

## Representative Bureaucracy in a Performance Contracting Environment\*

Bowen McBeath

Portland State University

William Meezan

Ohio State University

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In performance-based human service environments, increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of street-level bureaucrats may be viewed as a potential means for improving service effectiveness for historically-disadvantaged client populations. Representative bureaucracy theory suggests that there is instrumental value in having representative administrative agencies. The theory proposes that public managers should ensure that the proportion of front-line bureaucrats with certain group memberships within an agency mirrors the proportion of those individuals in the client population (passive representation), under the premise that bureaucrats with specific demographic characteristics will advance the interests and well-being of individuals from these groups more readily than other bureaucrats (active representation) (Meier & Bohte, 2001; Sowa & Selden, 2003). Representative bureaucracy may thus be understood to be a tool for improving the performance of public programs: public managers may seek to increase the diversity of their staff and deploy minority bureaucrats in strategic ways to improve the performance of programs serving minority populations.

The manner in which passive representation is associated with positive programmatic outcomes is a topic of sustained research. Empirical studies have examined the relationship between worker demographic characteristics, minority role acceptance, and subsequent program outcomes (Selden, Brudney, & Kellough, 1998; Sowa & Selden, 2003; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006). These studies highlight the relationships that may develop and evolve over time as bureaucrats seek to enact policies and carry out programmatic activities with minority client populations. Other research, which draws from scholarship on public governance (Hill & Lynn, 2004; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001), suggests that the activities of minority bureaucrats are embedded within an organizational environment that is itself affected by social forces and institutional demands (Andrews, Boyne, Meier, O'Toole, & Walker, 2005; Meier, O'Toole, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2004;

Wilkins & Williams, 2008). This latter literature finds that the efforts of front-line managers may be constrained or enabled as a result of how administrative agencies respond to the demands of political institutions.

The current study draws from both streams of research in examining the relationship between the characteristics of child welfare workers and the services these street-level bureaucrats provide to clients over time in performance contracting and non-performance contracting environments. Using a panel dataset derived from a natural experiment that contains time-varying measures of caseworker characteristics and different child welfare services, we examine whether service provision by caseworkers to same-race foster children and their families is influenced by the performance contracting environment. In doing so, we test the argument that bureaucratic influences differ by the outcomes under study, the specific characteristics of caseworkers, and the particular institutional environment in which bureaucratic-client interactions occur.

#### Exploring Mechanisms of Influence in Representative Bureaucracy

Research on active representation generally focuses upon outcomes that represent indicators of policy or program performance. A strong association between passive and active representation has been shown to exist in numerous bureaucratic venues, including child support collection (Wilkins, 2007), student educational achievement (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2009; Keiser, Wilkins, Meier, & Holland, 2002; Meier, O'Toole, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2004; Pitts, 2007), racial profiling (Wilkins & Williams, 2008), and rural home loans to minorities (Selden, Bruden, & Kellough, 1998; Sowa & Selden, 2003). A central premise underlying these findings is that minority bureaucrats must have sufficient discretion in order to translate their value preferences into behaviors that lead to improved policy or program

outcomes (Meier & Bohte, 2001; Sowa & Selden, 2003).

In the human service sector, caseworkers may have discretion over policy implementation through the delivery of different services within their span of control but comparatively less influence over the results of such activities (Brodkin, 2007; Lens, 2008; Sandfort, 2000). In child welfare, for example, caseworkers' ability to influence permanency outcomes such as parent-child reunification or adoption is constrained institutionally. Child welfare caseload decisions are ultimately controlled by the juvenile or family court, as mandated by the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (PL 96-272). While caseworkers may ask court officials to expedite the movement of foster children towards permanency, decisions concerning the clinically-appropriate point to begin and end client supervision rest with the court. Thus, passive representation in a child welfare context may influence service provision to foster children and their families but may not lead to the improved permanency rates that are the core performance indicators used by the federal Child and Family Service Reviews.

Understanding the bounded nature of discretion for front-line human service workers is important for scholarship on representative bureaucracy. First, it tempers expectations concerning the strength of the relationship between passive and active representation in certain service sectors. For example, child welfare studies have identified few strong associations between caseworker characteristics and permanency outcomes, with research identifying no difference in the likelihood of reunification for foster children served by caseworkers of similar or different racial backgrounds (Meezan & McBeath, 2008; Ryan, Garnier, Zyphur, & Zhai, 2006). Second, this line of reasoning problematizes the mechanisms through which minority bureaucrats seek to improve policy or program outcomes for minority clients. How and why does passive representation result in positive client outcomes? What specifically do effective

minority bureaucrats do that ineffective minority bureaucrats do not do? These questions differentiate between proximal versus distal outcomes, and focus upon the decision-making and behavior of bureaucrats who share important demographic characteristics with clients and who may or may not be able to identify (and implement) strategies that improve client outcomes.

