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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

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Volume 41  
Issue 3 *September*

Article 9

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2014

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### Recommended Citation

Romero, Sergio (2014) "Deputized Brokers: A Technique for a Case Study of Conservative Think Tanks in 1990s Welfare Reform," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 3 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol41/iss3/9>

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# Deputized Brokers: A Technique for a Case Study of Conservative Think Tanks in 1990s Welfare Reform

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*This study proposes a novel analytical technique in a case study of think tank brokerage. As brokers, think tanks structurally link foundations and media, yet they do so as representatives of a policy network consisting of corporate funders and affiliated think tanks. Print media sought their policy analysis regarding the welfare system and prescriptions for reform. Network and content methods are the bases for the presentation of the technique. The coupling of results from each of the technique's components shows how resources tie actors, as well as how their conversion from one form to another is the basis for a newfound understanding of structural brokerage. Taken together, the findings demonstrate the significance of representative brokerage that deepens the meaning of the policy advocacy mission of these organizations.*

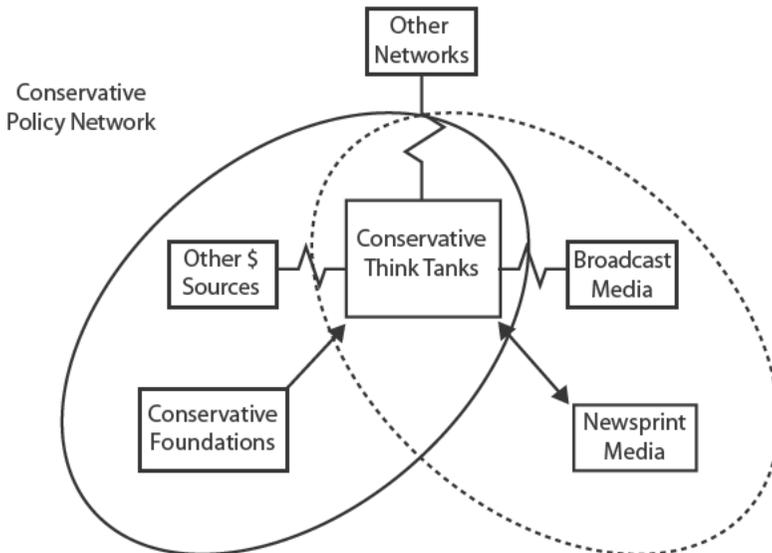
*Key words: brokerage; social network analysis; content analysis; conservative think tanks; welfare reform*

In recent decades, social scientists have examined the role of policy-planning organizations in the policy process. Interest ranges from think tanks' relationship to the state (Abelson, 1996; McGann & Weaver, 2000; Ricci, 1993), influence with the media (Abelson, 1992), interlocks with the corporate community (Burriss, 1992; Moore, Sobieraj, Whitt, Mayorova, & Beaulieu, 2002), consensus-building roles (Burriss, 2008; Carroll & Carson, 2003), policy-motivated funding support (Callahan, 1999; Colwell, 1993; Covington, 1997; Lagemann, 1999; Messer-Davidow, 1993; Roelofs, 2003; Saloma, 1984), and the agenda-setting activities of think tanks in policy development (see Burch, 1997; Callahan, 1999; Covington, 1997; Jenkins & Shumate, 1985; McDonald, 2008; Messer-Davidow, 1993; Peschek, 1987; Ricci, 1993; Rich, 2004; Svihula & Estes, 2008;

Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, September 2014, Volume XLI, Number 3

Smith, 1991). Think tanks engage in timely analysis of legislation, sponsor conferences highlighting their policy preferences, publish their findings for mass audiences, serve as a gateway to federal civil service employment, and provide policy expertise to media and legislators alike (Burch, 1997; Domhoff, 2010; Dye, 2001; McCright & Dunlap, 2003). Their role in this process is often cited as influential to legislative outcomes, compared with other policy interest groups (Domhoff, 2010; McGann & Weaver, 2000; Peschek, 1987; Union of Concerned Scientists, 2007). However, systematic analysis of their structural role is absent. The interrelationship of think tanks with foundations and media mitigated by the resources and context of their exchange are considered here. The research on think tanks has used descriptive analyses as the methodological approach of choice. While this inclination is understandable for an organizational actor new to policy development, the accessibility of network studies challenges this traditional approach. This study re-explores the context of think tanks' resource-based ties from these valuable studies to consider a different approach toward their structural role.

Figure 1. Conservative Think Tank Network Brokerage



Critical to the representation and articulation of interests

at the state level is the appearance of think tanks as neutral, nonaligned policy organizations. Their tax-exempt status underscores this structural façade. However, as research has demonstrated, these organizations are anything but impartial to the “stability and reproduction of a system shaped by capitalist social relations” (Peschek, 1987, p. 216; see also Burris, 2008; Carroll & Carson, 2003). They are entrusted as deputies of a network’s corporate interests (Gramsci, 1971, p. 6) that carry forward the general policy preferences of their corporate benefactors through several pipelines, including media. Prior research has examined their reliance upon (Abelson, 1992) as well as impact on the media (Dolny, 1996, 1997, 1998; Rich, 2001). For example, news bureaus on the East Coast and in the Midwest seek last-minute comment from think tanks located on the West Coast before print deadlines (Katz, 2009, pp. 12-13). This study examines the structural, intermediary location between funding sources and transmitters of policy analysis (see Figure 1), which is operationalized here as brokerage.

