidelines for navigating the diverse stigma identity management preferences of targets. We propose that this navigation of stigma identity management, through varying degrees of *cuing familiarity*, *enacting disclosure preferences*, and *building trust*, enables organizational members to reduce group member uncertainty associated with their attributes in interactions and to form buffering relationships grounded in varying degrees of personal liking, transactional competency, and organizational reputation (Hite, 2003; Hudson, 2008). Our model is diagrammatically depicted in Figure 1. In what follows, we describe four different pathways to delineate how organizational members'

stigma-relational identities influence their capacity to form different relationships among stigmatized targets. Table 4 highlights the specific theorized differences in organizational members' attempts to build relationships among stigmatized targets.

---Insert Figure 1 & Table 4---

The Passively-Normal and Pathways to Latent Relationships

To begin, we propose a latent relationships pathway in which *passively-normal* organizational members lack the capacity to establish or maintain relationships among stigmatized groups (Cornwell & Harrison, 2004). Regardless of the positive intentions of organizational members, without the internalization of personal and only limited professional stigma-interactive scripts for navigating a group's stigmatized attribute or the products, services, and contexts associated with them, we suggest that passively-normal organizational members will lack the language and behavioral guidelines to navigate targets' stigma identity management strategies and to build meaningful relationships with them.

Without stigma-interactive scripts to guide them, passively-normal organizational members rely upon scripts from their experiences of the non-stigmatized groups in society to which they belong. A reliance on these very general and broad scripts that often lack language and behaviors for engaging with marginalized, and often stigmatized, group members coupled with a lack of awareness of the negative implications that certain labels, accounts, and behaviors can have on targeted groups greatly increases the likelihood of these organizational members being oblivious and insensitive to stigma during interactions. For example, while behavioral and linguistic mimicking (imitating the behaviors of others) is often utilized by individuals to establish relationships and build bonds with members of out-groups they are less familiar with, in contexts of stigma such mimicry often makes stereotypes more salient for the stigmatized (Johnston, 2002).

We suggest that such highlighting or ‘cuing’ of stigma, through the use of insensitive language and behaviors by organizational members, is particularly detrimental in situations where such organizational members interact with groups whose stigmatized attributes are more visible, potentially triggering inappropriate behavioral responses and (unintentionally) engaging in language that can be highly stigmatizing (Kleck, 1968; Schumacher, Corrigan, & Dejong, 2003).

In addition to being more likely to engage in stigmatizing language and behavior and thus cue stigma during interactions, the language and behavior that is offered to passively-normal organizational members through their out-group scripts can significantly hamper their capacity to enact the disclosure preferences of targets around stigmatized attributes in interactions. For example, such organizational members lack the scripts that shape their understanding of whether, when, and how to approach targets to discuss their stigmatized attributes or any transactions they need to engage in. Or such organizational members will not be able to provide information on how targets’ attributes will be treated after disclosure of such attributes has taken place. Finally, these organizational members will also lack the behavioral and linguistic capacity to engage in advocacy for targets and demonstrate their broader support for them, because of their inability to comprehend the desires and goals of stigmatized group members.

While passively-normal organizational members should be able to initially navigate interactions among targets with non-visible stigmatizing attributes who prefer concealment-based stigma identity management strategies (Geiger-Oneto, Gelb & Simkins, 2020), repeated interactions with targets or transactions around stigmatized products, services, and contexts they engage in can reduce the effectiveness of concealment as a stigma identity management strategy for those targets. Without language and behaviors that enable organizational members to maintain targets’ concealment, we suggest that organizational members will not be able to establish trust

among those targets who prefer concealment as a stigma identity management strategy. This should be particularly disruptive for organizational members seeking to build ties among groups engaging in heavily sanctioned activities in which effective concealment of attributes and behaviors has shown to be necessary to prevent sanctioning (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009).

Cumulatively, examining passively-normal organizational members' stigma identity management navigation in our model, we suggest that a lack of linguistic and behavioral guidelines for signaling their familiarity with the stigmatized attribute or the products, services, and contexts that targets engage with, as well as a lack of understanding of targets' disclosure preferences, should substantially limit the trust that such organizational members can establish among targeted groups. Over time, with limited trust among targets for how these organizational members deal with stigma, passively-normal organizational members are unlikely to form active and strong ties with diverse individuals within stigmatized groups. Even for organizations with established reputations for working with stigmatized groups and providing the products and services they require (Lawrence, 2017), an organizational member's inability to navigate their stigma identity management and build trust among targets can prevent the personal liking and transactional competency that are required to form relationships.

Actively-Normal, Passively-Wise, and Pathways to Unidimensional Relationships

Our second pathway is a unidimensional relationship path. In this pathway, actively-normal and passively-wise organizational members are able to form relational ties that are relatively weak – grounded either in targets' personal liking of an organizational member or the organizational member's transactional competency. Specifically, we suggest that these organizational members' stigma-interactional scripts provide guidelines for language and behaviors that will reduce targets'

fear and uncertainty around the stigma identity management of their attributes or particular products, services, or contexts during mostly transactional interactions.

We argue that *actively-normal* organizational members who have internalized professional stigma-interactive scripts will be able to provide language and behaviors to navigate and respond to the preferred stigma identity management strategies of stigmatized targets seeking access to the products and services they desire. Unlike passively-normal organizational members who lack professional stigma-interactive scripts, actively-normal organizational members have internalized professional language and behaviors associated with stigmatized products and services and are thus able to cue familiarity with these. For example, scholars have argued that organizational members can use “safety cues” in presenting products and services to stigmatized populations to demonstrate their familiarity with targets’ needs and desires as well as to make sure that stigma is not made salient during related transactions (Wooten & Rank-Christman, 2019: 142). Research on counseling in the health professions has shown how training and formal dialogue guidelines around products and services desired by stigmatized groups can mitigate uncertainty and risk during interactions (Chaney, Sanchez, & Maimon, 2019; Hansson & Markström, 2014; Thompson & Seibold, 1978). However, without personal stigma-interactive scripts, actively-normal organizational members are limited in their interactions with targets and their ability to cue familiarity and understanding of the targeted group’s stigmatized attribute itself.

