

Church-Agency Relationships in the Black Community

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This article examines referral exchange relationships between black churches and local community health agencies by examining whether organizational and clergy characteristics influence clergy in black churches to refer parishioners to, and receive referrals from, community mental health agencies. We are interested in identifying the typical characteristics of churches and their clergy that tend to participate in these exchanges. The most significant indicators in predicting the probability of church referrals are the extent of interorganizational links and the size of a church. The data do not, however, suggest a reflective relationship; organizational factors do not significantly predict whether a church receives client referrals from community agencies. We speculate that the lack of reciprocity in this pattern may be caused by a conflict in the levels of rationality within community agencies.

This article uses data from a survey of the entire population of black churches in one defined community to characterize the relationships between social services, including mental health services, and the black community through local churches. Specifically, we explore the role of the local black church in facilitating the delivery of psychological and mental health services to the community via referrals to nonchurch agencies, and, in turn, receiving client referrals from community agencies for pastoral care and social support. Given the important roles of leadership and support that the church plays within the black community, the need for systematic research into the patterns of interaction between the black church, community agencies, and the community at

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large is acute. We are interested in understanding the characteristics of churches that tend to refer clients to external community agencies and that, in turn, tend to receive referrals for counseling from these agencies. Learning to recognize the characteristics of successful church-agency relationships may help to provide models by which other community agencies and nonprofit associations can construct productive relationships with the black community through local church associations. The embeddedness of the local black church within community networks, and its general position of trust and leadership among local citizens, represents an important reservoir of experience and local knowledge. Social service agencies and nonprofit groups seeking to serve these communities have opportunities to facilitate service delivery by understanding the position of the local church and by learning how to structure useful exchanges through these networks.

History of the Black Church

To understand the role of the black church and its clergy in the local community, it is important to understand the historical antecedents that have shaped the church's role in relation to the larger African-American community. The black church, that is to say, those denominations and congregations that emerge from a traditionally African-American history and that still have a predominantly black membership, occupies a distinct traditional niche among American religious institutions.

In the post-Civil War period, the church emerged as a visible center of the black community. More than a place of worship, these churches provided an open place for the community to come together for mutual aid and support. The black church also became a natural training ground for social leadership. The selection of clergy often was based on personal talents that naturally qualified one for a leadership role—the ability to speak in public, a facility with the Bible, charismatic appeal, and a commitment to the community. Religious leaders were also viewed with less overt hostility by the white community and were allowed a greater latitude in their activities than were black political and economic leaders. It is not coincidental that a number of prominent politicians in the black community have come from church backgrounds, nor is it coincidental that much of the successful collective action in the black community has been organized through church networks. The black church's social location at the center of the community, its cultivation of natural leaders, the ready forum it provides for public speech, and its historical role as a foundation of the African-American cultural identity makes the black church a multifunctional institution within the black community (Frazier, 1964; Baer and Singer, 1992).

Evidence suggests that this historical tradition of leadership continues today. In a national survey of black churches, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) reported that 92 percent of the clergy they interviewed advocated church

involvement in social and political issues and indicated that they felt it was appropriate for the clergy to express opinions on these issues. Another recent study of 634 black churches in the northeast and north central United States found similar patterns of clergy approval of political and social involvement in an overwhelming majority of black churches. These patterns hold across denominational and theological differences (Caldwell and Chatters, 1994). In addition, these churches provided a broad range of services, including youth programs, sex education, elderly programs, education, and job counseling (Levin, 1984; Williams and Williams, 1984; McAdoo and Crawford, 1990; Chaves and Higgins, 1992; Caldwell and Chatters, 1994). Although there has been a rise in the number of competing social service organizations within the black community, observations suggest that the church is still a place where many African-Americans go for help in solving personal, emotional, and family problems. Mukenge (1983) has written that although there has been a functional attrition of the black urban church, it still plays an active role in the black community, particularly with regard to maintaining mental health and psychological stability.

