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## AN APPLICATION OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT FOR CONFRONTING ORGANIZATIONAL STIGMATIZATION

Emad Rahim, Walden University

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*This paper investigated the origin and use of the term “ghetto” by clients and employees in four community centers in Syracuse, New York, that service clientele of low socioeconomic status. The investigation of the term “ghetto” and the consequences of the term were conducted under the “looking glass-self” concept, by Charles Cooley, as well as theories by such seminal thinkers as Lewin, G. H. Mead, Goffman, and Okhuysen and Hudson. Data was collected through a review of the relevant literature and the collection of focus group responses from employees of the four community centers in Syracuse, New York. The study found that organizations that are labeled as “ghetto” take on the attributes of that stigmatization.*

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper examines a labeling phenomenon that is taking shape within inner-city community base organizations, also known as community centers. These urban community centers were being labeled as “ghetto” agencies. Witnesses in this research paper have claimed to hear clients of these agencies making side remarks against these agencies or its own staff as being “ghetto” or “acting too ghetto.” While other witnesses claimed to have observed the agency employees, children attending afterschool programs, and community members use the term to describe behaviors, actions, resources, situations and even the structural characteristics of the agency. This problem of stigmatization for these community agencies, their stakeholders, and audiences motivated this study.

This paper identifies the source and manifestation of this label in four community centers in Syracuse, New York and the label’s association to unethical practices within these agencies. This paper will also examine the notion and function of “ghetto” as a negative stereotype. The community centers of Syracuse and centers located in other economically deprived urban neighborhoods are experiencing a negative labeling trend. Many of these agencies are labeled by their community as being “ghetto” and are associated with the stereotypes of this label. This manner of labeling is causing both internal (employees) and external (community) discord for community centers.

The labeling of community centers as being “ghetto” causes stereotypes to develop, stereotypes that are often associated with unethical behaviors and actions, which tarnish the image of these agencies and influence the quality of services provided by these agencies. The labeling problem has even made a financial impact, effecting grant support and fundraising efforts. Furthermore, partnerships and sponsorship problems due to larger groups not wanting to associate themselves with problems and behaviors that are developed and experienced in a “ghetto” agency. Historically, all of these agencies depended on support by larger corporations to underwrite their fund raising campaigns and community programs to stay fiscally prudent.

All of these agencies have experienced a drastic decrease in funding support and have lost a significant amount of programs, services, and jobs.

This paper utilized co-operative research methods to retrieve relevant information on this subject matter, interviewing different groups within these agencies. These agencies can use the information to develop solutions such as policy changes and action steps to mitigate or eliminate current problems, or procedures that will prevent the classification to occur within the agency. In addition, this ethnographic study of these community agencies provides the empirical frame for an examination of the social production of the ethnographer from the informants' point of view.

This paper explores the source of this labeling trend and examines the problems that this stereotype has created for these community centers through three primary research questions:

1. What is responsible for the stigmatization of community agencies as “ghetto”, and how does this stigmatization occur?
2. What are the implications for community agencies labeled as “ghetto”?
3. What are strategies and solutions for community agencies to counteract the negative affects of being stigmatized as “ghetto”?

In addition, this paper investigates the problem of stigmatization for community organizations by drawing on the theories of Cooley (1902), Lewin (1958), G. H. Mead (1934, 1938), Goffman (1959, 1963), and Okhuysen and Hudson (2003), and Hudson (2008). Through the application of these seminal researchers’ theories, the causes of community organizations’ problems of being stigmatized as “ghetto,” (as well as the detrimental consequences this can have), can be better understood. These problems are presented in a theoretical framework that postulates that individuals’ identities are products of their experiences of societal interaction, and that individual identities form the basis of the organizational stakeholders and audiences

responsible for the stigmatization of the community agencies. Furthermore, the author offers strategies and solutions for organizations that have been stigmatized as “ghetto” based on the interplay of the work by the theorists stated above in the context of the results of the study.

The paper begins with a review of labeling and stereotypes, and then discusses the concept of the “ghetto” as it is conceived today. The paper next presents a brief review of the research method used in the ethnographic research of the executive directors and employees of the community organizations. This is followed by a summarized presentation of the results of the study.

The second section of the paper expands on the conclusions based on the results of the interviews with employees of the community organizations, and generalizes those conclusions to a theoretical level. The problems of stigmatization and stereotypes of organizations is analyzed using the work of Cooley (1902) and Lewin (1958) as a theoretical framework. The paper concludes with the further integration of research by G. H. Mead (1934, 1938), Goffman (1959, 1963), and Hudson and Okhuysen (2003) to answer the research questions of this study and generate strategies and solutions for addressing the stigmatization of community organizations as “ghetto.”