The personal stigma-interactive scripts of the *passively-wise* provides organizational members with linguistic and behavioral prompts for cuing familiarity with stigmatized attributes and behaviors and for discussing them during the social dimensions of interactions (Pietri, Johnson, & Ozgumus, 2018; Preciado, Johnson, & Peplau, 2013). We suggest that past experience with personal contacts, such as family and friends, provides guidance to these organizational members

around the language that can be used around stigmatized attributes to signal and cue familiarity, as well as guide behaviors when information around attributes is disclosed. For example, while passively-wise organizational members may not have a specific understanding of the illegal drugs that are used by targets, a familiarity with general addiction behaviors – for example, due to experience with addictive behaviors in their personal social network – can inform and normalize the social dimensions of the interactions between passively-wise organizational members and targets. This will also enable these organizational members to gauge how and when it is appropriate to discuss, for example, the topic of addiction during interactions. Meanwhile, scripts associated with having family members of different races and religions (i.e., stigmatizing attributes that can be visible) can inform and normalize social interactions around a range of commercial interactions in which threatening stereotypes could otherwise become salient. The awareness of targets' stigmatized attributes and a feeling for the language and behavior required in interactions can enable the passively-wise to interpret targets' concealment decisions, allow them to sensitively respond to targets' disclosure of stigmatized attributes, and understand relevant and helpful ways of advocacy.

Bringing both types of organizational members together, we suggest that actively-normal and passively-wise organizational members' capacity to cue and signal familiarity as well as enact disclosure preferences associated with targets' stigmatized attributes and related transactions will reduce uncertainty and enable limited degrees of trust in organizational members among stigmatized targets. In particular, actively-normal organizational members' capacity to proactively navigate stigma during interactions around products and services in marketplaces that stigmatized groups desire should create a sense of familiarity and comfort among targets to build transactional trust. Meanwhile, the passively-wise organizational members' ability to avoid stigmatizing signals

in interactions and their familiarity with stigmatizing attributes reduces targets' uncertainty about how information around their attribute will be handled and establishes a sense of interpersonal trust (Nicholson, Compeau, & Sethi, 2001).

Cumulatively, we suggest that actively-normal and passively-wise organizational members' capacity to build either transactional or interpersonal trust during interactions should lead to the formation of unidimensional relational ties (Hite, 2003). Actively-normal organizational members' capacity to establish transactional competency around products, services, and contexts can establish relational ties grounded in their transactional competency associated with managing stigma and creating value associated with products and services for the stigmatized (Larson, 1992). Similarly, passively-wise organizational members' ability to build interpersonal trust via familiarity with attributes during marketplace interaction should foster an acquaintanceship based upon personal liking (Zaheer and Venkataraman, 1995). Furthermore, organizational members' capacity to establish trust and intimacy and, at a minimum, avoid creating a stigma salient transactional context should maintain a (positive) organizational reputation among targeted group members, often driven by the organization's products and public image.

Although being stronger and more durable than latent ties, unidimensional relationship ties that we propose here can be difficult to strengthen across ongoing interactions. Both actively-normal and passively-wise organizational members lack a combination of detailed personal and professional stigma-interactive scripts for discussing and navigating stigmatized attributes as well as products, services, and contexts during exchanges, limiting their ability to strengthen subsequent ties.

Actively-Wise, Passively-Own, and Pathways to Multidimensional Relationships

Continuing our reasoning, we now argue that actively-wise and passively-own organizational members will be able to establish ties that are multidimensional. The stigma-interactive scripts internalized by *actively-wise* organizational members provide guidelines for conversational prompts that initially cue their familiarity with stigmatized attributes as part of an out-group and thereby enable targets' disclosure around attributes as well as products, services, and contexts. Access to linguistic and behavioral guidelines support these organizational members' capacity to navigate targets' stigma identity management relating to both attributes and the products, services, and contexts they engaged with. Specifically, the capacity to utilize conversational prompts can create opportunities for targets hesitant to disclose information around their attributes and behaviors to be more comfortable in revealing information during interactions (Stenger & Roulet, 2018). For example, in addition to the ability to navigate transactional information disclosed during interactions, an organizational member's capacity to prompt a conversation signaling the understanding of stigmatized attributes and experiences can normalize interactions and encourage targets' revealing.

At the same time, the use of transactional language and behaviors can support the social dimensions of exchange between organizational members and targets by enabling not simply an understanding of attributes but substantive understanding of products, services, and contexts. While a passively-wise organizational member may have a general understanding and familiarity with addiction behaviors around illegal drugs and supporting services, an actively-wise organizational member's additional professional training in the types of illegal drugs or an understanding of laws concerning the trade and use of illegal drugs can signal a sense of transactional competency among targets. Meanwhile an individual with longstanding friendships

with individuals with visible stigmas can utilize scripts for approaching attributes that buttress their utilization of professional scripts. In particular, this can happen by providing decision making criteria into whether to approach an individual as an out-group member along with language for discussing a friend's experience with their product or service. Demonstrating familiarity with stigmatizing attributes and the products, services, and contexts targets use and engage in, as well as being able to navigate disclosure processes around them can bolster targeted groups' personal liking and perception of the transactional competency of actively-wise organizational members, leading to greater trust towards them.

The generation of trust grounded in both personal liking and transactional competency will increase the likelihood that targets will continue to engage with organizational members and establish ties that are stronger in nature (Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998). In particular, this will be driven by individual targets viewing organizational members as likeable as well as competent at managing the stigma associated with their attributes and the products and services they are interested in. This outcome, we propose, increases the likelihood of targets choosing to engage with actively-wise organizational members, reinforcing and building an organization's reputation as the basis for future interactions (over organizations composed of organizational members that are passively-wise or actively-normal).