The broader study on which this article is based (Williams, Griffith, and Young, 1993) finds strong evidence to support the role of the clergy as a provider of psychological, mental health, and social service support in New Haven, Connecticut. Clergy in these churches respond to a variety of needs that go beyond their roles as spiritual advisers. This study found that the majority of clergy spend a considerable amount of time counseling parishioners on issues ranging from sexual abuse to unemployment. In fact, the three most common problems clergy face are marital and family problems, drug- and alcohol-related problems, and financial problems related to poverty.

In response to the urgent needs in their community, the black churches that were surveyed reported a remarkable range of programs and services offered within the local church. These programs included education, substance abuse, child abuse, parenting, domestic violence, job training/unemployment, adoption/foster care, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, youth programs, elderly programs, long-term illnesses, AIDS, food and clothing distribution, counseling, spiritual outreach, day care, recreation, social and political activism, finances, and various volunteer programs. What is even more remarkable about these churches is that almost all of them reported that their programs are financed entirely through church funds with no external forms of support. Yet these churches cannot address all community needs alone; there are a number of community agencies that also provide services to the black community in New Haven.

This article looks at the organizational and clergy characteristics of black churches that are likely to encourage clergy to make referrals to professionals in community agencies outside the church. We also look at how organizational and clergy characteristics influence the likelihood that clergy will receive referrals from community agencies. We expect that institutional ties will make

a substantial difference in facilitating referral exchanges. That is, the more formal the ties a clergy person has with nonchurch agencies, the more likely he or she will be to develop the networks of information exchange that may foster referrals. The potential for such referral exchanges and a more open sharing of resources and information appears to be rich. Our study shows that, contrary to the conventional wisdom that religious leaders eschew professional models of mental health counseling in favor of church-based spiritual care, 47 percent of the surveyed clergy have referred parishioners to a community agency for mental health problems, and almost 44 percent of the clergy interviewed have had a referral made to them and/or their church programs by community professionals.

Theory and Hypotheses

This article approaches issues of church-agency relationships from an *open systems organizational perspective* (Scott, 1981). An open systems perspective views the focal organization (in this case, the local church) as a system of relationships whose boundaries are penetrated by its external environment. The external environment is made up of suppliers, consumers, regulators, and social conditions that act on the resources and activities of the organization (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Thus, organizational behavior is viewed as responsive to, and constituted by, conditions in its external environment.

The greater the number of organizational relationships with the environment, the more likely it is that organizational structures and practices will come to resemble the structures, norms, and practices of the most central relationships with the environment. Centrality, in this case, is generally interpreted as those relationships that carry the heaviest exchanges of resources, whether these are informational, financial, or political. The homogenizing effect of these exchange processes has been labeled *institutional isomorphism* (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Because most organizational leaders influence and implement organizational decisions, it follows that the greater the sensitivity of organizational leaders to their environments, the more likely it is that these leaders will become the mechanisms by which isomorphic changes proceed.

Potential isomorphic processes in this study are suggested by the patterns of referral exchange between community agencies and community churches. It is assumed that the higher the number of referrals, the greater the cooperation and mutual normative influence among the organizations. We look at the flow of referrals in two directions. Our first analytic question is, "What characteristics of the church, as an organization, and the clergy, as individual leaders, are likely to predict whether the church *refers* parishioners to community agencies for help?" The flow of referrals from the church to community agencies is indicated by the variable REFER.¹ When used as a dependent variable, it is dichotomous, coded "1" if the clergy has ever referred parishioners to a community agency for help and "0" if the clergy has never done so. The

second question is, "What characteristics of the church, as an organization, and the clergy, as individual leaders, are likely to predict whether they may receive referrals of clients from community agencies?" This is the flow of referrals of clients from health professionals and community agencies to the church for help and is indicated by the variable RECEIVE.² As a dependent variable, it also is dichotomous, coded "1" if the clergy has ever received such referrals and "0" if the clergy has never received an outside referral.

The open systems perspective focuses attention on the external relationships cultivated by churches and their leaders. We predict that involvement of the church and clergy in extrainstitutional relationships will increase the likelihood of referrals between community agencies and churches by facilitating the exchange of information about the resources each can provide. Regular involvement with other organizations inevitably increases an organization's exposure to wider networks of information. These networks carry information about resources and services available from other organizations in the community and are more likely to be passed on by clergy to parishioners. Also, agency professionals are more likely to become aware of the resources offered by particular churches and are, thus, more likely to refer clients to these programs and services.