### **LABELING & STEREOTYPES**

Sociologist David Schoem (1991) defines stereotyping as a set of generalizations held by one group of people regarding the characteristics and behaviors of a different group based on an image or assumption, instead of sound evidence. Stereotypes are developed when people are unable or unwilling to obtain all of the information that they would need to make fair judgment about people or situations. Our family, friends, community, or even the media often unknowingly perpetuate stereotypes, but these stereotypes often lead to unfair discrimination and persecution when the stereotype is unfavorable. Schoem (1991) argues that stereotypes substitute for substantive human understanding and are indicative of the deep chasms of social difference and separation across racial and ethnic differences:

The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable. That we can live so closely together, that our lives can be so intertwined socially, economically, and politically and that we can spend so many years of study in grade school and even in higher education and yet still manage to be ignorant of one another is clear testimony to the deep-seated roots of this human and national tragedy. What we do learn along the way is to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge. (Schoem, p. 98)

In the field of sociology, the act of “labeling” something or someone is considered by many researchers as a metaphor that is used to distinguish/ identify things and groups of people (Becker, 1963). In social context, the act of labeling is often used to differentiate one group of people from another thereby discriminating and stereotyping people being labeled (Becker). This characterization of a group of people based on assumptions, personal or social opinions, religious perspectives, isolated behaviors or based on any other unfounded evidence can be very harmful and damaging to the person or group, and in respect to this research, even community agencies. Becker argues that labeling theory researchers should avoid examining individual behaviors as the cause route of the labeling behaviors.

Becker (1963) believes that the source of many labeling problems is rooted in social beliefs, which are then used to compare different groups. Social norms are the common practice of beliefs, values and laws that are supported by the majority group of a community and society (Becker; Wright, 1984). The comparison between a larger group (majority) to a smaller group (minority), as to what are acceptable behaviors and beliefs causes the development of the labeling of the minority group to occur (Becker, 1963; Wright). Becker goes on to further explain that these social norms are then forced upon the minority group or individual, which in turn causes the development of unwanted behaviors to appear from the minority group.

The labeling of a group or individual then reinforces stereotypes (Ewen & Ewen, 2006). Ewen and Ewen describe stereotyping as a “fixed, commonly held notion or image of a person or group, based on an oversimplification of some observed or imagined trait of behavior or appearance.” (p. 27). Similar to labeling, stereotypes reflect the ideas that one group of people hold about a different group of people, but are more synonymous with prejudice and racism because it creates a one-dimensional and often degrading viewpoint of the different group which then rob them of their humanity (Ewen & Ewen,). Stereotypes evoke images and ideas that are recognized and understood by the group or individual that shares the same views of the minority group that is being labeled. Jacobs (1999) asserts that the marketing campaigns of today’s products, music, food and services help fuel the stereotypes and generalization of groups of people.

Sowell (2005) argues that the stereotyping and labeling of groups creates handicaps to develop. Sowell explains that under-represented groups that are often labeled will start to mimic these stereotypes out of acceptance by the common belief of their community. These labeled groups may start to use the negative stereotypes as excuses for why they are unable to achieve their goals or become successful contributors to their community (Sowell). These groups may see their future as hopeless because the stereotypes that they are labeled with often result into negative outcomes (Sowell). Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) argue that the

majority of the groups that are stereotyped have bought into these labels by absorbing the self-defeating stereotypes imposed upon them by historical events, such as slavery and segregation, media exploitation, and their own community:

Oppression not only resides in external social in external social institutions and norms but lodges in the human psyche as well (Fanon, 1968; Miller, 1976). Oppressive beliefs are internalized by victims as well as perpetrators. The ideas that poor people somehow deserve and are responsible for poverty, rather than the economic system that structures and requires it, is learned by poor and affluent alike. Homophobia, the deep fear and hatred of homosexuality, is internalized by both straight and gay people. Jews as well as Gentiles absorb antisemitic stereotypes. (Adams, Bell & Griffin, p. 4)

In terms of business practices the common purposes of labels are the creation of comparisons and distinctions to help consumers identify one product or service from another (Batra & Sinha, 2000). A common method of 'labeling' people in our society is often developed from a generalized perspective of beliefs towards members of a certain nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual preference (Becker, 1963). When the majority of one group of people holds certain beliefs towards another group, that belief develops into a stereotype. That stereotype can shape the way other people perceive that group without formal contact or research (Becker, 1963). The nuances underlying the beliefs of the label, positive or negative, will aid in the formation of social stereotypes on that group of people in question (Becker, 1963). I argue that these same social stereotypes can also influence the way an agency is viewed by its population and community and negativity affect the agency's ability to effectively operate their business.

### CONCEPT AND CONNOTATIONS OF THE "GHETTO"

According to Vergara (1995) presently the word ghetto, for most Americans, now has a different meaning and image from that used to describe the Warsaw ghetto. The word ghetto in America is used to describe poverty-stricken communities; a section of a city where a sub-group of low-income people resides in (Vergara). These sub-groups living in inner-city ghettos are often minority families that are forced to live in these poor conditions because of economic or legal challenges, or social pressures (Hilfiker, 2002). Some of these sub-groups may also be receiving government and public aid to supplement their income, such as welfare, food stamps, Medicaid and public housing (Hilfiker). Minority groups living in the ghetto are also considered to be marginalized and oppressed because of the poor quality of life in these areas:

The quality of life in these areas was already lower because of neighboring industry, and what housing stock existed tended to deteriorate...Congress set strict income limits on who could live in these new housing "projects." Functionally, this meant that the poorest members of the black ghetto were moved somewhere else in the city and segregated by class as well as by race, only intensifying their isolation from larger society. (Hilfiker, p. 56)

Hilfiker (2002) argues that the extreme deprivation and poverty of these ghetto communities, its restriction, or isolation fuel the growing problem of crime, violence and drug abuse within these communities. Some of the largest inner cities (Ghetto) of the United States are located in Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Washington D.C and New York City (Brooklyn, Queens and Bronx) all of these majority cities have experienced some of the worst gang related crimes, which includes murders, assault and battery, robberies, weapons trafficking, and drug trafficking and abuse (Hilfiker). Poorer communities also face serious problems with hunger, education, and lack of opportunities (Hilfiker). These conditions create a feeling of uncertainty, disparity and apathy for the future, which causes many residents of ghettos to engage in dangerous, harmful or often illegal activities in their community:

Poverty leads to despair. Chronic poverty impairs one's motivation to aspire to something greater than what one sees in the environment...Joblessness, poverty, low levels of education and consequent hopelessness, and segregation and consequent alienation from middle-class norms all combine to create a fertile field for nurturing workers in the drug trade. (Hilfiker, p. 62)

According to Hilfiker (2002) and Vergara (1995), people living in the ghetto are more likely to face serious economic hardship, unsafe living conditions, community violence, drug and alcohol abuse, suffer from illness and malnutrition, oppression and racism, and even forces that may appear positive for other communities – "the law, the media, government, police" – can in fact be harmful for residents living in the ghetto; Rodney King and Amadou Diallo. With all of these adversities that ghetto residents face, the media coverage focuses upon reporting bad news, which serves to perpetuate the negative stereotype towards African Americans living in the ghetto more than any other minority groups (Hilfiker).

Even though the data reported by the 2000 Census showed that African Americans only made up 12% of the poor in America, and less than half of that 12% live in ghettos. In fact, more White Americans receive welfare support than African Americans, but our society thinks otherwise (Hilfiker, 2002). According to Hilfiker these stereotypes of ghetto residents invoke images of dangerous

looking black men hanging out on every street corner, uneducated and uncultured families and children, streets infested with gang activity, drug dealers, addicts, and pregnant teens:

When most Americans think about poverty, or see the poor on television, or read about them in the newspapers, the images are poor black men hanging around the street corner, poor black teenagers selling drugs, poor black single mothers living on welfare, black inner-city schools failing their children. (Hilfiker, p. 66)

From my research and professional experience, these stereotypes that have been plaguing African Americans for decades have now attached its harmful stigma onto these urban community centers that services residents living in the ghetto. The labeling of these community centers as being “ghetto” has invoked a lot of mixed feelings by residents, clients, and the employees and administrators of these agencies.

## METHODS

In this research I am examining a social problem by observing the environment and people that are affected by it. The information I gathered was primarily obtained through interviewing small groups in the context of cooperative inquiry. From conception to execution, my research approach paralleled Lofland’s suggestion that “the bulk of analysis in most field studies is based on informants’ talk...” (Lofland, et al, 1994).

My research topic resembles the characteristics of a “Social Action” study, in which “human interactions, talk and actions are the fundamental sources of data for field research” (Lofland, et al., 1994, p. 85). The means of data gathering included interviews, questionnaires, and observation. The topic was introduced to these groups and participants were allowed to form and express their own opinions. This type of interviewing allowed me to locate a possible pattern in the conversation that will help me form my conclusion to the research.

Gathering information regarding the causes of this stereotype in community centers to occur will require qualitative analysis and mixed research methods. This action research project will use the approach of co-operative inquiry as developed by Heron (1996). The co-operative inquiry method facilitates ownership of learning (Baldwin, 1997). The group interactions help to develop communication channels, allowing different views and perspectives on a given topic/ subject being discussed, and enabling opinions and suggestions to form amongst the group being interviewed.

In this action research project, administrative representatives and employee co-operative inquiry groups were interviewed. All groups involved in the co-operative

inquiries agreed to the appropriateness of the interviewing process and topic. Some group members participated in the development of the research design and recording procedures. During the reflection stage of the research, group members individually met with me to discuss their opinions and ideas about the issues discussed in the groups. Several questions were developed from meetings with the management team and external groups, and other questions were created from personal observation and research. The meetings were documented with written notes and a voice recorder.

Historically, African American and Latino communities have been misrepresented and exploited by psychological and medical research (Guthrie, 1998; Jones, 1992; in Kelly, Mock, Tandon, 1979-1992). Many African Americans and other minority groups point out that the media and corporate businesses are currently exploiting urban violence and poverty for personal gain. These events have caused many African American, Latino and other minority communities to be very suspicious of the intentions of researchers; “For decades, poor, minority communities have been analyzed primarily through statistical data, which has caused greater division, mistrust, and destitution.” (Vergara, 1995).