The ties that connect think tanks and media are derived from dual interests by both. Print media, for example, turn to authoritative sources to clarify complex, technical matters for their storylines and sometimes provide a forum in the op-ed section for individual analysts to champion policy matters. The think tanks sampled in this paper leverage this need for expertise by advocating their policy analysis. For example, the Heritage Foundation allocated 13% of its budget in the 1990s to marketing, including nearly half a million dollars for consultants to assist them in these efforts (Georges, 1995). The president of Heritage stated they “stress an efficient, effective delivery system. Production is one side; *marketing is equally important*” (emphasis added) (Covington, 1997, p. 14). The president of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) similarly declared:

I make no bones about marketing... We pay as much attention to the dissemination of the product as we do the content. We’re probably the first major think tank to get into the electronic media. We hire ghost writers for scholars to produce op-ed articles that are sent to the one hundred and one cooperating newspapers—three pieces every two weeks. (p. 20)

The newsprint media citations referenced in this case study are a consequence of concerted efforts by these organizations to market themselves as credible sources of policy expertise (Ricci, 1993; Rich, 2004).

The present study seeks to broaden the research on think tanks by introducing a novel analytical technique that, if parsed, would appear as two distinct cases. Consisting of both network and content analyses, the technique's quantitative and qualitative structure is applied to a case study of conservative think tanks that participated in the development of welfare reform in the 1990s. Alone, each of these methods shed light on the network characteristics and semantic content of the think tanks' relationships with foundations and media. These relationships are determined by the resource substance that establishes their ties: funding (i.e., capital) that connects foundations and think tanks; and policy analysis (i.e., information) linking think tanks to media. Knowledge of the above linkages is not new. The objective of this study's analytical technique is to operationalize brokerage that recognizes mixed resource types in the process of connecting structurally distinct groups of actors. The empirical research on brokerage is generally focused on the study of persons and a singular resource—usually information. To proceed with the investigation, I pose two levels of questions, the first concerning each method:

At the network level, how is structural equivalence ascertained, and what does this indicate about a think tank's similarity and dissimilarity with its peers?

At the semantic level, what are the policy criticisms and reform prescriptions, and what does their frequency of appearance suggest?

This study's mixed methods approach presents an opportunity to peer into brokerage, beyond observing how brokers link otherwise unconnected actors (for which they are known). The second set of hypotheses concerns the implications of combining these methods:

How similarly does network equivalence correspond with media impact?

How is the resource structure of capital and information an indicator of brokerage?

The point of the study is to present a systematic analysis of think tanks that incorporates a broader understanding of structural brokerage in social network analysis (e.g., Burt, 2005; Gould & Fernandez, 1989; Marsden, 1982; Rydgren, 2005) at the organizational level (Fernandez & Gould, 1994; Knoke, 2009).

The social network analysis measures employed for the politically conservative policy network are drawn from financial ties between think tanks and private foundations that fund them. The procedures systematize the descriptive analysis of relational ties found in much of the literature regarding these organizations (see Roelofs, 2003; Saloma, 1984; Stefancic & Delgado, 1996). The dispensation of general operating grants for policy analysis by foundations sampled in this paper is not a common practice in the mainstream of private foundations (Colwell, 1993; Covington, 1997; Krehely, House, & Kernan, 2004; Saloma, 1984; Stefancic & Delgado, 1996). This operational strategy portends a practice critical to the outcomes of think tank activities. As noted by other scholars, this type of resource commitment permits think tanks to shift organizational resources on an as-needed basis toward policy issues that may suddenly warrant their attention (Krehely et al., 2004; Rich, 2004). The absence of project-specific grants that constrain an organization's activities expands the autonomy of think tanks to engage in creative advocacy of the network's policy preferences.

Foundations are generally regarded as passive institutions barred from directly engaging with the political process (e.g., campaign donations, lobbying, etc.). Yet, their bystander role does not mean they don't exert influence regarding think tank activities. For instance, according to Covington (1997), "in 1986, Olin and Smith Richardson foundations withdrew their support from [AEI] because of substantive disagreement with certain of its policies" leading to the resignation of its president (p. 15). Krehely et al. (2004) noted that conservative foundations have a high degree of interaction with grant recipients "meeting with them at least once formally during the year,

and several additional times informally at various conferences, retreats and meetings" (pp. 55-56). The structure of grant money identified in this study involves an exchange relationship where one actor provides a valuable and needed resource (money) to another in return for the latter's tacit conformity (Knoke, 1993). The competitive nature of fundraising-dependent non-profit organizations reinforces the general interests of the funding party, in this case a category of philanthropies that prioritize support for policy analysis in their funding missions (Covington, 1997; Saloma, 1984). By combining content analysis of media ties with network measures, the politically conservative think tanks assume a structural role as the deputy of the foundations' general policy preferences.

### Brokerage

Brokerage refers to strategic actors that control or coordinate the flow of network resources between clusters of actors (Marsden, 1982). Brokers facilitate the exchange of resources derived from bridging structural holes across networks (Burt, 2005). The holes or gaps enable them to function as a resource bridge between actors and the networks they represent. Brokers may accrue benefits (e.g., status, promotion, experience, commissions, etc.) as a consequence of influencing resource flows.

Brokerage demonstrates a distinct capability of linking otherwise disconnected actors (Gould & Fernandez, 1989; Marsden, 1982). Thus, brokers are visionaries of resource transactions that might otherwise be unfulfilled. In a sense, they take advantage of opportunities either ignored or addressed on a limited basis. They manifest social capital by "detecting and developing rewarding opportunities" generated from ties—strong and weak, close and distant—to actors, social networks, or other social structures (Burt, 2005, p. 18; Everett & Borgatti, 2005). Social capital theory casts light on characteristics of broker advantage, especially for self-interested purposes. A recent study of organizational social capital found that possession of it by corporate alliances was key to facilitating (as well as limiting) opportunities in a multi-industry system (Knoke, 2009).