Meanwhile, organizational members with *passively-own* relational identities internalize stigma-interactional scripts from stigmatized groups themselves. These scripts provide linguistic and behavioral guidelines for how to relate to stigmatized attributes as well as associated products, services, and contexts as individuals within stigmatized groups directly. Here, an organizational member's lived experience as part of a stigmatized group provides acceptable in-group language for cuing their familiarity with the preferences of targeted group members in how to engage in

concealing, revealing, or advocating during interactions. In particular, passively-own organizational members can emphasize the role of their own lived experiences in order to establish a safe environment for targets in which to disclose their stigmatized attributes (Marino, Child, & Campbell Krasinski, 2016). Furthermore, despite not having explicit training around how to engage with targeted groups (through, for example, education or coaching organizational settings), the experience within stigmatized groups themselves grant passively-own organizational members access to in-group language and behaviors around products, services, and contexts. Like actively-wise organizational members, stigma-interactional scripts associated with stigmatized attributes of targets and the products, services, and contexts they engage with enhance their capacity to reduce the uncertainty of targets' stigma identity management and build trust during interactions.

With this stated, one important limitation for passively-own organizational members' capacity to navigate stigma identity management concerns interactions with groups that have visible stigmas and who try to conceal them in social contexts. While the passively-own may be able to understand and adapt to targets' stigma identity management preferences, the visible nature of targets' stigma and the interactions with organizational members can increase targets' sense of risk around not being able to maintain their concealment and anonymity.

Besides this limitation, however, the sharing of in-group language and behaviors around a stigmatized attribute as well as products, services, and contexts can establish a sense of intimacy that enhances personal liking and transactional competency during interactions. Unlike the actively-wise, the passively-own organizational members' relationships with targeted groups and the capacity to access them much more directly increases their ability to broker multidimensional ties over time. This is particularly the case for building ties among those groups with less visible stigmas that can be more difficult to identify and access. Due to the establishment of intimacy in

addition to personal liking and transactional competency during interactions, we assert that organizational members with passively-own identities are likely to build stronger relationships among stigmatized groups (than actively-wise organizational members), enhancing their organization's positive reputation among targeted groups.

Actively-Own and Pathways to Divisive Relationships

The final pathway we theorize is one in which *actively-own* organizational members' navigation of targets' stigma identity management forms divisive relationships with targeted groups. As discussed previously, individuals in stigmatized groups have diverse stigma identity preferences (Marino, Child, & Campbell Krasinski, 2016; Murphy & Perera-Delcourt, 2014). Unlike passively-own organizational members, actively-own organizational members have internalized professional stigma-interactional scripts. These scripts provide actively-own organizational members with language and behaviors around the products and services that stigmatized groups desire, with mixed implications for the stigma identity management preferences of targets during interactions.

As targets have divergent beliefs regarding how their stigma should be managed, the professional stigma-interactional scripts that emerge through training in organizational contexts and that actively-wise organizational members draw on can be misaligned with those beliefs. For example, organizational members with lived experiences of alcohol or drug abuse who work for Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous internalize professional counselling scripts that position excessive alcohol and drug use as harmful. As a result, they engage with targets of such counselling services to convey this message and help targets overcome their addictions. However, people that drink excessively or use illegal drugs vary in whether or not they view such products and activities as harmful and 'bad'. As such, there can be a clash between the actively-owns'

internalization of professional scripts and the in-group scripts of targets about their attributes and activities. This may be particularly challenging as targeted groups may perceive actively-own organizational members very explicitly as part of their in-group and may think they share common views and beliefs around attributes and activities, which ultimately may not be the case.

Further, the use of certain language by actively-own organizational members can also cue stigmatization among their own groups, even though this may be unintentional. Drawing on the prior example and its context, using terms such as ‘alcoholic’ or talking about the negative effects of alcohol abuse can make stigma highly salient among those individuals who do not perceive their alcohol consumption as problematic. At the same time, actively-own organizational members’ may have developed preferences for getting targeted groups to disclose and discuss their attributes and activities during interactions, which can become disruptive. While actively managing the diverse disclosure processes of targets, managers of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, for example, ultimately seek out the disclosure and even the confession of attributes and behaviors as ‘problems’ or ‘conditions’ (i.e., being an “alcoholic” or having a “disease”) by individuals. Based on this, they will hold individuals accountable for their future behavior. While some stigmatized targets, often from highly visible groups, frequently engage in strategies to publicly disclose and advocate for their stigmatized attributes, there are others that seek anonymity. In other words, the use of particular labels by actively-own members, even with the best of intentions, can cue stigmatization among their own communities. This has been reflected in, for example, generational challenges in the coopting and use of racist labels by hip hop artists and record companies who attempted to advocate for their group (Lena, 2006), which, however, quickly became disruptive for those group members with different disclosure preferences.

Such public advocacy may thus be desired by some but disruptive for others from within the same group. As such, we suggest that this confrontation of professional scripts by organizational members and the expectation of support and advocacy by targets can lead to divided trust. In other words, while actively-own organizational members aim to develop a sense of personal liking and transactional competency with targets, differing beliefs around how stigmatized attributes and activities should be engaged with or disclosed can sometimes create tensions and identity conflicts, ultimately leading to a disruption of trust with some targets. When actively-own organizational members publicly adhere to particular professional stigma-interactional scripts reflecting different preferences regarding how stigma should be managed during interactions with targets, this can lead to a fragmentation among groups. Specifically, these situations can reduce the effectiveness of organizational members cuing familiarity, disrupt disclosure, and rather than produce intimacy and trust with targets lead to potential conflict and divide trust. Finally, as was the case with passively-own, actively-own organizational members' relationships to stigmatized groups enables the spread of their organization's reputation among targeted groups. However, the varying perception of trust towards actively-own organizational members by targets can lead to the creation of divisive ties: such organizational members may experience personal liking, transactional competency, and organizational reputation among likeminded targets, but latent ties among targets that oppose their professional script.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this paper, we extend work on the management and reduction of stigma's marginalizing effects by developing theory on how organizations, through the stigma relational identities of their members, can build varying relationships among targeted groups. Departing from prior research that has examined how stigmatized individuals (and their advocates) seek to normalize audiences'