Community centers, also known as community agencies, are nonprofit organizations that offer community assistance through human service support. The services offered by these agencies target low income and at-risk families and youth. An at-risk family is defined as a family or group of people who are in risk of harming themselves or others, physically or mentally do to poverty, abuse, illness or by a tragic accident, “ineffective performers” (Ginzberg, Berliner, & Ostow, 1988, p. 31-48). The programs and services are offered to the community to help foster independence and empowerment to local community members. The mission for these agencies draws on the human service philosophy, which is to increase the quality of life for their clients and surrounding neighbors. All of these agencies are currently experiencing a high turnover of employees in their organizations, every year they experience decrease in funding support and resource limitation, but the service needs of the community keeps increasing.

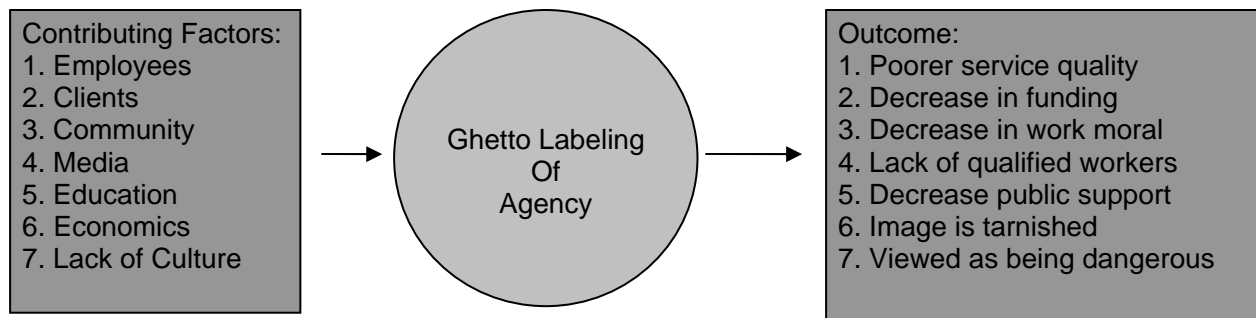
This research project examined four community agencies that are located on the Southwest side of Syracuse New York, each located 4 to 6 miles apart from each other. The majority of the people living in this area of the city are prominently African Americans, with the westside majority Hispanics. All four of these agencies have been categorized/ labeled as “ghetto” agencies, as identified by internal and external sources. These sources claim the following behaviors were observed or experienced while attending a program at these centers or as an employee: rude and unprofessional conduct between employees with clients and each other, unprofessional clothing by employees (perception by source), foul language being used by employees in front of clients or employees not confronting clients (young children) using inappropriate language, the

quality of service given to clients; consistency with service providers showing up late for appointments with clients, not prepared and not professionally dressed for the environment, and the lack of structure within programming

(documentation, organization, data). All four of these agencies serve residents living in the Southwest side community.

FIGURE 1

Community Agency Labeling Diagram, Created By Author (2007)



## RESULTS

### Community Agency Directors

The first group to be interviewed was the executive/management group. All four of the Executive Directors agreed to meet with me for a face-to-face interview to discuss the topic of this research. Three of the four Directors were women, and two were previous social workers who had earned graduate degrees in their discipline. All four Directors have been in the field of human services professionally for over two decades. Two of the Directors were the original founders of the agency that they currently represent. The other two have been in their current administrative positions in the agency for under ten years. All four Directors acknowledged the existence of the labeling issue for their agency and the problems it caused to their reputation and to the quality of their programs and services.

All four Directors acknowledged the existence of the labeling issue for their agency and the problems it caused to their reputation and to the quality of their programs and services. The separate interviews indicated three main stimuli that the Directors all believed were directly or indirectly causing the labeling of their agency as “ghetto.” All four Directors thought that the problem was caused by their own employees, the clients they serve, and the culture of the community, which they all agreed is being targeted by exploitative media coverage.

During the interviews the Directors claimed that they believe a small group of their employees is to blame for the labeling problem. They explained that some of their employees often imitate the behaviors of the clients they

serve, instead of modeling appropriate behaviors. They argued that the behaviors being imitated by these groups of employees are associated with the attributes of someone who would be classified as acting “ghetto.”

The first Director whom I interviewed answered the question by explaining the term “ghetto.” This Director, one of the three women, believes that the word “ghetto” is symbolic with poverty in our society. She goes on to say that people living in poverty are often “limited in education, money, food, shelter and other forms of resources and support.” She explains that this group of people will often act out in a manner that is considered “immature, arrogant, or ignorant.” She goes on to say that these limitations narrow this population’s scope of knowledge, causing some people to display immature and ignorant behaviors that have been defined as acting “ghetto.”

When asked why they hired employees who modeled these inappropriate behaviors, two Directors had similar explanations. Both of these Directors, long-time social workers, pointed out that the problem was a limited pool of skilled and educated workers from which they are forced to choose. They pointed out as contributing factors the low salary, limited or nonexistent benefits, restricted resources and budget, stress of overloaded cases, and dangerous work environment. Both Directors felt that these limitations made it harder for them to compete with other community organizations in acquiring qualified workers.