Generally, brokerage is measured with betweenness centrality, a derivative measure in social network analysis.

Betweenness refers to an ego's intermediary location between alters in a network. The alters depend on the ego's betweenness to connect them to distant alters (Scott, 2000). Betweenness centrality "recognizes that intermediate actors can control the messages passing through indirect channels" assumed to take place within a relatively restricted network of exchanges (Marsden, 1982, p. 205). This position confers a certain degree of power. Sociograms in network visualization software (such as Netdraw) illustrate an actor's betweenness network location which network scores alone are incapable of displaying (Scott, 2000).

In Figure 1, conservative think tanks are positioned between structurally distant actors. This enables the ego grouping (i.e., conservative think tanks) to directly transmit resource-influenced policy interests to alters of significance (e.g., media) that could otherwise be channeled through indirect, circuitous routes by remote actors. For example, practices think tanks frequently engage in for their constituents such as emails, workshops, conferences, or publications would yield limited policy diffusion. Though these practices may percolate to a mass audience, they may not be as effective in reaching it as broadly or efficiently as through the media, especially with hot-button legislation. The streamlining of that process has potential benefits. Knoke (1990) suggested that "as the number of ties between actors decreases, power accruing to any one broker rises" (p. 144).

A recent essay by Everett and Borgatti (2005) proposes an extension of the betweenness centrality concept to the supra-individual level by considering a set of actors' attributes for analysis. They contend that attributes such as ethnicity, age, or occupation may be used as a source for group-level centrality measurement. The operationalizing of this concept in this manner encourages problematizing brokerage beyond persons. Their approach extends our understanding of brokerage, but nevertheless is limited to mediating roles *within* a network, where a singular resource is assumed to be transmitted. This is consistent with the literature. The current paper's technique sketches a structural brokerage role that integrates two seemingly distinct networks differentiated by the resource types. The conservative policy network is the core of the think tanks' identity, but the media associated network is the

recipient of the base network's interests. Hence information, not money, is the transmitted resource. Though not examined with traditional network measures, the latter network completes the picture of the think tanks' structural role.

Furthermore, the empirical research takes for granted the resource type, typically information, as the medium of exchange in brokers' activities. The control of sought-after knowledge may translate into advantages for the intermediate holder of it. This applies to capital. Brokers, conscious or not, manipulate this exchange by virtue of their structural location (Marsden, 1982). Thus, their role is dependent upon the patterns of relations between actors with whom they connect (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Extant research also recognizes a broker's resource utility to determine the activity role of the think tank (see ideal types in Gould & Fernandez, 1989). The present study considers brokers that traverse their core membership network to connect with organizational actors vis-à-vis the resources they exchange, which forms another network. I posit the two methods side-by-side.

The theoretical model of brokerage for this paper's analysis is based on Gould and Fernandez's (1989) concepts of information transaction brokers. Brokers may perform any one or combination of brokerage functions, but according to the authors, each transaction is exclusive to an ideal type, including:

- Coordinator: broker and actors are connected to similar group;
- Cosmopolitan: actors being connected belong to the same group, but broker is outsider;
- Representative: initiator of resource and broker belong to same group, but resource passes through broker as it leaves the group;
- Gatekeeper: broker is the recipient of external resources and in the position to redistribute these (or not) to co-members; and
- Liaison: broker and connecting actors each belong to disparate groups.

For simplicity's sake, conservative think tanks in this paper are viewed as performing a representative broker function. They carry forward the general policy preferences of their corporate benefactors in their policy-related activities (Domhoff,

2010). The financial relationship between these actors is described in much of the literature as an ideological policy network (e.g., Burriss, 2008; Saloma, 1984). Trends in funding patterns, descriptions of policy philosophies, and identification of similar policy goals underscore such networks (e.g., Arnove, 1980; Krehely et al., 2004; Saloma, 1984). Vasi (2011), however, argues that if two sub-groups comprising a network are ideologically compatible, the representative and gatekeeper brokers dissolve (i.e., miscible) into each other as one ideal type, or representative brokerage. While the policy goals of the private foundations and think tanks in this paper's sample are compatible (e.g., support of free-market principles; conflict with the reach of the welfare state; etc.), think tank brokerage is not miscible. These organizations have distinct functions which are reinforced by tax law. Moreover, think tanks are not recipients of external funds that they redistribute to foundations or think tanks in the policy network, as the gatekeeper role would suggest.

As mentioned previously, conservative think tanks are explicit about the bridge they engineer to disseminate their policy preferences. Burt (2005), however, contends brokers do not optimize their access to structural holes. In other words, they do not necessarily set out to be brokers. "People vary in their ability to detect holes in social structure ... and inaccurately diagnose the value of their network" (p. 28). The target audience for think tank policy analysis is lawmakers, but perhaps their policy advocacy facilitated a rethinking of the relationship bridge to media as a by-product of this goal (Burt, 2005). As Burt and others (Marsden, 1982) have shown, brokers emerge organically, based in part on actors' needs in a network.