perceptions of their deviant attributes, we focus on the role of organizational members in the process of stigma management. To do so we conceptualize the key role of stigma-interactional scripts that organizational members internalize from their personal and professional backgrounds in shaping their efforts. We propose a typology of six stigma-relational identities for how organizational members relate to the stigmatized groups they intend to serve and put forward a model of relational stigma management. In this model, we theorize four relationship pathways for how stigma-relational identities, emerging from combinations of different personal and professional stigma-identity scripts, provide linguistic and behavioral guidelines for members of organizations to navigate diverse stigma identity management approaches of targeted individuals during interactions. We theorize that this enables organizational members to establish degrees of personal liking and transactional competency as well as maintain and spread organizational reputations that build varying relationships with stigmatized groups. Overall, our theory contributes to scholarship on stigma and its management in three ways.

Establishing Organizational Members' Central Role in the Management and Reduction of Stigma

First, our study lays a foundation for expanding the study of stigma management by including the crucial impact organizational members can have on it. Despite a longstanding awareness that organizational members vary in how they relate to the stigmatized and how they enact different roles towards them (Goffman, 1963), little theory has been developed to conceptualize these relational patterns. As such, we expand the literature on stigma management by addressing the important role that scripts play in how organizational members engage with stigmatized targets. In doing so, it is our hope that our conceptualization of stigma-interactional scripts and the resulting stigma-relational identity typologies enable future work on unpacking

organizational members' role in the process of the management and reduction of stigma in even more detail.

We suggest that scholars can draw from, test, and refine our initial typology of stigma-relational identities to substantiate and quantify how organizational members relate to the stigmatized they seek to engage with and serve. Given that the presence of stigma as well as how the stigmatized are treated varies substantially across contexts (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), researchers can begin to track and catalogue the varying stigma-interactional scripts found in different contexts. This is important as the backgrounds of individuals and the resulting scripts that emerge and define how they approach targeted groups are, practically speaking, challenging to track, conceptualize, and catalogue.

Our conceptualization of stigma-relational identities also provides a path for future research on the experience and impact of 'courtesy stigma', i.e., the blemish and marginalization experienced by individuals purely through their association with stigmatized groups (Goffman, 1963). More specifically, a limitation to our theoretical model ripe for exploration is that we do not explicitly theorize the negative valence (i.e., perceptions of undesirability) that organizational members may hold towards stigmatized groups (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). While organizational members' personal and professional experiences and backgrounds may provide them with stigma-interactional scripts, it does not mean that they automatically have a positive (or neutral) valence towards the stigmatized attribute, or the products, services, and contexts targeted groups engage with. For example, while medical professionals or family members may have scripts to inform their interactions with targets, they might still experience a negative valence – such as, for example, feelings of disgust or moral disapproval – towards the attributes or activities of such targets. We suggest that the internalization of scripts in combination with one's personal valence has

implications for whether organizational members will be willing and able to accept and endure the potential courtesy stigma associated with the targeted groups they engage with over time.

Conceptualizing How Organizational Members Are Accepted by the Stigmatized

Second, our work builds counterintuitive and necessary theory on whether and how organizational members will be able to “pass” (Goffman, 1963: 94), or garner acceptance, among stigmatized targets during interactions. Departing from existing research that has paid almost exclusive attention to how stigmatized targets try to “pass as normal” (Ingram & Hutchinson, 1999: 93) during interactions in organizations or society as a whole, we start from an awareness that targets have diverse preferences around how to manage their stigma. In other words, we suggest that it is an oversimplification to assume, as much of the previous work has done, that stigmatized targets’ primary aim in stigma identity management activities is to adapt and conform to the expectations of broader collectives and seek their acceptance (Helms & Patterson, 2014). In particular, we flip this perspective by building theory on how organizational members engage in efforts and draw on their personal and professional scripts that provide them with behavioral and linguistic guidelines to help them garner acceptance among the stigmatized with diverse stigma identity management approaches. We suggest that conceptualizing the navigation of such diverse stigma identity management approaches can broaden research on interactions with stigmatized groups in numerous ways: First, scholars can empirically examine the processual components of our stigma identity management navigation in more detail. For example, it would be intriguing to engage in empirical observations to uncover how organizational members go about stigma identity management navigation in practice – such as how they, for example, cue familiarity. While scholars have theorized the importance of cuing, less is known on how organizational members can act to effectively cue that an interaction with them is safe for targeted groups (Smith, 2007).

Further, examining how organizational members go about navigating and enabling different levels of disclosure in practice is important, for example, by comparing the training materials and socialization processes across different organizations to find common and divergent themes. Here, scholars may also consider behavior and language in practice to explore the trust implications that different cuing and disclosure efforts have for targeted groups. Second, scholars can empirically attend to the interactions between the linguistic and behavioral guidelines of organizational members' personal and professional scripts. Our theory provides a framework for arguing that. Here, it may be intriguing to utilize a communication lens (Meisenbach, 2010) to understand in more detail how to utilize and adapt language and behaviors to enhance familiarity, enable disclosure, and ultimately build more trust.

In broadly considering interactions between organizational members and the targets of stigma they seek to engage with, we believe that our theorizing extends work on identity orientation (Brickson, 2007) in an interesting direction by providing a range of new ways through which organizations and their members that want to connect with stakeholders (both internally and externally) can conceptualize those relationships. While previous work on identity orientation has been formative in our understanding of the nature of the relationships between organizations and their stakeholders by highlighting individualistic, relational, and collectivistic orientations (Brickson, 2005), our work moves beyond this and provides more nuance to the types of relationships organizations and stakeholders can establish. Specifically, by utilizing our conceptualization of organizational members' stigma-relational identities through which they relate to and interact with stigmatized groups in different ways, we suggest that our work broadens the perspective of how organizations and their members can relate to perceptually deviant stakeholder groups.