Regarding the factors involving clients and community, the word “unity” was mentioned by all four Directors in their separate interviews. All argued that both the clients and community in which they serve lack unity. They contended that the unity problem hinders or prevents productive and therapeutic communication about solutions. This disunity

resulted from their insistence upon “complaining” and resistance to “change.” The Directors explained that both the clients and community members complain about numerous things but will rarely get together to find a solution for a common problem. Clients and community members, often the same people, complain about their problems and blame each other instead of working together. More specifically, the Directors suggested that many of their clients complain about their problems with emotional gestures that are “performed” for the community. They further elaborated that the profession of human services deals with many dysfunctional behaviors and that these behaviors are often very emotional. The majority of their clients, the Directors explained, will target the agency and society for their problems, blaming everything and everybody else for their situation except themselves. The Directors observed that this is a normal psychological behavior but that this population will then share their frustration with the community, spreading fictitious rumors and gossiping about the agency.

This Director noted that some people use the term “ghetto” to describe something negative whereas others use it jokingly. All of the Directors agree that, however people apply the term, it is still a negative stereotype of the African American population and of all poverty-stricken people.

At the same time each seemed disappointed that both the clients and the cultures of the community were identified as the main factor of the agencies’ labeling problem. The Directors explained that changing internal rather than external behavior was easier because they had control over their employees and their agencies’ culture.

They all were in agreement that they could improve employee behavior by changing their recruitment approaches, employee expectations, agency policies, professional development training, and benefit options, as well as by offering better career-advancement opportunities within their organizations. They also concurred that external influences are harder to manage. Given limitations such as caps on salaries and benefit options within their organizations, the executive team suggested redeveloping career-advancement opportunities to compensate for limited financial resources, a change that in turn would alter their recruitment approaches.

### **Community Agency Employees**

The employees were interviewed in a group through cooperative inquiry research methods. The group interview took place at a local library, serving as a neutral location suggested by two of the participants. The library was located in the same neighborhood as these community centers and was within walking distance of two agencies. The group interview was conducted after work hours, as requested by the Directors and employees. The fifteen (15) participants, including three to four employees from each of the four

community agencies, represented a diverse group of professionals and ethnicities. Eight (8) of the participants were male and seven (7) were female. Ethnicities in the group included Hispanic and Caribbean, Caucasian, and African American.

When the participants were asked if they had ever heard of their agencies being called or labeled “ghetto,” all of them answered “yes.” However, the community agency employees presented a wider array of opinion about the meaning, causes, and implications of this stigmatization than the Directors expressed. Two participants explained that the word “ghetto” means different things to different people and that it is not always seen as being a negative word. Several participants indicated that they were born and raised in the ghetto and that they were proud of it.

On the other hand, other participants were frustrated with the negative connotations that came with the stigmatization of their agency as “ghetto.” One of the men in the group who had not yet contributed to the discussion stated that he could empathize with both opinions, because he was proud of his upbringing in a ghetto environment but as a professional he was also angry about the negative stereotypes. He felt that he often found himself defending other people’s behaviors in the workplace and that he was often judged for mistakes that others made.

A social worker that was contributing to the discussion agreed with this form of frustration and understood that this level of immaturity was a result of lack of education and culture. “Ghetto” behaviors, she commented, are often triggered when people are “scared or hurt.” The group agreed that the labeling of their agencies as “ghetto” negatively impacted morale, retention, and professionalism, and that their integrity and respect were challenged at work. Members of the group pointed out that they all genuinely believed in the services their agencies provided but felt that support from their administrators was limited. Many commented on a huge gap between employees who were qualified to perform their jobs and those who were not, with the majority being the unqualified. Respondents also believed that by hiring unqualified people the agencies themselves contributed to the labeling problem. They felt that unqualified workers often conflicted with better educated and qualified staff, friction that resulted in poor attitudes being developed throughout the agencies.

The interview ended with group members explaining that they felt that the “unqualified” workers are representing their agencies poorly to the public. The information provided by the group interview depicted the labeling problem as stemming from internal conflicts rather than external factors, as first emerged in my conversations with the Executive Directors of these agencies. There was a social conflict between “qualified employees” and “unqualified employees.”

FIGURE 2

**Identified Internal Conflict Causing the Labeling Problem****CONCLUSIONS****Introduction**

In order to fully explicate and frame the results found in this study, and to comprehensively answer the three research questions posed at the beginning of the paper, theories of stigmatization, self-identity, and organizational change from seminal researchers in the field are presented in conjunction with the conclusions of this paper. The conclusions begin with a section on self-development and the operation of stereotypes, which presents the decisive work of Charles Cooley (1902), whose theories of self-development as a social production are critical to understanding the fundamental basics of the “ghetto” behaviors discussed by the interviewees. The discussion then moves on to George Herbert Mead (1934, 1938, 1982), another seminal researcher in self-development, in order to contextualize how labeling occurs through interaction for the employees and clients of community agencies stigmatized as “ghetto.”