Greater involvement with other organizations is likely to expose clergy to other professionals with similar interests. Clergy participating in these networks may incidentally exchange information and advice with mental health professionals from other orientations (for example, social work or psychology) who do similar work. This exposure is likely to lead to a familiarity with alternative practices and philosophies used to address similar problems. Familiarity may, in turn, increase the likelihood that increased trust will produce referral exchanges between clergy and other professionals. We measure the involvement of the church with other community organizations with the variable ORGTIES, a count of the external groups with which the church actively cooperates in dealing with community problems. We expect that the number of organizational ties will be positively associated with patterns of referral both to and from the church and community agencies.

In addition to interorganizational exchanges, certain organizational characteristics are viewed as having an effect on the likelihood of churches and agencies developing institutional exchange patterns. Organizational size, indicated by the variable OSIZE, is measured as the average attendance at the main weekly worship service. Size is interpreted as a broad measure of the resources to which a church has access, because members are generally the primary source of organizational financial support, voluntary labor, expertise, and experience. Members support the life of the church and its outreach into the community. Several studies of black and nonblack churches have found the size of the congregation to be a significant determinant of the level of social service delivery (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Caldwell and Chatters, 1994). Large

churches are more likely to have formally trained clergy, larger staffs to coordinate programs, a larger pool of volunteers to help run programs, larger facilities to hold meetings, and more financial resources to draw on (Jones, 1982; Eng, Hatch, and Callan, 1985; Carson, 1990; Eng and Hatch, 1991). Churches with a greater number of members are also likely to have larger networks within the community because every member is a potential connection to other community organizations.

Organizational age is another characteristic that is expected to affect the development of institutional patterns of exchange. The variable ORGAGE indicates the number of years that a church has occupied its present location. For our concerns, a church's years in its present location is a more relevant measure than overall organizational age; some survey respondents defined their church's age in terms of its traditional history, but we are primarily interested in the length of time the church has been a presence in its local community. The longer a church has been a part of a local community, the more embedded it is likely to be within local networks of information, resources, and exchange, and, thus, the greater its likelihood of being solicited by community agencies as a distribution point for services or information. In addition, the longer a church is in one location, the more likely it is to be familiar with agency resources and practices.

In addition to organizational characteristics, a number of personal characteristics of clergy leaders are likely to be important. As discussed earlier, organizational leaders are the primary mechanisms through which environments influence organizational behaviors. Individual characteristics, therefore, are expected to predispose a clergy's attitude toward nonchurch types of social service delivery.

A clergy person's age, measured as the variable CAGE, can influence the pattern of referral exchange in a number of ways. Demographics in the black church suggest that younger clergy are more likely to be college educated and trained in seminaries than their older colleagues (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Karabel and Halsey (1977) suggest that one of the chief effects of a formal education is socialization toward bureaucratic control systems. By extension, this statement implies that younger clergy are more comfortable with bureaucratic and professional forms of service delivery and are, thus, more likely to refer their parishioners to these sources for help. Given this affinity, community agencies are more likely to feel more comfortable developing professional exchanges with such clergy. Older clergy are expected to be more likely to perceive their leadership authority as being based on personal charisma and are expected to have less confidence in bureaucratic forms of service delivery. They are expected to have cultivated longer personal relationships with their parishioners and be less likely to refer parishioners' problems to outside agencies. Therefore, we expect older clergy to be more resistant to referring parishioners to outside organizations for help.

On the other hand, older clergy may benefit from having long and deeply embedded relationships in the community and, therefore, may be well

socialized to the approaches used by nonreligious organizations in the community. In these situations, older clergy may be more aware of and positively disposed toward the work of these organizations and, thus, may be more likely to refer parishioners in appropriate situations. This latter situation is more directly measured by the number of years a pastor has been employed in a congregation, as opposed to the pastor's age. TENURE is the pastor's length of time with her or his present congregation.