The Buffering Nature of Allies for Stigmatized Groups

Finally, by examining the stigma buffering nature of relationships between organizational members and stigmatized groups members, our model begins to establish theory on the nature of allies and supporters that buffer groups from stigma (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). While prior research has focused upon how organizational members and the targets of stigma interact with stigmatizing audiences in society in order to publicly reduce their perceptions of the deviant nature of targeted groups' attributes or activities (Helms & Patterson, 2014; Lashley & Pollock, 2019; Kang et al. 2016), we conceptualize the nature of relationships that are chosen by stigmatized targets to buffer themselves from the experience of stigmatization. In other words, while previous work has examined how organizational members and targets work to change audiences' minds about stigmatized attributes and behaviors of certain groups, we draw attention to the efforts that organizational members and the targets themselves engage in to protect stigmatized groups from the experience of stigma. In doing so, we argue that simply working to reduce social and economic sanctions as well as external, negative evaluations of stigmatizers is not enough for historically stigmatized groups to effectively and sustainably reduce the experiences of stigma and its detrimental consequences (Luterman, 2020). Equally important is understanding how organizational members build relationships and connect with the stigmatized groups themselves to offer resources and support in their quest to navigate stigma. In our present study, we develop insights into this by drawing on Hite's (2003) observation on the relational nature of tie formation in marketplaces, which are grounded in personal liking, transactional competency, and reputation.

It is our hope that future scholars exploring stigma management, as well as those that study organizational networks and network dynamics, can apply, adapt, and extend our initial theory on the nature of ties that buffer stigma. In particular, we are looking forward to in-depth investigations

from a network perspective into how such networks of allies that can buffer stigma are established in the first place. Further, our theory provides scholars with a new manner of conceptualizing the contexts of stigmatized collectives. As argued by Hudson (2008), stigmatized organizations and collectives, depending on the severity of sanctioning and marginalization, often are excluded from established marketplace institutions and thereby have to rely upon informal networks. We hope that scholars can empirically examine the composition of the ties of these buffering networks and broaden our understanding of them.

Finally, we believe that combining our relational ties perspective with existing research on how to reduce social and economic sanctions for targeted groups could provide a more complete understanding of how the experience and effects of stigma can be reduced (Helms & Patterson, 2014). Here, longitudinal studies could be useful to compare and contrast the impact of sanction reduction with that of buffering relationships (through network formations) on the overall reduction of stigma among targeted groups. For example, one could imagine studies that examine how lifting sanctions on stigmatized groups influences the success of their businesses compared to how certain programs (e.g., in the context of social entrepreneurship) that seek to establish ties among stigmatized groups have impact on the success of targets' businesses.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we set out to develop insights into how organizations, through their organizational members, can build relationships with and become accepted by stigmatized groups. Drawing on early observations by Goffman (1963) that organizational members frequently relate to and interact with stigmatized groups in different ways, we develop the idea of stigma-interactional scripts – patterns of language and behavior for navigating interactions around stigma – that shape organizational members' efforts of engaging with targeted groups. We argue that

varying combinations of stigma-interactional scripts can lead to six stigma-relational identities of organizational members that, through navigating targets' stigma identity management practices, ultimately enable them to build varying relational ties with targets and embed within their groups. Overall, our work moves beyond previous theorizing around how organizational members can publicly campaign on behalf of targets and normalize targets among broader society towards how organizational members build relationships and connect with targeted groups to support those seeking to engage within broader communities, for instrumental, normative, or social reasons.

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1

Overview of Research on Different Roles of Organizational Members in the Management of Stigma

	Literature 1: Stigma Identity Management	Literature 2: Dirty Work	Literature 3: Stigma Reduction	Resulting Key Questions
The role of organizational members	A passive actor that individuals must navigate their stigmatized identities around.	An actor seeking to create a more positive and efficient work environment for stigmatized professions.	An actor advocating on behalf of stigmatized attributes (and organizations).	<i>How do organizational members' personal and professional roles shape how they relate to targets and their stigmatized attributes and activities?</i>
Interactional focus	Targets navigating the uncertainty of stigma with organizational members; Engaging in preferred stigma identity management strategies (e.g. passing, revealing, concealing, and advocating) during interactions with organizational members.	Organizational members actively managing stigma by selecting, socializing, and establishing practices that help targets deal with the negative experience of stigma.	Organizational members interacting with stigmatizing audiences to advocate for stigmatized attributes and activities.	<i>How do organizational members actively engage with the stigmatized to enable their stigma management?</i>
Outcomes	Targets forming relationships with those around them to integrate into settings to varying degrees.	Organizational contexts enable employees to positively engage with others in “dirty work” to accomplish organizational goals.	Social contexts with fewer social and economic sanctions and less negative labeling for targets.	<i>How do organizational members form relationships to integrate among the stigmatized? To what effect?</i>
Example literature	Clair, Beatty, & Maclean (2005) Lyons, Wessel, Ghumman, Ryan, & Kim (2014) Lyons, Pek, & Wessel (2017)	Ashforth & Kreiner (1999) Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss (2006) Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate (2007)	Helms & Patterson (2014) Hampel & Tracey (2017) Lashley & Pollock (2020)	<i>This study</i>

TABLE 2
An Overview of the Role of Scripts in Organizational Members' Navigation of Stigma