Proposing that active representation is a function of the actions of minority bureaucrats thus focuses attention upon bureaucratic behavior as a possible mediator of passive representation. Little evidence is available on this topic despite strong theoretical reasons for such research. Exploration of this topic might entail documenting the activities in which minority and non-minority bureaucrats are engaged and testing the relationship between these services and desired outcomes for critical client groups. This logic of inquiry might help to identify the constitutive activities linking the major aspects of representative bureaucracy theory.

#### Service Provision as an Outcome Construct

In a human service context, these questions pertain to the major tasks organizing street-level bureaucratic work, including assessing clients' needs, developing service delivery plans, providing services in response to clients' initial and emerging needs, linking clients with community services and interfacing with other agencies, and monitoring and documenting clients' progress towards treatment goals (Hasenfeld, 1983). In child welfare, caseworkers may provide case planning and case management, supervised parent-child visits, and links to specialized services in the community, among other services (McBeath & Meezan, 2008). No empirical study has examined whether minority caseworkers provide different types and amounts of services to foster children and their families than non-minority caseworkers.

Representative bureaucracy theory suggests that human service delivery should differ depending upon whether clients are served by same- or different-race caseworkers. But the

effect of passive representation in service provision should itself be conditioned by the degree of worker discretion present. In arenas where caseworkers are not required to standardize services and have some latitude concerning the manner in which service plans are developed and implemented, caseworkers may alter service delivery to respond to different client conditions (Hasenfeld & Powell, 2004; Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Sosin, 2009). In child welfare, for example, caseworkers exert substantial control over the process of scheduling and supervising parent-child visitation and establishing referrals for community-based services. In these domains, caseworkers have the ability to recalibrate service activity in response to the needs of same-race clients. In arenas such as mental health and substance use treatment, however, caseworkers often depend upon supervisors or other professionals to gain access to services, and caseworkers' non-standard use of these services may be limited.

While the representative bureaucracy literature has focused principally upon the influence of street-level bureaucrats' race, other individual qualities may enhance bureaucrats' service-related advocacy efforts. Bureaucratic experience, commonly operationalized either as years in a similar task environment or having obtained an advanced degree, is one factor that is traditionally included in regression models predicting client outcomes (Meier & Bohte, 2001; Meier, O'Toole, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2004; Pitts, 2007). There may be substantive reasons, however, to view bureaucratic experience as a facilitator of passive representation rather than as a covariate to be controlled. Experience, which has been found to have an independent effect on the performance of school districts (Juenke, 2005) and federal administrative agencies (Lewis, 2007), may serve as a proxy for organizational learning, the development of functional ability in the task environment, and the expansion of professional networks spanning the organizational field.

These qualities may help minority street-level bureaucrats link clients with needed services (Bunger, Stiffman, Foster, & Shi, 2009). Child welfare casework often involves substantial non-clinical case management, including determining client eligibility for services, collaborating with foster parents, and reserving service slots with community mental health agencies, substance abuse treatment centers, and housing providers (Hasenfeld, 2000; Smith & Donovan, 2003). It may be difficult for less-experienced caseworkers to navigate internal policy requirements, secure supervisory approval for unusually intense service plans, and locate funding for discretionary services (Sandfort, 1999). Thus, minority caseworkers with more practical child welfare experience may be more effective representatives of minority preferences than minority caseworkers with less experience.

#### Situating Service Provision within a Performance-Based Context

Whether conceptualized as an individual-level dyadic relationship or at the level of the organization, the relationship between child welfare caseworkers and clients can be understood to exist within a multilevel governance framework. Governance can be defined as “regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the provision of publicly supported goods and services” (Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001, p. 7). Using a multilevel governance framework, street-level human service work may be conceptualized as a hierarchical process in which the technical production of services at the level of the caseworker worker is nested in a managerial environment that is itself situated in an institutional context (Hill & Lynn, 2004; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2000). For example, laws and legislative-bureaucratic relationships may affect interactions between the administrative and structural aspects of organizations, which may shape front-line work.