To measure education, we categorize the years of formal education into three levels, forming the variable EDUC: the first category is "high school or less," the second category is "between one and four years of college," and the third category is "beyond four years of college." We found this tripartite categorization to be most meaningful given the overall distribution of education in our sample of clergy.

A number of studies have shown that education is positively correlated with the level of political activism among clergy. In studies more directly related to social service issues, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) found higher levels of education to be related to awareness of social problems, cooperation with other community organizations, and political opinions. Similarly, Caldwell and Chatters (1994) found that the higher the level of education, the more likely a clergy was to be involved in community outreach programs. In part, this association may be less related to knowledge per se than to socialization to the strategies by which larger social institutions operate, and to the benefits that the state can offer those who learn the rules of the "system" (Baer and Singer, 1992). We expect clergy with higher educations to be more active both in viewing the community agencies as a source of positive resources and learning the system by which these resources can be extracted from the community agencies. In turn, social service professionals may come to view these clergy as leaders in the community and may increasingly use them as community informants.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected between September 1991 and March 1993 from the clergy of black churches in the metropolitan New Haven area (New Haven, Hamden, North Haven, West Haven). Interviews probed the relationships among African-American clergy and community agencies, particularly those providing mental health services. The clergy of all churches in which the majority of members were black were eligible for participation in this study. Because no comprehensive list of all these churches existed prior to the study, a master list was developed from telephone directories, the New Haven clergy association, local funeral directors, informants in the community, and contacts made during the course of investigation. The eventual master list contained 121 congregations. After meeting with the New Haven clergy association and securing its approval, all clergy were contacted by mail with

information about the study and a request for their participation. Interviewers then attempted to make contact by phone, and, if unsuccessful, attempted to catch the pastor after a regularly scheduled church service.

Despite these efforts, we were unable to contact four churches, and interviews were not conducted with an additional nineteen churches. Of these nineteen, four clergy explicitly refused to cooperate. Interviews were completed with ninety-eight clergy, 81 percent of the total. This response rate compares favorably with earlier studies of the black church. In addition, our efforts to compile a master list included focusing on contacting the smaller, poorer, female-headed churches that are typically excluded from sampling frames that rely solely on telephone directories. Only seventy-two of the ninety-eight churches we interviewed were listed in the New Haven telephone directory. Thus, we believe that this study is particularly comprehensive in providing a picture of the black church community in New Haven. Interviews were conducted in person, and ranged from forty-five minutes to six hours with a median of ninety minutes.

Analysis

A series of statistical models incorporating the variables specified above were analyzed using logistic regression techniques on the two dependent variables REFER and RECEIVE. Logistic regression is appropriate when the dependent variable can have only two possible outcomes. It directly estimates the probability of an event occurring using maximum likelihood methods of estimation.

The statistical models were first built with the primary variable of interest, organizational ties (ORGTTIES). Control variables measuring organizational characteristics and individual clergy characteristics were then added. Comparisons of the log-likelihood statistic determined the relative goodness-of-fit among the models.

The first series of models examines the effects of the independent variables on the probability that a clergy leader will refer a parishioner to a community service agency (REFER). The probability coefficient is interpreted as the change in the log odds associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable. Table 1 shows the results for this series of models.

Model 1 establishes a baseline model in which the only independent variable included is ORGTIES, the number of organizations the church cooperates with in addressing community problems. As expected, the number of organizational ties in the community has a positive effect on the number of referrals. We interpret this coefficient to mean that for every additional organization the church cooperates with, the log odds of the clergy referring a parishioner to a community agency are increased by .40. To obtain the simple probability, we exponentiate this coefficient; thus, for every additional organizational tie, the probability of the clergy referring a parishioner increases approximately 149 percent. This suggests that institu-

**Table 1. Logistic Regression Coefficients (and Standard Errors)
Predicting the Probability of Clergy Referring Parishioners
to Community Agencies**