Next, the research of Erving Goffman (1959, 1963) is reviewed to fully round out the theory that stigmatization and labeling with negative stereotypes are outcomes of individuals’ (and organizations’) interactions with others. Using Goffman’s work, I forward the perspective that behaviors considered as “ghetto” may be just a “front” required of individuals by the governing modes of societal interaction and identity formation. As a consequence, the organization represented by such individuals (as either employees or clients) takes on the stigmatization of that identity.

It is important to note that many of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934, 1938, 1982), and Goffman’s (1959, 1963) theories can be transposed from an individual context to an organizational one, and that the conclusions of this paper operate under this dualistic framework. In other words, the results of the interviews with regard to the stigmatization of community agencies as “ghetto” are understood as

applicable to both the individuals being stigmatized as well as the community agencies with which they are affiliated. Like many other organizational behavior researchers, Natoli (2003) believes that organizations have personalities and that an organization’s personality influences its work environment either positively or negatively. The organization’s personality also influences its corporate development, which should be aimed at improving the entity’s processes and interaction, improving communication between employees and managers, and improving the quality of products and services offered by the organization.

The following section draws on the work of Hudson (2008) and Hudson and Okhuysen (2003), and I posit the notion that the community agencies suffer from “core-stigmatization,” meaning that core attributes of the organizations are responsible for their perception by some as “ghetto.” The conclusions section comes to an end with a further discussion of Hudson’s work integrated into Lewin’s (1958) seminal writing on organizational change in order to present strategies and solutions for community agencies that suffer from stigmatization. The results of this study are incorporated into the above-mentioned theories to present realistic recommendations for practice.

**Self-Development and the Operation of Stereotypes**

The “looking glass-self,” a concept created by Charles Cooley (1902), supported the theory that individuals learn to see themselves based on how society views them. The “looking glass-self” is an idea that all individuals take on characteristics that are predominately influenced by what we believe society perceives of us to be. Under this theory, stereotyped individuals come to integrate society’s label of them as their identity, and will reproduce the behaviors associated with that identity.

Cooley’s (1902) “looking glass-self” theory and the behaviors and attitudes of marginalized people living in the ghetto share many aspects. People who live in the ghetto are



frequently stereotyped and labeled as being “ghetto” by society, a negative stereotype that often leads people to think poorly of themselves and their opportunities. Such negative stereotypes can be internalized and consequently affect interpersonal relations and how individuals see themselves, their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

Cooley argued that a person’s perception of the self actually is an outcome of his or her acceptance by others; “The social origin of his life comes by the pathway of intercourse with other persons” ([1902] 1983). Cooley believed that the self arises dialectically through communication with society, which influences how we desire our self to be portrayed in front of others ([1902] 1983). Cooley (1983) explains this theory of “social influences” on the self as follows:

When we speak of society, or use any other collective term, we fix our minds upon some general view of the people concerned, while when we speak of individuals we disregard the general aspect and think of them as if they were separate. (Cooley, 1983)

According to Cooley, the self is not foremost an individual and then a social being, but rather we unconsciously develop or mold our self on the basis of our communication with society: “there can be no isolated selves. There is no sense of ‘I’ without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they... a reflection of the ideas about himself that he attributes to other minds” ([1902] 1983). The individual accepts/ embraces or unconsciously develops an image of the self based on society’s viewpoint or acceptance (Yeung & Martin, 2003). Cooley points out that this social process causes us to develop a sort of “selective reinforcement” that shapes our “developing selves” (Cooley, 1902; 1983). Cooley elaborates on the influence of the social process on the “developing selves” as follows:

[I]n imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, characters, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it...seeing ourselves as we imagine others see us. (1902; 1983).

There is a strong comparison between the “looking glass-self” and that of the influences of social stereotypes on the development of the “self.” Stereotypes are seen as negative labeling, while the “looking glass-self” is viewed more as a normal experience by which we all go through in discovering who we really are. The “looking glass-self” seems to question whether individualism is truly gained by social influences on the “self.” I would argue that the same phenomenon occurs with regard to how stereotypes and labeling can influence how marginalized people see themselves, and how they think they should appear in front of others.

Individualism seems to be the challenge in the development of the “self.” There are many forces that shape our character, beliefs, and behaviors. I would then argue that stereotypes are the by-product of the “looking glass-self.” If stereotypes are developed by society, which then influences how people perceive another group to be, thus effecting how the group being stereotyped see themselves, would this not support the concept of “looking glass-self”? The difference between the two topics is that the “looking glass-self” can be influenced by positive social interactions and experiences, while stereotypes will only lead to disparity within the self.

George Herbert Mead (1934, 1938), a follower of Cooley (1902), contended that it was unfeasible for anyone to conceive a self in the absence of social interaction. Mead postulated an understanding of the self as intersubjective, believing that the self was constructed in interaction with others through such mechanisms as social control, roles, and the generalized other. In this interpretation of the self, Mead argued that interaction, as opposed to action or consciousness, as the starting point for sociological theorizing. Therefore, this further supports and develops the idea forwarded under Cooley’s (1902) theory that individuals tend to represent in themselves their identities as perceived by others. However, going beyond perception, Mead’s theory specifies that it is in interaction that the understanding of the self, and the accompanying behaviors of that self, takes place.