This paper focuses upon the effect of a specific institutional mechanism—performance contracting—on the efforts of minority caseworkers to serve foster children and their families. Over the past 20 years, some administrative agencies have embedded performance-based criteria into purchase of service contracts to motivate managers to improve child welfare program outcomes. It has been assumed that the use of performance contracting will lead to cost savings and improved client outcomes, including a reduction in the number of youth in foster care, improved rates of achievement of permanency outcomes such as reunification and adoption, improved time to achievement of these outcomes, and lower rates of recidivism upon exit from foster care (Planning and Learning Technologies, Inc. and The University of Kentucky, 2009). Performance-based models are generally thought to improve these outcomes by penalizing agencies that fail to reach performance targets and, conversely, rewarding service providers that limit unnecessary, duplicative, and untimely service provision (Heinrich & Marschke, forthcoming; Planning and Learning Technologies, Inc. and The University of Kentucky, 2006).

Randomized outcome studies have been completed on 6 of the 27 state child welfare performance contracting initiatives currently active, with no discernable trends in results to date (James Bell Associates, 2007). In contrast, research suggests that these initiatives are associated with considerable reductions in service provision to foster children and their families (McBeath & Meezan, 2008; Snowden, Cuellar, & Libby, 2003) and to child welfare-involved children in Medicaid managed care environments (Raghavan, Leibowitz, Andersen, Zima, Schuster, & Landsverk, 2006). The finding of depressed service delivery is quite similar to the effect of performance-based models in the medical sector (Hutchinson & Foster, 2003; Miller & Luft, 1997; Simpson & Fraser, 1999).

Performance contracting in child welfare provides a suitable opportunity to examine

whether the effect of passive representation on service provision is contingent upon changes in the organizational and institutional environment (Andrews, Boyne, Meier, O'Toole, & Walker, 2005; Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999). Given financial incentives to provide services in a targeted fashion, public managers in performance-based contexts may deploy minority caseworkers strategically to expedite client engagement in service planning. Evidence from case studies suggests that “the meter is running” (Emenheiser, Barker, & DeWoody, 1995, p. xxii) in performance-based environments, as agencies seek to initiate quick and accurate diagnostic procedures that result in immediate service provision, thereby increasing the odds of attaining desired permanency outcomes (Simms et al., 1999; Stroul, Pires, & Armstrong, 2003). An incentive therefore exists for caseworkers to elicit the assistance of clients in gathering information pertaining to household circumstances and needed services. Because biological parents and their children generally enter foster care involuntarily, caseworkers often must respond to clients’ sense of loss, shame, and stigmatization while seeking to develop a collaborative service planning partnership. Caseworkers’ cultural identity and knowledge may facilitate this engagement process with minority clients (Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood, & Vesneski, 2009; Romanelli et al., 2009). Thus, under the assumption that racial similarity in caseworker-client dyads increases client engagement, minority caseworkers may serve minority clients more effectively than non-minority caseworkers in performance-based environments.

### Methods<sup>1</sup>

We test this hypothesis by examining the relationship between caseworker and client characteristics and service provision to foster children and families who were served by nine nonprofit agencies in Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan from 2001 to 2004. Three agencies

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material in this section is taken from other publications by the authors (McBeath & Meezan, 2008; Meezan & McBeath, 2008).

contracted with the State of Michigan Department of Human Services (then called the Family Independence Agency (FIA)) under a fee-for-service reimbursement system in which agencies were reimbursed for their service-related expenses on a per-child, per-diem basis. The other six agencies contracted with FIA under a performance-based reimbursement system that contained a lower per-diem rate and financial bonuses for moving foster children into permanent placements within specified time periods and for sustaining these placements. The fiscal structure of the two reimbursement systems is presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 About Here]

This study takes advantage of the conditions for a natural experiment to isolate the effect of the pilot initiative from client- and caseworker-level covariates. Nonprofit agencies, which provide care for approximately 85% of the foster children and families in Wayne County, receive all of their foster care cases through the Family Assignment System (FAS). Under the FAS, a child entering foster care for the first time is assigned to the next agency in the alphabetical queue of service providers. If an agency is at full capacity, the next agency in the queue is contacted, and if a space is available the child is placed with that service provider. As a result, foster children in Wayne County are assigned to nonprofit agencies on a rotating basis that is unrelated to case characteristics. Due to the FAS, random assignment equivalence was initially presumed and later demonstrated to exist between children and families in pilot and nonpilot agencies (McBeath & Meezan, 2008; Meezan & McBeath, 2008). Thus, comparisons between the performance-based (“pilot”) versus fee-for-service (“nonpilot”) contracting environments are derived from the equivalent of a randomized, post-test only control group design.

To examine service provision to foster children and families across the performance contracting and fee-for-service environments, 243 foster children served by the six pilot agencies

(n = 175) and three nonpilot agencies (n = 68) were identified between May and October 2001.<sup>2</sup> Information on the demographic characteristics of these children and their families was collected once, 30 days after the child's entry into foster care. Information concerning the services provided to children and their families and the characteristics of caseworkers serving them was collected at 30 days and then every 90 days thereafter. Data were gathered through reviews of case files, which contained reports from Child Protective Services, FIA-required assessments and service plans, and regularly updated case notes. Reliability checks of these data were completed regularly by project staff, and when inconsistencies surfaced between caseworkers and project staff, the data were reviewed and appropriate corrections were made to ensure consistency. Data collection stopped either when the court terminated FIA's supervision of the family or at 930 days in care.