	Model					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
ORGTTIES	.402 ^b (.161)	.344 ^a (.171)	.348 ^a (.171)	.372 ^a (.175)	.372 ^a (.176)	.331 (.179)
ORGSIZE		.007 ^a (.003)	.007 ^a (.003)	.006 ^a (.003)	.006 ^a (.003)	.007 ^a (.003)
ORGAGE			.005 (.014)	.006 (.015)	.007 (.015)	.004 (.015)
CAGE			-.022 (.019)	-.021 (.023)	-.021 (.023)	-.018 (.024)
TENURE					-.001 (.030)	.004 (.030)
EDUC (1)						-.690 (.701)
EDUC (2)						.400 (.744)
EDUC (3)						
Constant	-.702 ^a (.303)	-1.45 ^c (.427)	-1.51 ^b (.458)	-.282 (1.121)	-.299 (1.206)	-.351 (1.329)
Log-likelihood	112.25 ^b	102.25 ^c	102.09	100.68	100.69	97.01

Note: ORGTIES = number of ties to other organizations, ORGSIZE = size of congregation, ORGAGE = age of congregation in present building, CAGE = age of clergy/pastor who heads church, TENURE = pastor's length of tenure, EDUC (1) = clergy have high school education or less, EDUC (2) = clergy have one to four years of college, EDUC (3) = clergy have more than four years of college.

^a $p < .05$.

^b $p < .01$.

^c $p < .001$.

tional networks within the community effectively carry additional information about community agencies to church leaders and possibly facilitate the building of trust between these community institutions. The log-likelihood statistic is significant at the .01 level, indicating that this model represents a significant improvement of fit over the model with only the constant added.

In the subsequent models, we added the organizational and clergy characteristic variables one at a time to the baseline model to see whether they would significantly and substantively improve the model. Although organizational size is statistically significant, the substantive effects are negligible (.007). In fact, the addition of OSIZE slightly reduces the size of the coefficient of ORGTIES, although it remains significant. All other variables had little effect, statistically or substantively, on the fit of the

baseline model. However, when all the variables are included, the coefficient of ORGTIES is reduced in size and not statistically significant,³ although OSIZE is still significant. We can conclude that the model with the organizational ties and organizational size variables provides the most parsimonious fit to the data.

Table 2 shows the reciprocity of the relationship between local churches and community mental health agencies, the reception of referrals to the church from community agencies (RECEIVE). We are interested in discovering whether the pattern that has been observed to affect the probability that clergy will make referrals to these agencies also influences whether agencies will, in turn, refer their clients to local churches for aid.

Model 1 of Table 2 is the baseline model, the effect of organizational ties. We predicted that the number of ties a church has with other local organizations will increase the visibility and chances for personal and professional contacts between agency professionals and church leaders. We expect that these contacts will, in turn, facilitate the receipt of client referrals by the local churches. Although the baseline model indicates that organizational networks have a small positive effect on the probability of such referrals, the effect is not

**Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients (and Standard Errors)
Predicting the Probability of Clergy Referring Parishioners
to Community Agencies**

	Model					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
ORTGIES	.190 (.135)	.196 (.139)	.194 (.140)	.201 (.140)	.167 (.144)	.155 (.151)
OSIZE		-.3E-03 (.001)	-.6E-03 (.002)	-.E-03 (.002)	-.E-03 (.002)	-.001 (.002)
OAGE			.005 (.011)	.005 (.011)	.E-03 (.011)	.3E-03 (.011)
CAGE				-.007 (.017)	-.036 (.022)	-.034 (.023)
TENURE					-.063 (.028)	.061 (.028)
EDUC (1)						-.171 (.651)
EDUC (2)						.473 (.691)
EDUC (3)						
Constant	-.565 (.289)	-.538 (.324)	-.598 (.350)	-.185 (.988)	-.688 (1.107)	-.884 (1.150)
Log-likelihood	116.60	116.56	116.32	116.13	110.46	109.93

Note: See Note to Table 1 for definitions

statistically significant. The pattern of referral exchange does not appear to be reciprocal. We again added each of the organizational and clergy variables one at a time to the baseline model. Interestingly, there are no significant statistical or substantive effects when the organizational variables are included.