Mead (1934, 1938) had a devoutly pragmatic attitude towards identity formation, and believed that an individual existed as a part of a community before existing with individual consciousness (Joas, 1985). An individual’s meaning is deeply rooted in the interactions they have in the society around them. The extent of that individual consciousness can determine an individual’s level of identification with the community. Mead postulated that only through experience with different communities can individuals become self-aware. This construct is important in explaining the persistent negative stigmatization of community agencies as “ghetto.”

Mead (1982) also forwarded the concept of “the generalized other,” which is essentially a summation of the social norms in a given community or environment. As a child matures, they learn to understand appropriate modes of behavior and interaction for the particular communities around them, which represent “the generalized other.” For Mead (1982), the thinking processes of individuals are no more than their experiences of internalized communications, noting “the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings” (1982, p. 5). Mead’s (1934, 1982) important contribution to this research is in framing the elements of the agency that carry the negative stigmatization of being “ghetto,” which reflects on the organization. The employees and clients who are stereotyped as being “ghetto” can be understood as a clashing of perceptions of “the generalized other.” The key element here is the experience of those involved, which can be

intrinsically tied to education and opportunity, both of which are lacking in disenfranchised areas served by the community agencies.

Erving Goffman (1959, 1963) affirmed Mead's (1934, 1938) argument that the identity of an individual is constructed through an understanding of the projection of the self to others. Goffman (1959, 1963) posited the idea that individuals will go to great lengths to combat a stigma they feel is attached to them, and in doing so, may work to reinforce that stigma. Goffman's (1959) research focused on the acting of individuals in their daily interactions. Interactions are perceived as "performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 17), and these performances are inflected with impressions to attain the desired goal of the participants of the interaction. This is a formative part of individual development.

The performances that individuals engage in often require a specific set of criteria for the appropriate identity in order to most effectively engage in interactions (Goffman, 1959). This confirms the earlier work of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934), in that social surroundings are the determinative factor of self-development and identity formation. Goffman considered this specific set of criteria for the appropriate identities that individuals adopt for their societies as a "front" (p. 22). Consistency of the front is paramount in order to maintain its viability as a believable identity. This suggests that the behaviors implicated the labeling of organizations and individuals as "ghetto" are deeply engrained, and will be difficult to alter.

According to Goffman (1959, 1963), individuals will attempt to perform an idealized version of the front, more consistent with the societal perception of the identity when around an audience than when not performing. The idealized version of the front is largely determined by the hegemony of prevailing dominant norms, which also provides the pressure for individuals to conform to that front in their performative identities. Goffman's theories of self-management and development reinforce the results of this study, in that the "ghetto" stigma associated with those who use or work at the community agencies may reinforce the stereotype in their attempts to avoid or counteract its negative connotations.

### Organizational Stigmatization

Research on organizational stigmatization by Hudson (2008) and Hudson and Okhuysen (2003) provides an essential framework for understanding the stigmatization of community agencies as "ghetto." Hudson (2008) and Hudson and Okhuysen (2003) make an important point about the concept of organizational stigmatization: that it is a perception of audiences, a subjective phenomenon. Awareness of an organization is elemental in determining the level of stigma, if any, it receives from audiences. Hudson's (2008) research confirmed the results of Hudson and Okhuysen's (2003) study on stigmatization of gay

bathhouses, which found that most people aren't aware of gay bathhouses, but that they would probably stigmatize them if they were exposed to them. Hudson (2008) noted,

In other words, a social audience can be more or less aware of the organization or organizations whose core attributes violate that audience's values. Although this awareness may seem fairly straightforward, it depends on the exposure of the organization to the audience. Thus, not every social audience is exposed in equal measure to every organization or set of organizations. Exposure may be the result of accidental or intentional actions of members of the social audience, of the organization, or both. (p. 258)

Hudson (2008) distinguished two types of stigma from which an organization can suffer: event-stigma and core-stigma. Event-stigma is attached to a particular circumstance involving an organization, and is normally easy to address and overcome. Core-stigma, on the other hand, indicates that a core attribute of the organization is stigmatized. Hudson explained,

Being core-stigmatized indicates there is something about the organization or set of organizations—some core attribute, core element, or core trait—that others in the environment deem incompatible with ordinary standards of organizational accounts or "plausible explanations for the organization and its endeavors" (Suchman, 1995). (p. 254)

Hudson went on to note that there are various implications of such core-stigmatization, and the conclusions of the 2008 study found that stigma is (a) a matter of perception from one or more audiences, and (b) "that there exists something about the core or fundamental nature of the organization itself that allows these social audiences to judge it as tainted or spoiled" (p. 254).

Under Hudson's (2008) theory, the community organizations suffer from core-stigmatization, that is, stigmatization because of the negative stereotyping of one or more core attributes of the organization. In this case, the core attributes causing the stigmatization of the organizations are the employees and the clientele they serve. This presents a significant obstacle, as it may be beyond the grasp of a core-stigmatized organization to address those core attributes. This highlights an unavoidable issue. If a community of people is itself stigmatized in the mainstream public's perception (e.g., a "ghetto" community), are the organizations that serve that community certain to suffer from stigma themselves?