#### Measures of Service Provision and Key Covariates

Given the availability of up to 10 quarters of information on service provision and caseworkers, it is possible to identify temporal changes in the services provided to foster children and their families as well as the caseworkers serving these individuals. In order to develop models that test the association between changes in the relationship between each foster child and his or her caseworker and changes in service delivery, we use time-varying measures of service provision and caseworker characteristics.

We focus upon three dependent variables related to service provision: the number of *non-therapeutic service contacts* made by caseworkers to foster children and their families, which included visitation and case management-related activities; the number of *therapeutic services*

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<sup>2</sup> In cases where two or more children from a sibling group were eligible for the study, only two siblings were included in the sample; where the sibling group consisted of more than two children, two children were randomly selected for study.

provided to foster children by counselors, psychiatrists, and/or psychologists at the child welfare agency; and the number of *phone calls that caseworkers made to FIA and other community agencies* to coordinate out-of-agency service provision. These measures reflect the major domains of services that child welfare caseworkers provide to foster children and their families and are integral to permanency planning (Children's Bureau, 2006; Miller et al., 2006; Unrau & Wells, 2005; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, 1997).<sup>3</sup>

Visitation facilitates the reestablishment of parent-child attachment in the aftermath of child maltreatment and is a legal precondition to reunification. Mental health professionals may provide therapeutic or clinical services to foster children to respond to the effects of child maltreatment that led to out-of-home placement. And caseworkers may make phone calls to access court-ordered community services in response to biological parents' material, substance abuse, health, and mental health needs related to the episode of child abuse or neglect.

These service domains are thus of high potential salience to caseworkers and clients. These service types also allow for a comparative examination of worker discretion. Child welfare workers have significant autonomy over (as well as responsibility for) visitation planning and case management, but have less professional control over the provision of mental health services. We thus expect to see the influence of passive representation more prominently in the first and third service areas than in the second.

We rely upon an individual-level, dyadic measure to capture the similarity of the child's

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<sup>3</sup> The measures of service provision are thus counts of either the number of contacts or services provided. While studies have used count variables to capture the amount and intensity of child welfare service provision (James et al., 2004; Unrau & Wells, 2005), count-based measures are not able to identify service quality. Additionally, because information on the nature of the activities that took place within each service or service contact was unavailable, it is not possible to identify whether similar services were provided in different ways or by different people. Furthermore, because these service measures were additive, it was assumed that individual service contacts were equivalent, although some service contacts might have been more critical than others from the perspective of caseworkers or clients.

and the caseworker's racial background: whether the foster child and the caseworker(s) were both either Caucasian or African American (*caseworker-child racial match*). Foster children in this study were either African American (n = 193, 79%) or Caucasian (n = 50, 21%); no other races or ethnicities were present in the sample. This measure is different from agency-level measures of passive representation that reflect the proportion of bureaucrats per agency who are minority but do not account for the ratio of minority bureaucrats to minority clients. Our measure captures changes in the caseworker(s) serving each client and is therefore responsive to situations where the racial composition of this dyadic relationship changes when foster children are reassigned to different caseworkers while in foster care, a not-uncommon circumstance (U.S. GAO, 2003). While we expect differences in service provision based upon the racial similarity or dissimilarity of caseworkers and clients, our application of representative bureaucracy theory to the case of foster care service provision does not suggest a clear directional hypothesis.

Research has suggested that caseworker turnover and the presence of workers with little experience and high caseloads may hinder service planning and delivery to foster children and their families (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004; Courtney & McMurtry, 2002; Unrau & Wells, 2005). In response to these possibilities, other caseworker-specific variables include the *number of caseworkers* that served the foster child, these workers' *number of months of experience* within the agency, and their *caseload size* in family units. An interaction term, *caseworker-child racial match*  $\times$  *caseworker experience*, is included to examine whether caseworker experience mediates the influence of passive representation. We expect service provision to be negatively affected by the presence of multiple caseworkers and as caseload sizes increase. In contrast, we expect a positive relationship between caseworker experience and service provision.