Types of internalized stigma-interactive scripts	Explanations of the type of scripts	Exemplar research
Professional scripts	Professional and organizational specific education, training, or mentorship experience, resulting in language and behavior for navigating organizational interactions with stigmatized group members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gordon, S., & Nelson, S. 2012. 1. Moving beyond the Virtue Script in Nursing: Creating a Knowledge-Based Identity for Nurses. In <i>The Complexities of Care</i> (pp. 13-29). Cornell University Press. • Stone-Romero, E. F., Stone, D. L., & Lukaszewski, K. (2006). The influence of disability on role-taking in organizations. <i>Handbook of workplace diversity</i>, 401-430. • Hansson, L., & Markström, U. 2014. The effectiveness of an anti-stigma intervention in a basic police officer training programme: a controlled study. <i>BMC psychiatry</i>, 14(1), 1-8. • Novak, D. R., & Harter, L. M. 2008. "Flipping the scripts" of poverty and panhandling: Organizing democracy by creating connections. <i>Journal of Applied Communication Research</i>, 36(4), 391-414. • Sandelowski, M., Trimble, F., Woodard, E. K., & Barroso, J. 2006. From synthesis to script: Transforming qualitative research findings for use in practice. <i>Qualitative Health Research</i>, 16(10), 1350-1370.
Without personal scripts	A lack of personal social experience, resulting in a lack	

	of language and behavior for navigating stigmatized attributes during interactions with stigmatized group members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crowe, A., & Murray, C. E. 2015. Stigma from professional helpers toward survivors of intimate partner violence. <i>Partner abuse</i>, 6(2), 157-179 • Fagan, J., & Geller, A. 2015. Following the script: Narratives of suspicion in Terry stops in street policing. <i>U. Chi. L. Rev.</i>, 82, 51. • Meisenbach, R. J. 2010. Stigma management communication: A theory and agenda for applied research on how individuals manage moments of stigmatized identity. <i>Journal of Applied Communication Research</i>, 38(3), 268-292. • Thompson, T. L., & Seibold, D. R. 1978. Stigma management in normal-stigmatized interactions: Test of the disclosure hypothesis and a model of stigma acceptance. <i>Human Communication Research</i>, 4(3), 231-242.
Personal scripts	Personal social experience, for example, as a family member or friend, resulting in language and behavior for navigating stigmatized attributes during interactions with stigmatized group members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrigan, P. W., Mittal, D., Reaves, C. M., Haynes, T. F., Han, X., Morris, S., & Sullivan, G. 2014. Mental health stigma and primary health care decisions. <i>Psychiatry research</i>, 218(1-2), 35-38. • Herek, G. M., & Capitanio, J. P. 1996. "Some of My Best Friends" Intergroup Contact, Concealable Stigma, and Heterosexuals' Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>, 22(4), 412-424. • Wahl, O. F., & Harman, C. R. 1989. Family views of stigma. <i>Schizophrenia Bulletin</i>, 15(1), 131-139.

<p>In-group scripts</p>	<p>Personal ‘lived’ experience as a member of a stigmatized group, providing intimacy and resulting in language and behavior for navigating stigmatized attributes during interactions with stigmatized group members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duvnjak, A., Stewart, V., Young, P., & Turvey, L. 2021. How does Lived Experience of Incarceration Impact Upon the Helping Process in Social Work Practice?: A Scoping Review. <i>The British Journal of Social Work</i>. • Wayland, S., Coker, S., & Maple, M. 2021. The human approach to supportive interventions: The lived experience of people who care for others who suicide attempt. <i>International journal of mental health nursing</i>, 30(3), 667-682. • Wyatt, T. R., Rockich-Winston, N., Taylor, T. R., & White, D. 2020. What does context have to do with anything? A study of professional identity formation in physician-trainees considered underrepresented in medicine. <i>Academic Medicine</i>, 95(10), 1587-1593.
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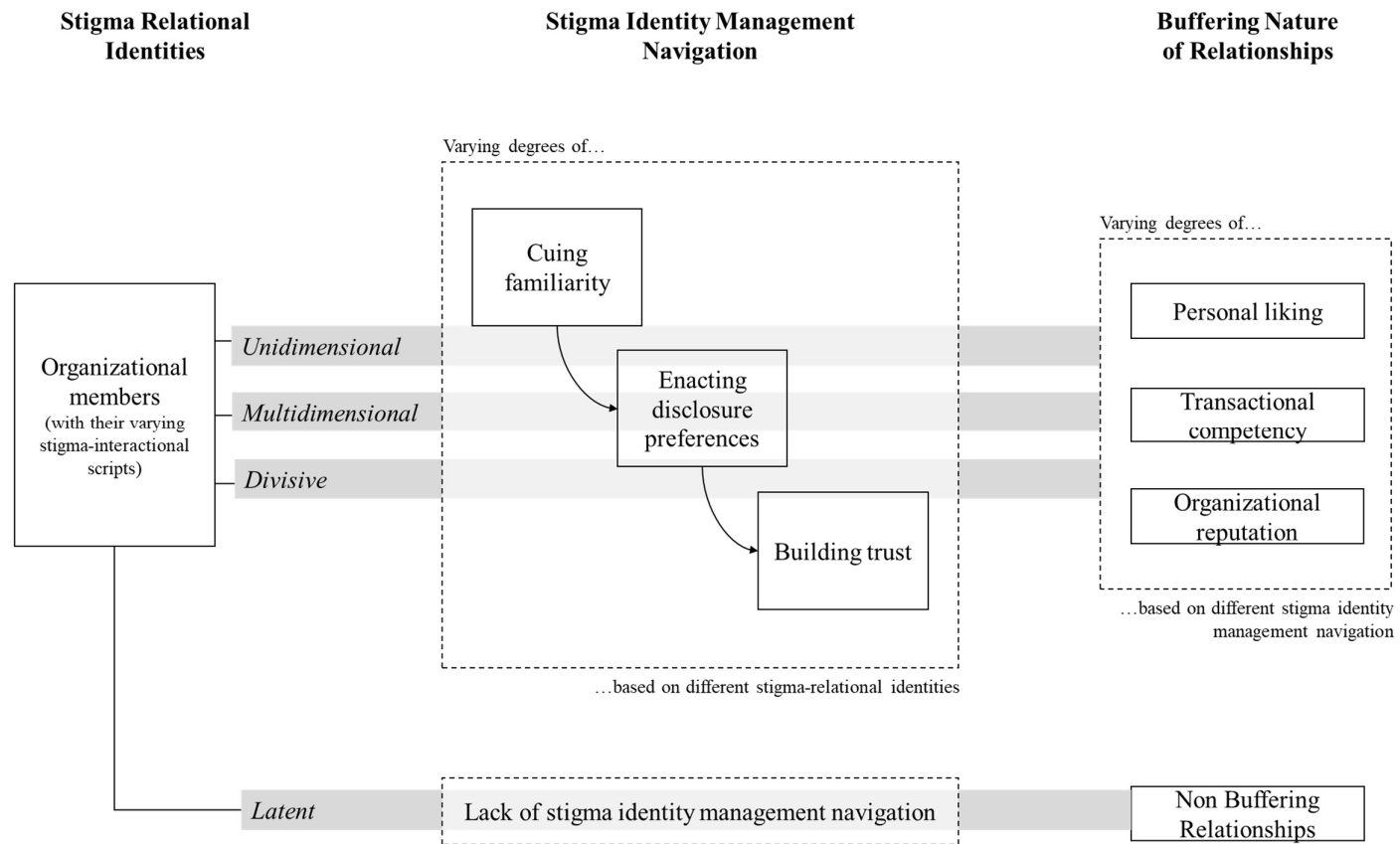
TABLE 3
Theorization of Six Stigma-Relational Identities of Organizational Members