## Data and Methods

The primary unit of analysis for this study is the think tanks from which the resource-based ties to foundations and print media are constructed. First, a purposive sample of eleven conservative foundations were identified reputationally from "actors widely believed by knowledgeable observers to have the actual or potential power to 'move and shake' the system" (Knoke, 1993, p. 30; also see Campbell, 2000). Reputational sampling is problematic, but it sufficed to

demonstrate the technique. Studies of philanthropic foundations that program monies for policy analysis identify them in a variety of ways, including samples derived: with a minimum asset level (\$10 million) and a minimum annual percentage of grants (5%) awarded toward public policy analysis (Colwell, 1993, pp. 10-11); annual grant-making totaling over a million dollars (Covington, 1997; Howell, 1995; Saloma, 1984); or through snowball sampling (Allen, 1992; Stefancic & Delgado, 1996). Their identified reputation in the literature then led to an examination of mission statements outlining their general policy principles located on their websites or in annual reports. The mission statements reflect their political philosophies regarding the function of the welfare state and economy. The group of conservative foundations identified include: Bradley Foundation (BF); Carthage Foundation (CF); Castle Rock Foundation (CRF); Adolph Coors Foundation (ACF); Earhart Foundation (EF); JM Foundation (JMF); Philip M. McKenna Foundation (PMF); John M. Olin Foundation (JOF); Smith Richardson Foundation, Inc. (SRF); Scaife Family Foundation (SFF); and Sarah Scaife Foundation (SSF).

Second, conservative think tanks identified in this article for years 1992 to 1994 were also subjected to the reputational criteria. The literature on these organizations identifies as few as a handful to as many as one hundred and eight conservative think tanks (Allen, 1992; Callahan, 1999; Covington, 1997; Howell, 1995; Ricci, 1993; Rich, 2004; Saloma, 1984; Smith, 1991; Stefancic & Delgado, 1996; Stoesz, 1987). For example, Covington (1997) identified the top eighteen grant-receiving think tanks between 1992 and 1994. Five of the six think tanks that I sample appear consistently in the top tier of those most frequently cited by media (Dolny, 1996, 1997, 1998). We can reasonably expect these organizations to express similar policy preferences with major pieces of legislation, especially in regards to reforms in the social welfare state that call for a 'limited government, personal responsibility, and free enterprise.' The differences in policy prescription reflect reform disagreements but are not cleavers of a fundamental philosophy as it regards the welfare state or economy. Further examination of welfare-related policy areas on their websites, such as federal government deregulation of health and human services, were indicators of their policy preference vis-à-vis welfare reform.

The content analysis is the qualitative aspect of the paper's technique. The sample of think tanks for this paper's technique is not meant to be exhaustive. The focus is not exclusive to the top reputable organizations nor to frequency of media citations regarding welfare reform or the welfare state. Rather, the focus is on how to demonstrate one half of the technique. Three of the six think tanks have national and international policy scopes, and the other half tend to restrict themselves to domestic and/or regional issues.

The sample of think tanks consisting of the paper's conservative policy network include: American Enterprise Institute (AEI); Cato Institute; Heritage Foundation; Hudson Institute; Manhattan Institute for Policy Research; and National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA). The first three are located in Washington D.C. The Manhattan Institute is located in New York City, the Hudson Institute in Wisconsin, and NCPA in Texas. Although it would be ideal to have data from a larger sample of think tanks and more newspaper articles over more years, the presentation of this paper's technique is a useful first step.

### *Network Analysis*

The ties connecting think tanks with conservative foundations are motivated by philosophies and established through money. I apply network analysis on two grounds: (1) to discern relationships of mutual interest where one set of actors (i.e., foundations) provides resources to another group of actors (i.e., think tanks) to buttress the latter's activities (Domhoff, 2010; Knoke, 1993; Krehely et al., 2004); and (2) to explore the extent to which policy network equivalence is similar to their frequency of media citations. The former investigates characteristics in the network and the latter examines whether the patterning of network similarities is comparable to their appearance in print media. Media coverage is a means for foundations to monitor the success of grant-receiving think tanks (Krehely et al., 2004). The network relationships are examined vis-à-vis structural equivalence and relational network measures.

The UCINET 6 software program (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002) was used to render scores and mapping from sociomatrices representing the think tanks' financial ties to

foundations. Three measures in network analysis calculate structural similarity in membership and relational characteristics: affiliation, density, and cluster analyses. Affiliation analysis measures how think tanks are connected with each other as a result of receiving grants from a set of foundations. Density measures the proportion of actual ties to the maximum possible relations (Scott, 2000). To what extent do think tank ties with foundations represent network cohesion? Cluster analysis is a procedure for identifying subsets of actors based on their structural similarities. Think tanks may be similar (or dissimilar) to one another in terms of their network ties (direct and indirect) determined by their grant-receiving patterns. Thus, clusters are contingent on the density levels found (Scott, 2000).

This paper assumes that grant-receipt ties are expressions of trust (Krehely et al., 2004; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). It considers Knoke and Laumann's (1982) concept of a policy domain whose organizational members are recognized by "specifying a substantively defined criterion of mutual relevance or common orientation ... concerned with formulating, advocating, and selecting courses of action" to analyze problems associated with the policy (p. 256). The policy domain's time frame for this study is 1992 through 1994. The time frame represents a brief period in the run-up to welfare reform enacted in 1996. As Withorn (1998) and others point out, welfare reform was a path-breaking policy that galvanized various segments of conservatism (O'Connor, 2001; Piven, 2004; Williams, 1997), including the sample of think tanks and foundations in this paper.

### *Content Analysis*

The second step of the paper's technique is an analysis of the network's policy preferences represented by what think tanks articulate and what is attributed to them. What do they convey, in what frequency, and what are the implications of both? Articles from U.S.-based dailies containing references or op-ed articles by conservative think tank representatives were searched. Keywords—welfare, welfare reform, dependency, and poverty—were searched alongside the names of each organization. For example, claims decrying the wastefulness of the federal government's social spending were located along with similar assertions about the government spending

trillions on programs since the War on Poverty was declared in 1965. Much of the coding depended on a latent semantic analysis of themes that relied on a reading of works by authors self-identified as conservatives, such as George Gilder (1981), Charles Murray (1984), Lawrence Mead (1986) and Marvin Olasky (1995) on the social welfare state and welfare reform.