Among the clergy variables added to the model, only job tenure—the number of years a pastor has held his or her present position—appears to have a substantive and significant effect. There is a small positive effect as predicted, with greater seniority predicting a greater probability that the clergy will receive a client referral from a community agency. This effect is significant at the .05 level. It suggests that unlike church referrals to community agencies, which are affected by institutional characteristics, agency referrals to churches tend to be affected by individual characteristics—the most significant of which appears to be the years of experience a church leader has in the community.

Discussion and Conclusion

The discontinuity in patterns of referral exchanges is striking. Church referrals are clearly influenced by the network of interorganizational ties in which a church participates. This pattern is predicted by open systems perspectives that view organizations as being penetrated by the key resources and actors in their institutional environments. This penetration suggests that internal organizational behaviors will, in part, be structured by the organizational procedures and expectations of the key actors in the environment, as well as internal organizational cultures and practices. The strong effect of organizational ties in the first series of models strongly supports this claim. Contrary to impressions that black churches have organizational cultures that are exclusive, insulated, or closed off from their broader environments, our findings show that, with regard to mental health resources, black churches can be strongly influenced by their participation in interorganizational community networks. The models also suggest that organizational size makes a small, albeit significant, contribution to the probability that churches will make referrals. Interestingly, organizational ties appear to carry more weight than individual clergy characteristics, such as age, education, or job tenure, although the direction of these effects is predicted by theory.

The strength of organizational effects suggests that the structural position of the church vis-à-vis its institutional environment can be a more powerful predictor than the individual traits of the clergy in anticipating whether productive and successful church-agency relationships can be established. One means by which institutional ties may exert influence is the role definition of the clergy within the local church.

Conceivably, if a church is involved with other community organizations, this involvement will have some influence on the formal role and activities of the clergy. Clergy in such churches are more likely to spend time in administrative functions, such as attending meetings, coordinating efforts with other

groups, acting as spokespersons in the community, and surveying the needs of their congregations. They may have less time to focus on pastoral care and, therefore, may be more likely to refer mental health problems to other agencies. They are also more likely to feel comfortable making referrals to agencies that they have cooperated with in some capacity. In addition, clergy in highly connected churches are more likely to become familiar with the methods and philosophies of professionals in nonchurch agencies because of relationships built from interaction in their institutional roles.

What these models suggest, for practical purposes, is that an effective strategy for facilitating delivery of mental health services to the black community is to use the network of organizations and groups that are working together to find solutions to problems in the community. These relationships appear to be important for building professional trust and establishing working relationships with the black clergy. Working on cooperative projects may cause clergy to invest in broader conceptualizations of community problems and be more open to a wider set of solutions, including those not based within the church.

What is interesting in this pattern is that agencies do not clearly respond in a similar fashion. That is, the churches that receive referrals from agencies are not necessarily those that participate within organizational networks, nor are they necessarily the largest or most established churches in the community. In addition, churches that receive referrals do not necessarily have the youngest or most well-educated clergy. The only statistically significant predictor of whether a church will receive a client referral from a community agency appears to be the experience of the clergy in the community, specifically a pastor's tenure or seniority in his or her present job.

This pattern is a striking anomaly. We expect community agencies to be highly institutionalized—that is, strongly organized in bureaucratic procedure, established lines of communication, and organizational behavior subject to external regulation. All of these factors suggest that communication with the wider community will tend to take place within existing institutional channels. Specifically, we expect agencies to make referrals to churches with a large number of institutional links because of probable existing relationships and the higher visibility that these churches likely have in the community.

The results reported in Table 2, however, do not support this hypothesis. In fact, none of the organizational variables affect this probability. Of the individual characteristics, only job tenure influences the probability of receiving a referral. How can we interpret this finding?

Tenure, or seniority, may be a proxy for the respect and influence a clergy-person has within the community. It may also indicate a certain degree of experience with community problems, increasing the probability that agency personnel will view the pastor as a valuable resource. Alternatively, it may simply reflect the fact that clergy who have been on the job longer are more likely to have received a referral at some point in time.