<p style="text-align: center;">Professional scripts</p> <p><i>Professional and organizational specific education, training, or mentorship experience, resulting in language and behavior for navigating organizational interactions with stigmatized group members.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Actively-normal</u></p> <p>Greater access to stigma-interactive scripts for actively navigating transactional dimensions of interactions (e.g., around products, services, or contexts).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Actively-wise</u></p> <p>Greater access to stigma-interactive scripts for actively navigating transactional dimensions of interactions (e.g., around products, services, or contexts).</p> <p>Access to stigma-interactive scripts for navigating stigmatized attributes as an out-group member during social dimensions of interactions.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Actively-own</u></p> <p>Greater access to stigma-interactive scripts for actively navigating transactional dimensions of interactions (e.g., around products, services, or contexts).</p> <p>Access to to stigma-interactive scripts for navigating stigmatized attributes as an in-group member during social dimensions of interactions.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Limited professional scripts</p> <p><i>Limited professional and organizational specific education, training, or mentorship experience, resulting in limited language and behavior for navigating organizational interactions with stigmatized group members.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Passively-normal</u></p> <p>Relying upon personal and limited professional out-group scripts for addressing stigma during interactions.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Passively-wise</u></p> <p>Access to stigma-interactive scripts for navigating stigmatized attributes as an out-group member during social dimensions of interactions.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Passively-own</u></p> <p>Access to stigma-interactive scripts for navigating stigmatized attributes as an in-group member during social dimensions of interactions.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Without personal scripts</p> <p><i>A lack of personal social experience, resulting in a lack of language and behavior for navigating stigmatized attributes during interactions with stigmatized group members.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Personal scripts</p> <p><i>Personal social experience, for example, as a family member or friend, resulting in language and behavior for navigating stigmatized attributes during interactions with stigmatized group members.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">In-group scripts</p> <p><i>Personal 'lived' experience as a member of a stigmatized group, providing intimacy and resulting in language and behavior for navigating stigmatized attributes during interactions with stigmatized group members.</i></p>

TABLE 4
Overview of Differences in Organizational Members' Attempts to Build Relationships Among Stigmatized Targets

Stigma-relational identities	Stigma-interactive scripts	Stigma Identity Management Navigation			Buffering nature of relationships
		Cuing familiarity	Enacting disclosure preferences	Building trust	
Passively-normal	n/a	Stigma cuing	Limited	Diminished	n/a (organizational reputation loss)
Actively-normal	Professional	Cues familiarity with products, services, and transactional contexts	Around products, services, and contexts	Transaction-based	Transactional competency (organizational reputation maintenance)
Passively-wise	Personal	Cues familiarity with stigmatized attributes	Around attributes	Interpersonal-based	Personal liking (organizational reputation maintenance)
Actively-wise	Professional; personal	Cues familiarity with products, services, transactional contexts as well as attributes	Around products, services, contexts, and attributes	Interpersonal-based, transaction-based	Transactional competency; personal liking; organizational reputation building
Passively-own	Personal; in-group	Cues familiarity with products, services, transactional contexts as well as attributes	Around products, services, contexts, and attributes	Intimacy-, interpersonal-, transaction-based	Transactional competency; personal liking; organizational reputation building
Actively-own	In-group; personal; professional	Cues familiarity with products, services, transactional contexts as well as attributes	Around products, services, contexts, and attributes	Intimacy-, interpersonal-, transaction-based (among supporters)	Transactional competency; personal liking; organizational reputation building (among supporters)

FIGURE 1
A Model of Relational Stigma Management



Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Although a lot of advancement has been made on the study of stigma – and more broadly, on negative social evaluations – in organizational and management scholarship over the last decade, researchers have increasingly criticized the literature for not having paid enough attention to the interactions of and relationships between audiences and targets in the study of stigma. Without developing a more relational view of the process of stigmatization and its management, we might, however, overlook important nuances of why or why not certain decisions to stigmatize and sanction targets are taken, or how and why targets of stigma may respond in the specific ways they do. In response to this, the present dissertation develops more nuanced insights into a relational view of stigma in and around organizations.

Specifically, drawing on a longitudinal, inductive study of Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs) in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017 in the UK, Chapter 2 shows how different audiences evaluate the focal event in diverse ways and, due to varying historical relationships, thus respond differently towards targets through sanctions. It goes on to show how targets then respond in dissimilar manners to those audiences. As such, this chapter provides insights into how prior relationships between audiences and targets may shape their individual actions towards one another.