I coded for two conceptually broad themes that took one of two shapes: criticism of the welfare system (including the role of the state and its policies) and policy reform prescriptions. These dichotomous categories are a partition of what appeared after sub-categories were constructed. Ten percent of the newspaper articles (i.e., 23 of 230) were sampled. This procedure drew eight sub-categories, later clarified with a thorough examination of all the newspaper articles. A total of 594 content units were gleaned from the universe of articles obtained electronically through searches in Academic Universe (Lexis/Nexis) and ProQuest Newstand from 53 of the most important newspapers available in the United States.

Table 1. Think Tank Affiliations, Aggregate (3 years)

	HF	AEI	CATO	MI	HI	NCPA
HF	9	8	4	7	6	7
AEI	8	10	5	8	7	7
CATO	4	5	5	5	5	4
MI	7	8	5	9	8	7
HI	6	7	5	8	8	6
NCPA	7	7	4	7	6	8

Key: HF=Heritage Foundation; AEI=American Enterprise Institute; CATO=Cato Institute; MI=Manhattan Institute; HI=Hudson Institute; NCPA=National Center for Policy Analysis

## Findings

### *Network Analysis Results*

The first research question directs our attention to structural similarities. The affiliation ties representing think tank membership with foundations was aggregated for years 1992 to 1994 (see Table 1). The row-by-column cells for each think tank to itself represent the cumulative number of

foundations from which it received grant awards over this period. The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) obtained foundation monies from ten of the eleven possible foundations. Manhattan and Heritage received the second most grants from nine foundations. The adjacent row-by-column cells indicate the overlap that a think tank has with its network colleagues. Again, by way of example, Heritage and AEI shared eight foundations from which they received grants.

Density analysis paints a picture of the degree to which foundations and think tanks intermingle, suggesting network cohesion. For this reason, matrices in each year were coded in binary form representing either the presence or absence of a tie. A perfect score of 1 means all possible links are filled, while 0 indicates no linkage. Density for 1992 was .590. In 1993 it was .545, and in 1994 it yielded .393. The aggregated density of the overall network (11 foundations by 6 think tanks) is .510 for the three years of grant analysis. This score indicates that at least fifty-one percent of all possible grant donations from every foundation were distributed to every think tank, thus constituting a network.

Table 2. Hierarchical Think Tank Clusters, Aggregate (3 years)

	CATO	HF	AEI	MI	HI	NCPA
45.00			X	X		
41.00			X	X	X	
34.07		X	X	X	X	
26.23		X	X	X	X	X
19.13	X	X	X	X	X	X

Key: HF=Heritage Foundation; AEI=American Enterprise Institute; CATO=Cato Institute; MI=Manhattan Institute; HI=Hudson Institute; NCPA=National Center for Policy Analysis

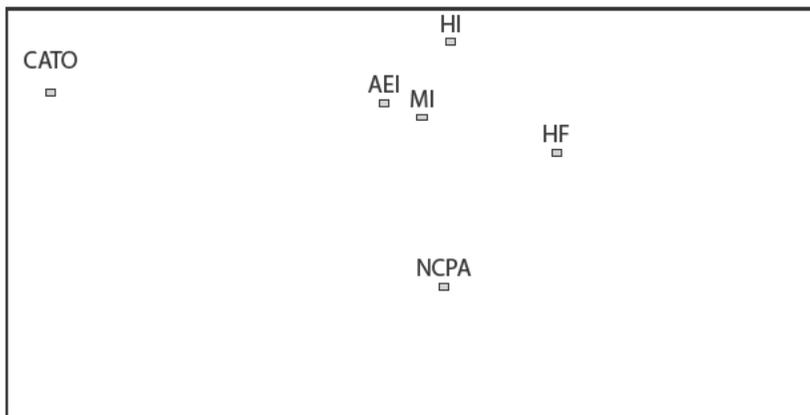
I now turn to cluster analysis to represent sub-groups or clusters based on similar characteristics of grant-receipt. Following Johnson's (1967) hierarchal clustering, I ranked the most similar think tanks near the top, followed by groupings of increasingly heterogeneous actors at each level below. The scores represent discrete thresholds that indicate the average level of actor similarities for that cluster (see Table 2). At each

level from the top, the measure adds an actor (or more) to an already existing cluster, to form a new cluster, so that the average level of similarity within all clusters is maximized. The analysis proceeds until all actors are exhausted.

The results indicate AEI and Manhattan shared the most similar characteristics linking them to foundations (see Table 2). Their grouping as a cluster in the network vis-à-vis other think tanks tells us that over the three-year period AEI and Manhattan courted similar foundations. The succeeding cluster incorporates the Hudson Institute but has less similar network characteristics. Every ensuing cluster devolves in similarity, as indicated by the proximity scores in the left hand column.

An added illustration of think tank similarities is seen in Figure 2. The multidimensional scaling graph is a representation of their spatial setting relative to structural similarities. The cluster represented by AEI and Manhattan is orbited by Hudson and to a lesser extent Heritage and so forth. The visualization depicts their structural equivalence.

Figure 2. Multidimensional Scale of Think Tanks, Aggregate (3 years)



Key: HF=Heritage Foundation; AEI=American Enterprise Institute; CATO=Cato Institute; MI=Manhattan Institute; HI=Hudson Institute; NCPA=National Center for Policy Analysis

### *Content Analysis Results*

The second research question turns towards a representation of manifest and latent meanings of the think tanks' policy preferences. A combined total of 594 thematic content units

regarding welfare reform issues were identified from a universe of 230 newspapers articles between 1992 and 1994. Two broad thematic categories were underscored by the eight primary themes that emerged upon closer semantic inspection of the articles (see Table 3). The first category contends the welfare system is a pernicious social policy that: (a) is costly, inefficient, and harmful because it is administered by the federal government; (b) has far-reaching consequences, including adverse effects on the welfare participants' participation in the labor force, child-bearing and -rearing, and marriage stability; (c) doesn't alleviate poverty nor dissuade the poor from relying on general assistance; (d) misrepresents real poverty and minimizes abundant prosperity; and (e) relies on liberals' misguided assumptions about the state and the poor.