The variable capturing the influence of the performance-based contracting environment is

*pilot status*, operationalized as whether the foster child was served by an agency operating under a performance-based contract (pilot agency) or by an agency operating under a fee-for-service contract (nonpilot agency). We include an interaction term to test whether the effect of passive representation differs across institutional environments: *pilot status* × *caseworker-child racial match*. While we expect service provision to be depressed in agencies with performance contracts, our reading of representative bureaucracy theory suggests that in pilot environments, service provision will be enhanced in direct relation to the racial similarity of the caseworker-client dyad.

### Control Variables

Other time-invariant variables present in the model are included to control for client-level characteristics that research suggests may influence the type and amount of services provided to foster children and their families. Measures related to the characteristics of each foster child include the child's *days in care* (Unrau & Wells, 2005) and *age* in years at the point of entry into foster care (Martin, Peters, & Glisson, 1998). A measure related to the characteristics of the primary caregiver of the child is the primary caregiver's *age* in years. Finally, two measures capture the physical, social, and material needs of foster children and their primary caregivers (Faver, Crawford, & Combs-Orme, 1999; Shin, 2006; U.S. GAO, 1995). These measures draw from a nine-item assessment of the *child's strengths and needs* and a 13-item assessment of the *primary caregiver's strengths and needs* that were completed within 30 days of the child's entry into foster care by caseworkers using FIA-developed forms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Analyses suggested that these measures of strengths and needs have acceptable psychometric properties (Meezan & McBeath, 2003). Exploratory factor analyses of the items in each measure of strengths and needs resulted in single factor solutions, suggesting that it was appropriate to sum each set of items into a single measure. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha associated with the measures of child and primary caregiver needs and strengths were 0.75 and 0.79, respectively, suggesting that they had acceptable internal consistency.

A set of dummy variables identifies the *precipitating formal allegation leading to the child's placement in foster care*,<sup>5</sup> which has been shown to be related to increased mental health service utilization among foster children (Leslie et al., 2000; Shin, 2006). Finally, two dichotomous measures capture conditions in the biological household related to the allegation of child maltreatment, including *drug abuse* and *domestic violence*. These conditions, which may complicate reunification planning and are thus often addressed through the provision of substance abuse treatment and domestic violence services (Courtney, McMurtry, & Zinn, 2004; Kohl et al., 2005; Smith & Marsh, 2002), are not mutually exclusive, since CPS or caseworkers identified the presence or absence of each of these conditions prior to the child's removal from the caregiver's household. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on these variables for the full sample.

[Table 2 About Here]

### Analytic Approach

We use a time-varying negative binomial regression model to account for the count nature of the dependent variables and to test whether service provision to foster children and families changes over time.<sup>6</sup> Because much of our data was collected quarterly, up to 10 quarters of data are available on the measures of service provision and the characteristics of the caseworker(s) serving foster children and families. This data structure allows for the use of a panel model to test for differences in the trajectory of service provision. This approach draws

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<sup>5</sup> Whether neglect was the sole reason for removal of the child (omitted category); whether the child had been abandoned by his or her biological parents; whether physical abuse was the sole reason for removal of the child; whether neglect and physical abuse were the reasons for removal of the child; whether sexual abuse was the sole reason for removal of the child; or whether neglect as well as emotional and physical abuse were the reasons for removal of the child.

<sup>6</sup> A negative binomial model, which relies upon the cumulative density function of the gamma distribution, is appropriate for count variables with values densely distributed around zero (Long & Freese, 2006). A negative binomial regression is a more appropriate estimator than a Poisson regression for these data since the service provision measures' conditional variances exceed their conditional means.

from research implying that it may be important to assess change over time in service provision. In the only longitudinal study of foster care service provision to date, Unrau and Wells (2005) determined that children receive different amounts of various services as they progress through the foster care system. A random effects negative binomial regression approach is therefore employed to estimate a time-varying model of service provision.<sup>7</sup>

Our model predicting service provision includes the time-varying variables pertaining to caseworker characteristics, variables reflecting the performance-based contracting condition, and the set of control variables related to the characteristics of foster children, primary caregivers, and their households. This model is tested using the full sample and then with a subsample containing only African American children and primary caregivers. We bifurcate our analyses in this manner in order to study whether the effect of passive representation upon service provision holds for African American as well as Caucasian foster children and families or only for African American clients. For the full sample analyses, passive representation pertains to Caucasian-only and African American-only caseworker-client dyads; for the African American-specific analyses, passive representation refers to African American-only caseworker-client pairs. Studies have proposed that the effect of passive representation may be distributed across majority as well as minority clients within an agency (Meier & Bohte, 2001; Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999; Pitts, 2007). Comparison of the results of these two sets of analyses allows us to examine this hypothesis, and to avoid specifying an additional interaction term.