There may also be a spurious connection between clergy seniority and the number or kinds of programs the church offers. Health professionals and agencies may actually be referring clients to a church's homeless shelter or food distribution program rather than to the pastor for counseling. Because the questionnaire does not probe the specific causes behind referrals received, testing this speculation with the available data is difficult. However, exploring this issue in informal conversations with clergy suggests that this speculation may sometimes be the case. Some clergy report that they have received client referrals from agencies to provide services or aid that the social service agency is not legally or functionally equipped to handle. For example, they might receive a request to help provide a client with emergency money to pay the client's heating bill, or to provide a companion or visitation for an elderly shut-in, or to direct a particular youth into an after-school program.

A possible explanation exists that is compatible with the last observation as well as consistent with organizational theory about bureaucratic agencies. It may be that the consultants making the referrals are not the same persons working with church leaders on cooperative efforts within the community. Scott (1983, 1984) has observed that managerial and professional systems of authority and control often co-exist on different levels within the health care sector. The evolution of different systems of control and authority within the same organization is consistent with the view that organizations create administrative layers to buffer their technical core (the productive elements of the organization) and to manage the uncertainty of external environments (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The combination of results here suggests that there may be a loose coupling between the components of agency organizations that deal with black church leaders and the caseworkers who refer clients to the churches. A pattern of conflicting rationality within social service agencies would fit this pattern of results. Such bounded rationality is less likely to be a problem in the local churches where the clergy are both pastoral counselors and administrators.

In practical terms, this suggests that clergy and mental health caseworkers are responding to two different environments in the mental health field. In making referrals to mental health agencies, clergy are acting on knowledge, trust, and perceived legitimacy gained through working relationships with agency managers and administrators, who may have little contact with the clients the agency serves. On the other hand, caseworkers who refer clients to clergy may be doing so based on informal, personal networks of contact and information, responding to their knowledge of experienced individuals and leaders within the community, irrespective of those individuals' institutional affiliations. These caseworkers know which churches are providing certain programs and which churches might have the resources to support their clients' special needs. Such knowledge is gained through personal contacts and informal exchanges.

Given that this unbalanced pattern may eventually lead to an incongruent relationship with regard to expectations and delivery, a strategy that may improve this relationship for both clergy and agencies is to encourage increased direct

contact between caseworkers and clergy. In this way, caseworkers will be more aware of community and church programs' broader availability to their clients, and clergy will be more directly aware of parishioners in particular need of pastoral and congregational support, which the church is more suited to offer.

The surprising results of this study have provided insights into the productive structuring of church-agency relationships in the black community. The results have features that may also be more broadly applicable. First, we find that the probability that churches will facilitate the delivery of social services to the community is significantly linked to institutional or structural factors. Most notably, the number of organizational links a church maintains with other community groups and the size of the church have significant positive effects on this probability, independently of individual clergy characteristics. Second, the combined pattern of referrals made and received by clergy suggests that an incongruence exists between the criteria used by caseworkers to refer clients to churches and the criteria used by churches to refer their parishioners to agencies. We speculate that this incongruence may be a reflection of a loose coupling between the administrative and delivery elements of agency organizations. Specifically, agency managers working with church leaders to coordinate programs through institutional networks in the community are distinct from caseworkers working to support their clients through personal and reputational networks in the community. We suggest that more direct contact between clergy counselors and caseworkers will avoid potential misdirections regarding expectations and delivery of social services. This communication will serve clients and parishioners more directly by identifying clients who will benefit from additional pastoral and congregational support in a church context and by identifying parishioners who will gain additional services and support from local agencies.

Notes

1. The question was worded: "How often do you refer a parishioner or client elsewhere for help with problems related to mental health? More than once a week? ($f = 1$), three to four times a month? ($f = 1$), one to two times a month? ($f = 4$), once every two to six months? ($f = 14$), once every seven to twelve months? ($f = 7$), less than once a year? ($f = 22$), or never? ($f = 51$). " (f = frequency of response given.)
2. The question was worded: "Have any health professionals or agencies ever referred troubled individuals to you?"
3. ORCTIES remains significant under a one-tailed test. It is plausible to interpret this significance level as relevant because we predicted the relationship to be in a positive direction.

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