Table 3. The Conservative Policy Network's Claims of Welfare Reform, 1992-1994

Theme	Description	N	%
<i>Thematic Category One: Pernicious Welfare System</i>			
1	Criticism of Welfare Programs/State	117	20
2	Pernicious Social Effects of Welfare	190	32
3	Criticism of Liberal Support for Welfare	29	5
4	Poor are Better Off	47	8
Total:		383	65
<i>Thematic Category Two: Welfare Reform Prescription</i>			
5	Welfare Reform Goals	87	14
6	Welfare Reform Objectives	93	16
7	Welfare Reform Predictions	20	3
8	Private Sector Alternative	11	2
Total		211	35
Totals		594	100

The results indicate that the social effects of the welfare system have the highest thematic content units, followed by criticism of the welfare system and welfare reform objectives and goals. Parsing all of the content units year by year saw a steady increase between 1992 and 1993 from one hundred

twenty-four to one hundred forty-nine recorded references. There was a dramatic increase in 1994, with three hundred twenty-one content units seen in nearly all of the thematic classifications led by theme two, with one hundred twenty-two references (38%). Themes two and five also had the highest increases in 1994, escalating forty-two percent and forty percent from the year before. Themes four and eight each decreased. The assertion that the poor live better (theme four) was an unanticipated theme that contained forty-seven references between 1992 and 1993. but dropped to three references in 1994.

There were a wide variety of claims about the inadequacy of the welfare system in category one. For example, Michael Tanner (1994) at CATO asserted the federal government had "spent more than \$3.5 trillion on social-welfare programs since the Great Society of the 1960s. Yet the poverty rate today is higher than when we began" (p. 12A). According to William J. Bennett (1992), fellow at Hudson and Heritage, "Americans have developed an unhealthy reliance on, and unrealistic expectations about, what the federal government will do for them. We have to begin to alter people's assumptions about the federal government's role" (p. A17). David Murray (1994) at Heritage equated welfare participation with marriage, stating, "In America, we are pursuing the dangerous course of replacing families with the indifferent welfare state, now the official pater of vast numbers of children. Welfare mothers are marrying the state, as it were..." (p. 18).

Disputing official poverty statistics and assumptions about the poor, Robert Rector at Heritage claimed, "For most Americans, poverty means destitution, an inability to provide a family with nutritious food, clothing and reasonable shelter. Only a small number ... fit that description" (Ross, 1993, p. 22). The net effect of misleading poverty figures by the Census Bureau that inflate government spending, argued Rector, is "millions of children who grow up without fathers, adults who lack the work ethic and the dignity it provides, and entire generations robbed of real dreams and hopes for the future" (Rector, 1992, p. A10). Underscoring an assumption about the pernicious effects of the welfare system, Walter Olson (1992) of the Manhattan Institute claimed, "almost everyone who gets a job in this country escapes poverty. Yet poor adults are

working much less than they used to, and most do not work at all. The problem is absence from the labor force..." (p. A14). In a review of a book by Myron Magnet of the Manhattan Institute, the columnist George Will summarized the thesis of the book in the following manner:

Since the 1960s such central institutions as the law, universities, public schools, the welfare and mental health systems have been permeated with [liberal] 1960s values. Often the changes have been driven by a perverse premise—that the social order is an infringement on freedom rather than freedom's foundation. (1993, p. C7)

The second thematic category shifts towards policy prescriptions. Welfare reform goals and objectives comprise the primary thrust in this section. For example, Charles Murray (1993), fellow at AEI in the 1990s, proposed ending all support to single mothers stating, "The AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) payment goes to zero. Single mothers are not eligible for subsidized housing or for food stamps" (p. A14) in an editorial that garnered the attention of Congress and the White House. Rector (1994) argued in an op-ed that the general goals of welfare reform should be the elimination of "illegitimacy, divorce and non-work" (p. 7B).

Policy proposals included such recommendations as devolving the federal government's role to the states, requiring work and education for program participation, and displacing the state with the private sector. Charles Finn, Jr., of the Hudson Institute, stated "nobody in Washington should tell people at home what to do or how to do it," (cited in Walters, 1994, p. 1) implying that states understood their population's needs better than an intrusive federal government. Arguing about the primacy of the free market, Burton Yale Pines, Vice President at Heritage, said "it is economic growth that makes it possible for living standards to increase for nearly every American. It is growth that defeats poverty. Reagan reminded America that government cannot create economic growth and that government generally is the enemy of economic growth" (cited in Thomas, 1994, p. G-04). The NCPA suggested a transfer of the welfare system's administration to the private sector (Fund, 1994).

## Discussion

At the outset of this study I claimed that its purpose was to re-explore the descriptive research approach taken in work about think tanks in a systematic manner. Their structural role is operationalized as brokerage with an analytical technique instigated by a case study of conservative think tanks that participated in 1990s welfare reform. The technique was devised from knowledge of these actors' resource induced ties derived from their media-related policy advocacy and relationship to private financing. Thus two sets of questions were asked. The first set dealt with each of the methodological components: the relational and affiliational characteristics of the think tanks and a semantic interpretation and frequency count of their policy preferences in print media. Each of these paints a fractured picture of their activities. The second set of questions concerns the implications for integrating each method and is, in a sense, the core of the study's focus. The resource types—bookmarked on the receiving and diffusion ends—that tied these brokers to peripheral yet integral organizations motivated the third and fourth research questions. It is the second set I discuss below.

