

WORKING PAPERS

The Kinship between Refugee and Family Sponsorship

Audrey Macklin, Luin Goldring, Jennifer Hyndman, Anna Korteweg,
Kathryn Barber, & Jona Zyfi

Working Paper No. 2020/4
August 2020



The *Working Papers* Series is produced jointly by the
Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement (RCIS)
and the CERC in Migration and Integration

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Working Paper

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Audrey Macklin
University of Toronto

Luin Goldring
York University

Jennifer Hyndman
York University

Anna Korteweg
University of Toronto

Kathryn Barber
York University

Jona Zyfi
University of Toronto

Series Editors: Anna Triandafyllidou and Usha George



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ISSN: 1929-9915



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Introduction¹

Private refugee sponsorship depends on establishing and maintaining personal relationships. The primary nexus is between sponsor and refugee, although relations among members of a sponsorship group are also critically important. Tacit assumptions about the nature, scope, dynamics, and effects of the sponsor-refugee relationship operate at the governmental, civil society and individual level. They shape expectations of what private refugee sponsorship means and does for the participants. Yet, the formal architecture of private sponsorship configures relationships between sponsor and refugee that have no obvious contemporary referent and few historical antecedents. Little is known about how refugees and sponsors actually experience the relationship. This chapter draws from an ongoing research project that examines refugee sponsorship from the perspective of sponsors, particularly sponsors of Syrian refugees from 2015 onwards. In this paper, we identify multiple points of contact between private sponsorship and the family as a social unit. We argue that certain features associated with kinship relations are embedded in the institutional structure and interstitial norms of private refugee sponsorship, and that these reverberate in sponsors' accounts of their relationship with sponsored refugees².

The private sponsorship of refugees in Canada spans four decades. The introduction of Canada's new *Immigration Act, 1976*, inaugurated private refugee sponsorship as a stable practice with legislative foundation (Labman, 2016). In 1978 the federal government enacted the necessary regulations to translate law into practice on a significant scale, and the 'designated class' of refugee was introduced. Since then, some 300,000 privately sponsored refugees have arrived in Canada. Until the Syrian Refugee Initiative was launched in 2015, however, research about private sponsorship remained quite scarce. In contrast with research related to government-assisted refugees (GARs), only a handful of researchers have analyzed the outcomes and experience of privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) in Canada across sectors and disciplines (Beiser, 2003; Denton, 2003; Treviranus and Casasola, 2003).

Since 2015, a small 'cottage industry' of research on private sponsorship has emerged (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Hanley et al., 2018; Hynie, 2018; Kyriakides et al., 2018a; Kyriakides et al., 2018b; Macklin et al., 2018; Molloy et al., 2017; Oda et al., 2018). Our online national survey of sponsors who supported Syrians resettled to Canada after November 2015 furnishes one of the first, and perhaps the largest dataset on sponsors to date. Funded by IRCC, it is specific to sponsors in the Syrian Refugee Initiative promised by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in the October 2015 federal election. One notable feature of the sample of more than 530 individuals is that 80% of them were new sponsors. This context is important to understanding the insights, comments, and candour of research participants. The findings we analyze and discuss below reveal the joy, disappointments, challenges, and experiences of people engaged for the first time in this kind of support³. The high proportion of new

¹ The authors thank SSHRC and IRCC for the financial support to enable this research. Audrey Macklin thanks the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation for its generous support of this project.

² One dimension of kinship that this article does not discuss (but which the larger project does address) is the so-called 'echo effect,' whereby resettled refugees seek out sponsors to name extended family member for subsequent sponsorships. In this way, a significant proportion of privately sponsorship involves extended family reunification.

³ Our empirical research comprises two parts. The first is an online survey, now complete, of approximately 530 individual sponsors who chose to respond to a widely distributed invitation to participate. We developed one version for sponsors still in the twelve-month sponsorship period, and a modified version for those who had finished the formal sponsorship when they completed the survey. The survey was funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The

sponsors among the research participants may bear on the volume, content and candour of the written comments, but we cannot specify its significance any further. Their accounts are based on a single experience (although a few also participated in volunteer support for Government Assisted Refugees), whereas veteran sponsors can situate their most recent sponsorship in comparative context.

The sponsors who responded to our survey were self-selected. We do not and cannot claim that the survey is representative of all sponsors in Canada; in the absence of data about private sponsors based on random sampling, no baseline for comparison exists. We found that a disproportionate percentage of our respondents are from urban centres and from Ontario, with 37% of sponsors in the survey from Toronto (Macklin et al., 2018). However, we note that recent data from the Longitudinal Immigrant Database indicates that 40% of refugee sponsors reside in Toronto. Results of our survey show that particular demographic characteristics define sponsors of the Syrian cohort. Survey respondents are more likely to be women than men (74%), over 50 years of age (74%), with 49% over 60 years. Our research shows that those surveyed are also highly educated; some 84% have at least one university degree, and more than half (53%) hold a graduate or professional degree. The self-selection of sponsors in the survey is both a limitation, in terms of representation, but also an opportunity as their motivation to participate and reflect on the sponsorship experience resulted in rich insights in the open-ended parts of the survey.

Our empirical research comprises two parts. The first is an online survey, now complete, of approximately 530 individual sponsors of Syrian refugees who chose to respond to a widely distributed invitation to participate in the survey. We developed one version for sponsors still in the twelve-month sponsorship period, and a modified version for those who had already finished the formal sponsorship when they completed the survey⁴. The second phase of the research consists of semi-structured interviews with individual sponsors to acquire a deeper understanding of their experience and perceptions.