## Strategies and Solutions for Counteracting Stigmatization

The results of this study found that there were two primary causes for the stigmatization of community agencies as “ghetto”: (a) the rupture between qualified employees and unqualified employees, and (b) the culture of the clients served by the agencies. According to Hudson (2008), these are core-stigmas, and are difficult to counteract. Hudson posited three modes of resistance to stigmatization: specialist strategies, hiding strategies, and challenging strategies. Specialist strategies involve the targeting of specific and highly limited domains. As the community agencies are public organizations, this strategy can be discarded. Hiding strategies involve keeping organizational exposure to hostile audiences as a minimum. Again, because the community agencies are open to the public, there is not much leeway in this respect.

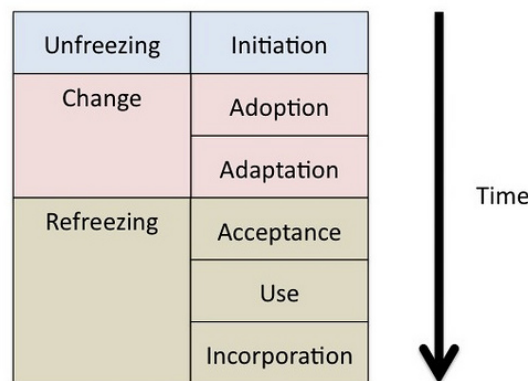
However, challenging strategies can be useful for community agencies to counteract stigmatization as “ghetto” organizations. Hudson (2008) posited that normalizing

behaviors could counter stigmatization. This requires that the agency operate in a professional way at all times to provoke an image of legitimacy. The results of the interviews in this study indicated that employees and Directors found that some employees are unqualified for their positions and behave in unprofessional ways, and that this was a main root to audience perceptions of the organizations as “ghetto.” This would need to be a target for any attempted organizational change.

Kurt Lewin (1958) was one of the preeminent researchers in organizational change theory, positing a three-step method for change that has been widely accepted in the field for many years. The three steps of the method are unfreeze, move, and freeze. According to Lewin, organizational change requires the replacement of old attitudes and behaviors with new ones. The unfreezing step of the process refers to a time of self-reflection among the members of the organization and motivation to prepare the members for the next step. Defense mechanisms and old routines need to be bypassed, and expectations are broken.

**FIGURE 3**

### Keller Adaptation of Lewin's Freeze/Unfreeze Model of Change (2005)



The moving step of Lewinian (1958) change theory requires a period of cognitive restructuring, in which the members of the organization are provided with information showing that the change is possible and desirable. Members of the organization feel anxious as the change, perhaps threatened that old modes of operation will be changed. The freezing step refers to a period of returning to the previous comfort levels of the organization, with new goals and expectations formed in the organization's members' minds. This three-step theory to change is particularly applicable to the community agencies of this study because, as Weick and Quinn (1999) noted,

Lewin's ideas remain central to episodic change because they assume that inertia in the form of a

quasi-stationary equilibrium is the main impediment to change (Schein, 1996). Lewin's insight was that an equilibrium would change more easily if restraining forces such as personal defenses, group norms, or organizational culture were unfrozen.

The community agencies definitely suffered from inertia, saddled with excessive work, undertrained and under motivated staff, and limited budgets. The Lewinian model offers a way to counteract that inertia.

The work of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934, 1938), and Hoffman indicated that individuals' identities were products of interaction and communication with the society around them. The “front” suggested by Hoffman can be understood

as the labeled stereotype of “ghetto,” and it is important to recognize that it is a monumental task to restructure the behavior routines of individuals. Employees in the interview in this study noted that they wanted more effort from the Directors to provide them with a professional work environment. It will take significant change to the environment in order to complete the three-step change method forwarded by Lewin (1958). Such an attempted change would require the restructuring of the mindsets of the Directors as well.

However, this approach only addresses one of the two core-stigmas attached to the community agencies. The clients of the organization constitute the second core-stigma, and it is unlikely that the organizations will be able to change the stereotypes of the general public. In situations where an unqualified employee group is contributing directly to the labeling problem because of their insecurities or lack of education and experience of other cultures, then it is only appropriate to develop a system that promotes an environment embracing the opposite qualities. These community agencies can promote fairness and equality by hiring people who normally would not have been hired, and in doing so, they should implement a program that actively fosters workplace professionalism.

It is extremely important for organizations to analyze where they may be going wrong and how they can introduce sustainable measures for improvement. This can be achieved through the unfreezing step of Lewin’s theory of change. Only though such re-evaluation can the inertia of the organization under a stigmatization of “ghetto” be broken. Bagley (2003) maintains that to uphold an ethical standard, organizations must first understand the law and articulate corporate values. According to Schwartz and Weber (2006), organizations must first develop an “honest assessment of its problems,” accept it, and formulate a change-management plan that may require modifying the company’s policies and bylaws, which are legal agreements of an organization’s conduct toward its employees and community. Both the policies and the bylaws of an organization may require adjustments to allow changes to occur regarding intolerance for deleterious behaviors.

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