## Results

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<sup>7</sup> Because of the manner in which fixed effects models are estimated, time-invariant explanatory variables are unable to be parameterized (Halaby, 2004; Wooldridge, 2002). In the context of the current research, using fixed effects models would have meant that coefficients for key variables—including pilot or non-pilot status, interaction terms incorporating this variable, and some characteristics of children and primary caregivers—would not have been able to be estimated. Because random effects models have no such limitation, this approach was chosen in order to estimate coefficients for time-invariant and time-variant predictors.

Table 3 presents the results from the regression models for non-therapeutic service provision, therapeutic service provision, and service-related phone call activity. As seen in the table, caseworker-client racial matching is associated with non-therapeutic service provision. In the full sample analysis, foster children and families served by same-race caseworkers (either Caucasian-only or African American-only dyads) receive 20% fewer non-therapeutic services. In the subsample analysis, African American foster children and families receive 21% fewer non-therapeutic services when served by same-race caseworkers; and African American front-line staff make 25% fewer service-related phone calls on behalf of same-race children and families.

[Table 3 About Here]

The effect of worker turnover concentrates in the domain of therapeutic service provision. In the full sample analysis, children who are assigned a new caseworker receive 33% fewer therapeutic services; African American children receive 27% fewer such services when caseworker replacement occurs.

Albeit marginally significant, an additional month of caseworker experience is associated with a less than 1% increase in therapeutic service provision and a less than 1% increase in phone call activity in the full sample. For African American children, an additional month of caseworker experience is associated with a 1% increase in therapeutic service provision.

The association between caseload size and service provision is also of marginal significance in two service domains (non-therapeutic services and service-related phone calls). For both the full sample and subsample analyses, adding an additional family to caseworkers' caseloads is associated with a 1% increase in non-therapeutic service provision and a 1% decrease in phone calls made on behalf of foster children and their families. In contrast, the

relationship between caseload size and therapeutic service provision is positive: adding an additional case to caseworkers' caseloads is related to a 4% increase in such services in the full sample and a 6% increase in therapeutic services for African American children.

The interaction term between caseworker-client racial match and caseworker experience is significantly and negatively associated with therapeutic service provision and service-related phone call activity for only the African American subsample. For African American children served by African American caseworkers, an additional month of caseworker experience is related to a 1% decrease in therapeutic service provision.

In contrast, service provision is generally depressed in the pilot contracting environment. In the full sample analysis, foster children and their families receive 34% fewer non-therapeutic services and 67% fewer therapeutic services if they are served by agencies operating under performance-based contracts. Similarly, African American children and families served by pilot agencies receive 36% fewer non-therapeutic services and 66% fewer therapeutic services, and 19% fewer service-related phone calls are made on their behalf if they are served by agencies with performance-based contracts.

In the presence of performance contracting, the relationship between caseworker-client racial matching and service provision is significant and positive in the domains of non-therapeutic service provision and service-related phone call activity. In the full sample analysis, foster children and families served by same-race caseworkers (either Caucasian-only or African American-only dyads) in the pilot contracting environment receive 26% more non-therapeutic services. In the subsample analysis, African American foster children and families served by agencies with performance-based contracts receive 39% more non-therapeutic services when served by same-race caseworkers; and African American front-line staff make 29% more

service-related phone calls on behalf of same-race children and families in the performance-based environment.

### Discussion

This study addressed a perceived gap in the literature on representative bureaucracy, namely the activities of minority bureaucrats. As a topic of investigation, street-level bureaucratic behavior links two complementary themes from research on active representation: given sufficient discretionary ability, minority bureaucrats are more likely to benefit minority client populations than non-minority bureaucrats; and policy and program outcomes are shaped by what minority bureaucrats do or do not do. Using data from nine nonprofit child welfare agencies in Michigan, we determined that the service activities of front-line caseworkers may be influenced by these individuals' characteristics. In arenas in which caseworkers have professional discretion over service availability, the amount of services to Caucasian and African American foster children and families is negatively related to the presence of same-race caseworkers. The dyadic caseworker-client relationship, however, is itself influenced by the institutional context surrounding service delivery. Specifically, foster children and families served by same-race caseworkers in agencies with performance-based contracts receive more services while in care than those served under fee-for-service contracts. This latter result fits our expectation that, in performance management environments involving involuntary clients, public managers may view street-level bureaucrats' demographic similarity to clients as beneficial to the process of client engagement. This result is particularly noteworthy given that prior research has found that performance contracting in the human service sector is associated with significant service reductions to clients.