### *Structural Equivalence and its Qualitative Cousin*

The standard network analysis procedures of the technique illustrate the social context of think tank relations and affiliation emanating from financial ties. Other network measures could be substituted to demonstrate the existence of a network. However, the third research question suggests that the affiliation and cluster measures derived from dependence on donor money may influence what policy issues they consider and how they articulate prescriptions of them. Preference for the dominance of the private sector over an intrusive welfare state and its policies, like general cash assistance (i.e., welfare), is evident in both the foundations' mission statements and think tanks' media advocacy. The autonomous implication of general operating grants, however, does not diminish the need to satisfy the intent of institutional donors. The structural equivalence findings point to a competitive relationship (Knocke & Yang, 2008) between think tanks as a result of their similar ties to foundations. As non-profits, they try to garner as many financial donations as possible from these and

other like-minded sources. We may speculate that the public disclosure of grant recipients in either foundation reports or their IRS 990-PF tax filings “encourages [think tanks] to model their beliefs and behaviors after one another” (Knoke, 1990, p. 11). Looking at Table 1 suggests all but CATO are aggressive in their fundraising strategies towards the set of foundations in the network. However, as media reports have pointed out, CATO derives significant amounts of resources from one of its founding and still active board members, the billionaire Charles G. Koch, thus their relatively lower structural equivalence scores.

Turning to the media advocacy results, we find how the think tanks collectively put their stamp on welfare reform. It would be presumptuous to equate network results and frequency of media appearances as compatible measures. Nevertheless, the premise of this study’s brokerage analysis rests on the proposition that a key resource (i.e., policy analysis) that these organizations manifest is a consequence of its network representative role. Combining any quantitative measure with a qualitative one raises the question of compatibility. Let’s look at AEI by way of example. It was the organization most connected to foundations through grants in all three years (see Table 1), but was referenced by print media the second most during the three-year period. Does this mean it had the second most effect among the sampled think tanks towards the development of welfare reform? A closer inspection of its policy proposals suggests it may have been the most influential think tank with welfare reform. AEI’s Charles Murray, a leading voice of conservative thought on welfare reform, was praised by President Clinton for arguing that unwed births were a social problem made worse by the welfare system (Bennett & Wehner, 1994). Many scholars concluded that President Clinton assimilated many of the assumptions put forth by conservative commentators on welfare reform, as evidenced by the provisions of the bill he signed in 1996 (e.g., Goldberg & Collins, 2001).

In another example regarding to the third research question, CATO had the lowest affiliated score in the policy network, but had the third highest occurrence of media citations for 1994. Perhaps CATO turned toward welfare reform analysis with more resources after the Clinton administration’s

national health care initiative, a policy this organization was highly critical of, was perceived as declining in public support (Rushesky & Patel, 1997). Furthermore, when we compare actors in the densest cluster, consisting of AEI, Manhattan, and Hudson, we find only AEI with a significant amount of media references. Yet, Manhattan and Hudson were early advocates of devolving the federal government's role onto the states, an idea that was incorporated in the form of block grants found in the final bill. This funding mechanism permitted each state to dispense general assistance based on participation criteria and time-limits that they determined. Perhaps the proposal to devolve the state's role was a foregone conclusion to the outcome of welfare reform and more did not need to be articulated; this may have resulted in higher media frequency counts for these proponents, had it been otherwise.

Herein lays the utility of the qualitative aspect of the technique that complicates how compatible it is with its network cousin. It is through content analysis that the think tanks' policy preferences are identified. This does two things. First, it systematizes the think tanks' collective leanings on a policy issue by identifying, grouping, and calculating macro- and meso-level themes. I arrived at two macro-level themes consisting of the problematic features of existing welfare policy and reform prescriptions. The sub-categories in each articulate the collective stamp these actors put on welfare reform. Second, this method further identifies the thematic foci for each of these actors over a three-year period as they articulated it. I was able to identify who said what and compare them to claims-making in the narrative literature (e.g., Reese, 2005). The former is encapsulated in Table 3 and the latter in the descriptive results shown above.

A surprising finding in the results yet not addressed in the literature was the claim that the poor are materially privileged, thus welfare programs are unnecessary (Table 3, Theme 4). It was a compelling argument buttressed with data about material comfort (e.g., TV sets and microwaves owned per capita) the poor enjoy today relative to the past. Though flawed in their assumptions and analysis, this claim underscores the long-standing myth that state relief indulges an indolent, materially privileged class that should be employed.

Most of the think tanks' print media advocacy described a pernicious welfare system. Criticism of welfare programs

(Theme 1) coupled with assertions about the social damage it inflicts (Theme 2) were the overall top claims. This is fitting with a study by McCright and Dunlap (2000) that analyzed the significance of conservative forces' counter-claims to recast the scientific consensus over global climate change. By not only casting doubt but also redirecting the terms of policy debate to include their policy views, these organizations were able to insert themselves as legitimate alternative policy authorities, despite being an insignificant minority within the scientific community (McCright & Dunlap, 2010). In a similar fashion, the results in Table 1 demonstrate the significance of persistent claims-making about the deficits of the welfare system years before welfare reform was enacted. Welfare reform had previously taken place in 1988, and it included provisions about work participation, education, and greater local control with which conservative policy analysts appeared content. Yet welfare reform was resurrected in 1992, and conservative think tanks took a vociferous stance about the welfare state's destabilizing effect on individual liberty. Perhaps forging a consensus about this argument unlocked the box of provisions in the 1996 law advocated by conservative think tanks.