Chapter 3 then examines how audiences try to help stigmatized targets back into employment and focuses on the central role that compassion plays in this process. The results of this study show how even with the best of intentions of audiences their interactions with and support of targets and the building of relationships between both groups can be far from straightforward and may require ongoing efforts to maintain such support.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I then develop insights into how organizations, through their members, can form relationships with stigmatized groups. Although stigmatized groups can be central stakeholders that organizations want to connect to and interact with, for normative,

instrumental, or social reasons, prior research has shown that this can be notoriously difficult to accomplish. As such, this paper departs from an existing focus in organizational scholarship on the strategies through which organizations attempt to publicly destigmatize and garner acceptance for targeted groups and their attributes in broader society and, to the contrary, theorizes how they can form positive relationships with stigmatized groups.

As a result of these studies, I suggest that organizational and management scholars interested in the topic of negative social evaluations should focus on studying the relational dynamics between audiences and targets in greater detail and examine what impact such relational aspects have on audiences' and targets' behavior towards one another.

One fruitful avenue for future research in this context would be to study more extensively how and why different groups respond to similar targets with very diverging social evaluations – some may celebrate while others may stigmatize them. Investigating the antecedents of these evaluations would add more complexity to our understanding of how (negative) social evaluations emerge in practice and would potentially also enable us to find more suitable remedies for them. In particular, it may be fruitful to explore how within a specific audience differing opinions about a particular target emerge and how different sub-audiences negotiate among themselves whether or not to apply specific (negative) labels to targets and whether or not to sanction them. Examining such sub-audience interactions and the consequences for targets seem intriguing and underexplored (Helms, Patterson, & Hudson, 2019).

Another pathway for scholars interested in examining the relational dynamics between audiences and targets would be to explore how different audiences emerge in the first place and how they then build relationships with targets. As mentioned in Chapter 4, scholarship to date on stigma has often assumed that actors take on different roles (Goffman, 1963) in how they relate to targets – i.e., as the own, wise, and normal. While in that chapter I developed insights into how different kinds of wise, own, or normal audiences interact with targets, we

still lack insights into why and how audiences become wise or normal in the first place. As such, it would be exciting to enlarge our understanding around the drivers of individuals' initial perceptions of and relationships to targeted groups. What makes an individual become either a normal or a wise member of society? What contextual factors are central to this? In addition, research has often approached the conceptualization of wise, own, and normal audiences by implicitly assuming that one 'belongs' to one of the groups – for example, is either wise or is not – and has paid little attention to the potential dynamics of moving between these three groups and what may trigger such shifts. As such, one's membership as wise, for example, has largely been considered as somewhat static. While recent scholars have called for more insights into how different groups might emerge and change (Roulet 2020; Conti, Morrison, & Pantaleo, 2013), whether, how, and why the wise may shift to normal or the normal may become wise is something that is underexplored. More insights into this, may even enable us to understand how actors can influence audiences' attitudes towards targets of stigma and engage in 'work' to persuade and convert them from an actively stigmatizing audience member to one that wants to help and support targets.

Finally, I suggest that we still require more theorizing on how targets experience their interactions with and relationships to audiences that want to help them. Often, studies have examined the positive consequences of audiences that provide support. Throughout my research, however, it became increasingly clear to me that targets and audiences do not always have the same perceptions of what accounts for *actual* help. As such, another broad area of research is to study more explicitly the individual-level practical and emotional experiences of targets who are in the process of receiving help from others and how this enables or hinders them in achieving their own personal goals. In so doing, scholars could advance insights into what efforts by well-intending organizations are accepted and really work for targets, and which ones may not and why.

Beyond academic contributions and future research opportunities, studying the topics of negative social evaluations, stigma, and relationships between audiences and targets in this dissertation has also led to a range of insights that have practical implications.

One is that for many organizations, rather than using their often limited resources to fight stigmatization (or other negative social evaluations) by trying to change audiences' minds through advocacy or campaigning, it might be worthwhile to consider whether such public response is necessary and helpful. As shown in Chapter 2, it may be more strategic and beneficial for organizations and their stakeholders to consider prioritizing fighting the sanctions (that often come along with stigmatization) based on their relationships with one another. This is because audiences' negative perceptions, often anchored in moral convictions, are very difficult to change in the short term. As such, attending to the various sanctions targets of stigma experiences from audiences may help targets continue to do their important and valuable work in society, even in the face of ongoing adversity.

A second practical implication of this dissertation, somewhat related to the above, is that for audiences wanting to provide support to stigmatized groups in society, this does not always (need to) entail public campaigning on their behalf or working to change society's mind. Because stigma leads to very direct and tangible negative consequences for targets, I suggest that it might be even more important, at least in the short term, to build ties and relationships with stigmatized individuals through which one can enable them to further reduce their own, personal experiences of stigma in their daily lives. For example, this could happen through the provision of resources, introductions to contacts and networks that are supportive, or functioning as a listener and advocate. In other words, rather than trying to alter others' evaluations of targets, it may be helpful for audiences to support and interact with targets much more directly in order to enable them to reduce their experiences of stigma. Chapter 4 hints at these dynamics.

A third and final practical implication that emerges from this dissertation is that audiences that want to help and support stigmatized targets may need to learn and invest efforts into being perceived as genuinely helpful and caring by targets. As shown in Chapter 3, this can be because targets who have historically been stigmatized may fear interactions and the building of relationships with organizations – even if they have been told that such organizations are there to help them. As a result, I suggest that organizations that are in the business of helping stigmatized groups (or more generally those experiencing substantial marginalization) may need to think in more detail about not only the specific services they provide to such groups but also how they can demonstrate and communicate how individuals will be treated during the service provision. Chapter 3 provides some insight into these dynamics and further provides a sense that organizations wanting to help stigmatized groups need to think about *how much* help is going to be beneficial. Helping individuals too little may not enable them to overcome the adversity they are facing; helping too much may make them dependent and reliant on those providing help. As such, practically speaking, organizations need to carefully consider the breadth and depth of help they choose to extend.

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