These findings suggest greater consideration of how street-level bureaucrats respond to

performance environments. By penalizing agencies that do not reach performance targets, performance contracts may indirectly pressure caseworkers to expedite or reduce services to clients. One way workers may respond to performance environments is by devoting greater attention to those cases that lead to positive performance. This modified cherry picking hypothesis might suggest that caseworkers pay greater attention to cases that are less difficult to serve. Yet it is also possible that when pressured to perform, caseworkers may adopt a “more is more” service strategy in which they provide clients with whatever services are available at the moment. This alternative possibility might explain our finding that caseworkers in performance contracting environments provide more non-therapeutic services to and make more service-related phone calls for African American clients. Both scenarios may have some bearing upon the effectiveness and efficiency of human service programs.

Other worker characteristics may also have non-trivial effects on foster care service provision. We find that an increase in caseworker turnover is associated with reduced therapeutic service provision, and that more experienced workers provide more therapeutic contacts and service-related phone calls. Additionally, caseworkers with larger caseloads provide more non-therapeutic and therapeutic services but make fewer service-related phone calls on behalf of clients than those with smaller caseloads. These worker effects cannot be explained by reference to the characteristics of children and families or the broader performance-based contracting environment.

These results suggest that further scholarship on the relationship between caseworker characteristics and human service provision may be warranted. For example, the effect of worker turnover on foster care service provision may depend upon the nature of the turnover process. As part of an established case management process in which intake workers pass cases

to ongoing workers, turnover may have little effect on new workers' ability to adhere to service plans. If turnover is unexpected, however, then new workers may be unfamiliar with case histories, thus potentially decreasing service tailoring and increasing service duplication. The influence of worker turnover on service provision may also depend upon whom initial and new workers are. In light of laboratory studies that find considerable differences in how foster care caseworkers respond to similar client scenarios (Rossi, Schuerman, & Buddle, 1999; Schuerman, Rossi, & Buddle, 1999), it is possible that different caseworkers may not "see" clients and their needs in the same way.

Gaining answers to these questions will likely require in-depth studies in which the caseworker is a primary unit of analysis and where caseworker behavior is tracked over time and in response to different types of clients and agency environments. The characteristics described in this paper are primarily features *of* caseworkers, which provide little information on the manner in which caseworkers carry out their tasks. Implementation studies, in contrast, attend much more carefully to *how* street-level bureaucrats operate (Brodkin, 1997; Meyers, Glaser, & MacDonald, 1998; Sandfort, 1999). Additionally, future research on decision-making may clarify how street-level bureaucrats conceive of their options at various decision points and why caseworkers make critical service-related decisions (DePanfilis & Girvin, 2005; Rzepnicki & Johnson, 2005). A more balanced assessment of the contributions of agency staff to human service provision, in which caseworker characteristics, decision-making strategies, and behaviors are captured alongside information on clients, might help to answer these questions.

Research is also needed to investigate the particular manner in which race matters for minority representation. While our results generally hold across African American as well as Caucasian caseworker-client dyads, in a few instances we find African American-specific

results. This suggests that future researchers drill down to identify the specific mechanisms through which race affects service provision. Ethnographic scholarship might help to clarify how the caseworker-client relationship develops over time and the manner in which race and culture may serve as a resource for street-level bureaucrats serving minority clients. What cultural knowledge is needed to engage minority and majority clients in service planning? Is this knowledge accessible by non-minority caseworkers; and if not, with what effects upon service quality? These questions direct attention to the manner in which street-level bureaucrats exercise affective leadership and respond to the concrete and cultural needs of at-risk client populations (Newman, Guy, & Mastracci, 2009).

It is also important to drill upwards into the hierarchical governance model. Our finding that the influence of passive representation differs in the presence of performance contracting reinforces the argument that the benefits of racial diversity in street-level bureaucratic work may be greatest in organizational and institutional environments that can preserve and integrate such diversity into core functions. This is a critical issue in light of the New Public Management focus upon customer service as a criterion of public performance (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Paarlberg, 2007). If public managers in high-performance environments view a diverse workforce as being a critical antecedent of service effectiveness, then how do public managers seek to create the optimal conditions for minority bureaucrats to practice? Consideration of how and why diversity management matters (Pitts, 2009) may benefit from multilevel exploration of the effects of diversity-focused human resource initiatives on minority and non-minority workers' perceptions of organizational culture and climate and on service provision to different types of clients.

These research and practical implications of our results suggest the need for greater

attention to the pathways through which minority bureaucrats do excellent work. We conclude by reiterating the importance of service delivery-focused approaches to understanding the relationship between passive and active representation. In performance-based environments, administrative agencies seeking to improve policy and programmatic outcomes may alter the features of human service work, thereby potentially affecting how caseworkers design intervention strategies and deliver services. Studying representative bureaucracy in performance-based contexts may therefore benefit from investigation of processes of change across scale (administrative, managerial, and front-line) and time that may be understood differently based upon individuals' affiliations and roles. The research methods employed to study these fluid bureaucratic processes should be similarly diverse.