The newer prescriptions, minor by comparison, were no less significant. Many of the provisions that conservative think tanks advocated for (Table 3, Them 6)—devolution of program administration to states; replacement of previous entitlement features with a block grant program to states; lifetime participation limits; work requirements; family caps; and participation restrictions for immigrants—were codified in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, or welfare reform. Further investigation of similar data from 1995 and 1996 is needed to determine how claims-making of welfare system deficits and prescriptions to remedy them correspond with each other over time.

### *Brokerage Reconsidered*

The fourth research question focused on the interplay of mixed resources in brokerage. The illustration of the conservative think tanks' structural location in Figure 1 identifies the two distinct groupings of peripheral actors—foundations and print media—that think tanks connect. But these ties are not restricted to a single or communication-based tie, as the

brokerage literature generally assumes. This study delves deeper into the representational structure of conservative think tank brokerage in pursuit of a public forum for the policy preferences of its benefactors. In doing so, these representative actors bridge the structural hole Burt (2005) regards as a basis of brokerage, taking advantage of media's search for policy expertise on complicated matters (Abelson, 1992; Katz, 2009). Thus, structural advantage is levied by think tanks in the process of identifying and matching the interests of peripheral actors.

The study's analytical technique recognizes the implicit resource transformation of capital into information. The nominally unrestricted structure of general operating grants and the funding patterns established by the foundations enables think tanks to fashion their policy analysis within the ideological contours associated with their benefactors' policy philosophies. The resource conversion is suited for the financially dependent think tanks. Their non-profit status limits their revenue generating activities. Smaller think tanks, like the NCPA, depend on as much as fifty-two percent of their funding from foundations, while the more diversified organizations, like Heritage and AEI, rely on twenty to twenty-two percent of their budgets from this source. Thus, foundation grants are indispensable. Therefore, the development and dissemination of think tank policy analysis is contingent on these resources. Foundations can monitor the amount and quality of press coverage their grant recipients receive. All of the think tanks in the case study, like many of their peers, tout their media appearances on their websites. The analytical technique captures the relational and resource bases of their brokerage.

The intellectual opinion role of academics, writers, policy-makers, and other authorities in media is well established. The marketing commitments of conservative think tanks merely exploit this in a concerted manner. But two additional factors require further examination. First, think tank policy analysts are free from many, not all, of the institutional and resource constraints imposed on many of these aforementioned opinion leaders. This is critical to understanding the time, energy, and creative inputs in the development and dissemination of policy analysis when constraints are removed or minimized. While Burt (2005) and others regard brokerage as circumstantial,

there may be work-place or network characteristics that have a higher propensity for brokerage development. Networks are where action takes place. Identifying characteristics of these environment producing networks may yield some answers as to why brokerage occurs among some peers and not others who participate in the same industry. We should not take it as a given that brokerage just happens. Second, a neutral, non-partisan façade may correspond with brokerage. For example, the policy analyses of conservative think tanks in the case study generally align with the Republican Party platform, though their 501 © 3 status prevents them from lobbying and other political activities that are not educational in nature. Notwithstanding their legal status, think tanks or other policy brokers may exploit niche contexts with media and the public alike as neutral third-parties distant from partisan interests of either major political party. Perhaps actors' impartial status is more likely to correspond with their intermediary location as resource interlocutors, but further analysis is needed.

## Conclusion

Scholars of elite think tanks have examined their involvement in the policy arena in various ways. The mission of think tanks in general is to alter the policy landscape. Their relationships with legislators and governing bodies, the media, and their funders work towards that end. The ways in which they knead these relationships have important implications for how policy preferences are disseminated to and received by scores of constituents. For instance, the debate over climate change and the validity of scientific claims regarding it are a function of the input by conservative think tanks (McCright & Dunlap, 2003). A systematic understanding of these relationships is necessary for these and other organizational actors as it relates to their structural roles.

This paper introduced a novel analytical technique that extends our understanding of brokerage. Question four suggests that brokerage is determined by resource types and the context of their resource-based relationships. It is composed of a dual formulation of methods at the relational and semantic levels that examine the social structure of resource-based relationships. The context of these relationships is interpreted as a

representative type of broker. The nature of the foundations' funding commitment as an expression of trust, structurally delegates think tanks to articulate a policy stance. The content analysis results indicate two things: directly, the policy preferences of conservative think tanks as expressed in Table 3; indirectly, ties to media as result of media's coverage with these organization's policy preferences.

The present study advances the theoretical and methodological approaches to brokerage by outlining its quantitative and qualitative properties. What is the resource content of brokerage? While this article analyzes the mediating role of organizational actors in relation to disparate actors, its approach can be replicated for persons in a restricted network when both events and persons or organizations are represented. But the study's analytical technique is inhibited by constraints that content analysis imposes. Mining the qualitative data is time consuming. The larger the sample, the greater the room for error. Nevertheless, researchers can continue investigating brokerage dynamics that traverse networks to connect with external environments. We need better mapping of brokers' mediating role between distinct and seemingly unconnected entities to understand, for instance, issues of power as it relates to resource conversion, control, and diffusion.

A concomitant interest in social networks and globalization will certainly generate questions about the form and content of roles that tie distant actors. Are their differences between brokers in the for-profit and nonprofit private sector? Are they more prevalent in the public sector? How does brokerage in marketing compare with brokerage of an espionage nature? How do state actors function as brokers for the private sector, as research seems to suggest they do for multinational corporations? Are non-governmental organizations brokers for justice? Research questions such as these necessitate a theoretical and methodological approach along the lines of this paper's technique to understand that the most visible actors in any sector are not necessarily the most significant ones to facilitating or constraining the flow of resources to dependent actors.

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