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Table 1: Per Child Reimbursement Structure of the Pilot Initiative

	<u>Nonpilot (\$)</u>	<u>Pilot (\$)</u>
<u>Base Compensation</u>		
Payment upon intake into pilot	0	2,210
Per diem rate	18 – 34	13.20
<u>Performance Incentives</u>		
Attainment of performance standard (either the child’s return home or to a relative, or achievement of legal guardianship or independent living in 290 days; or achievement of termination of parental rights in 515 days)	0	1,900
Child at home six months after initial discharge	0	1,290
Child at home 12 months after initial discharge	0	1,600
Adoption placement made within seven months of termination of parental rights	0	1,290

Table 2: Sample Characteristics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	%	N
<u>Service Provision</u>						
Non-therapeutic services	117.96	87.84	0	419		243
Therapeutic services	9.03	17.80	0	97		243
Phone calls to coordinate services	45.46	50.64	0	476		243
<u>Caseworker Characteristics</u>						
Caseworker-child racial match					49.46	243
Number of caseworkers	2.79	1.38	1	7		243
Caseworker experience	17.93	24.26	0.5	212.1		243
Caseworker caseload	22.37	4.66	2.38	32		243
<u>Institutional Environment</u>						
Child is served by a pilot agency					72.02	175
<u>Child Characteristics</u>						
Days the child spent in care	674.74	284.35	43	930		243
Child age	6.32	4.57	1.12	17.42		242
Child strengths and needs	0.00	4.16	-16.24	9.63		235
<u>Primary Caregiver Characteristics</u>						
Caregiver age	34.08	9.53	18.03	71.4		219
Caregiver strengths and needs	0.14	6.62	-14.73	19.83		223
<u>Formal Allegation of Child Maltreatment</u>						
None					6.20	15
Neglect					54.13	131
Abandonment					12.81	31
Physical abuse					9.09	22
Neglect and physical abuse					6.61	16
Sexual abuse					4.13	10
Neglect and emotional and physical abuse					3.72	9
Other					3.31	8
<u>Conditions in the Biological Household</u>						
Drug abuse in the household					36.78	89

Domestic violence

10.74 26

Note. For caseworker characteristics, N pertains to the number of valid child cases for which data were available.

Table 3: The Relationship between Caseworker Characteristics and Service Provision

	<u>Non-Therapeutic Services</u>				<u>Therapeutic Services</u>				<u>Phone Calls</u>			
	<u>Full Sample</u>		<u>Black Only</u>		<u>Full Sample</u>		<u>Black Only</u>		<u>Full Sample</u>		<u>Black Only</u>	
Caseworker-child racial match	0.80	**	0.79	**	1.05		1.26		0.85		0.75	**
	(0.06)		(0.07)		(0.21)		(0.28)		(0.08)		(0.08)	
Caseworker was assigned to child during this period	1.02		1.06		0.67	**	0.73	*	0.95		0.94	
	(0.04)		(0.05)		(0.09)		(0.11)		(0.05)		(0.05)	
Caseworker experience	1.00		1.00		1.00	+	1.01	**	1.00	+	1.00	
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.01)		(0.00)		(0.00)	
Caseworker caseload	1.01	+	1.01	+	1.04	**	1.06	***	0.99	+	0.99	+
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.01)		(0.02)		(0.01)		(0.01)	
Caseworker-child racial match × caseworker experience	1.00		1.00		1.00		0.99	*	1.00		0.99	+
	(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.01)		(0.00)		(0.00)	
Pilot status	0.66	***	0.64	***	0.33	***	0.34	***	0.90		0.81	*
	(0.05)		(0.05)		(0.07)		(0.08)		(0.09)		(0.08)	
Pilot status × caseworker-child racial match	1.26	*	1.39	**	1.18		1.28		0.98		1.29	*
	(0.12)		(0.14)		(0.32)		(0.38)		(0.12)		(0.17)	
(-2 ln L)	-5924.95		-4859.47		-1404.26		-1154.82		-4410.76		-3632.78	

Note: Results are random effects negative binomial regression coefficients reported as incidence rate ratios, with standard errors in parentheses. N = 201 for the full sample and N = 159 for the African American subsample. + = (p < 0.10), \* = (p < .05), \*\* = (p < .01), \*\*\* = (p < 0.001). Variables in each model omitted from the table due to space considerations include time in care, child age, child strengths and needs, caregiver age, caregiver strengths and needs, the specific allegation of child maltreatment, and drug abuse and domestic violence in the household.