In addition to quantitative data collection, the survey enabled respondents to supplement responses to various questions with written comments. One was a question about challenge(s) in their interactions with the sponsored family. We also posed the following open-ended question at the end:

If you would like to tell us more about your private sponsorship expectations or experiences, please use the following text box to discuss any experiences or ideas that you think are relevant not otherwise captured in this survey.

Virtually all material presented in this chapter is drawn from written comments to these two questions. We extracted all written comments from these sections and used open coding to identify emergent themes. Almost half the survey participants took the opportunity to write in a comment (256 people). Many contributions were detailed and introspective. They disclosed insights we expected would be accessible only through in-person interviews. We interpret the enthusiastic take-up of our invitation as expressive of respondents' desire to share the specificity and nuance of their personal experience. We aim to reflect either frequently mentioned or markedly reflexive comments offered by a cross section of the approximately 530 survey respondents, but do not claim that they are representative of sponsors as such.

second phase of the research consists of semi-structured interviews with individual sponsors in order to acquire a deeper understanding of their experience and perceptions.

⁴ We also crafted a French version of the survey that took account of the differences in the Quebec sponsorship regime. For a more detailed explanation of the survey, see Macklin et al. (2018).

Our analysis sheds light on the way sponsors conceived of their role, how their understanding may have evolved, and how engaging in sponsorship transforms sponsors in social terms. Recent research on sponsorship draws on psychological and sociological perspectives to emphasize the importance of status recognition and eligibilities. Kyriakides et al. (2018b) identify status eligibilities as being at the heart of sponsor-sponsored relations. We add to this scholarship with our work on sponsors. In asking how they understand their role and rate their experience, we are addressing wider questions about their role as sponsors and citizens. Sponsors are private (non-government) social actors involved in a process of newcomer resettlement that, in Canada, is normally mediated by state actors.

The analysis of write-in comments in our survey indicates that sponsors have complex motivations and experiences. Sponsors tended to evaluate the experience in positive terms, despite many challenges. The responses also pointed (explicitly or tacitly) to the power imbalances built into the sponsor-sponsored relationship. This asymmetry is both revealed and nuanced by 1) the language of “sponsorship,” which overlays conceptions of family with relations of dependence and autonomy, and 2) sponsors’ efforts to assist refugees move from a condition of putative neediness to self-sufficiency – an endeavour that lends itself to articulation in the discourses of both family and citizenship. In the process, sponsors reflect on the expectations they had for themselves and for those they sponsored, the evolution of their relationship with sponsored refugees along axes of trust, respect, and affect; and the impact of the experience of sponsorship on their own attitudes, feelings and beliefs.

Evaluation of Sponsorship Experience

Among survey respondents, an overwhelming number of participants evaluated the experience very positively. On a 5-point scale where 1 represented a very negative experience and 5 represented very positive one, the overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) from the survey (432 of 530 people) rated their experience highly (as either a 4 or 5). Further, 64% of sponsors who responded said they would be involved in a private sponsorship again either as part of sponsorship group (45%) or in a more informal capacity (19%). Eighty-eight percent of all respondents (530) stated that they would recommend private sponsorship to others and 90.8% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their efforts were valued by the Syrian family.

This strong positive bias is evident in the written comments as well, which frequently describe how meaningful, rewarding, powerful and transformative the experience was for them. Several described it as one of the most worthwhile things they had done in their lives.

I feel that this experience has changed me. It has grown my capacity to be empathetic. I can put myself in our family's shoes and see how difficult it would be to leave everything behind - including the simple idea of being able to communicate with everyone you meet (152).

Sponsoring has enriched my life, and my perspective on what it is to be a Canadian (and a human being) (245).

Respondents frequently shared the personal and emotional satisfaction they derived from sponsorship, sometimes cast in terms of gratitude for the opportunity. One respondent effused ‘When I’m driving home after a visit, I am smiling, with joy. That’s how they make us feel - joyful’ (188). Equally significant is the fact that many of these same respondents also reported candidly about the challenges, demands, conflicts, disappointments, and unresolvable problems they encountered with the family, with other members of the

sponsorship group and with government. In other words, respondents generally did not seem to romanticize the refugees they sponsored, their fellow sponsors, or their own struggles. Yet, they remained resolutely positive about private sponsorship:

Our sponsored family is inspiring and I could not have imagined a more positive experience if I tried (despite the challenges). They are examples of resilience and optimism in the face of unimaginable difficulty, and they have been gracious and embraced Canadian culture wholeheartedly. We love them and Canada is better off for having them here! (3)

Being involved in private sponsorship is the most positive and rewarding experience I have ever had. It has brought me great joy and feelings of accomplishment. I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to be involved in this process, with an amazing group of people (co-sponsors) and a wonderful family from Syria (176).

To the extent that the remainder of this chapter highlights some of these challenges and difficulties, it is important to situate them in relation to the overall favourable disposition of respondents.

Family Resemblance: Sponsorship and Kinship

Linking refugee sponsorship and kinship for descriptive, analytical or critical purposes seems problematic, given the obvious overtones of parentalism⁵ and orientalism. We argue that sponsorship is a structurally unequal relationship that can - not must - give rise to a dynamic of parentalism with overtones of orientalism. The sponsorship program casts sponsors in the role of providing guidance and financial, social, and personal support to newcomers over the course of a year. The notional destination of this temporally compressed journey is independence, often reduced to economic self-sufficiency. Yet, the concept of family is baked into the institution of refugee sponsorship, and not only because the Trudeau government, acting on the securitization of Arab and Muslim men, exerted a preference for sponsorship of families, to the exclusion of single, unattached, heterosexual men.

The institutional structure of sponsorship mimics family class sponsorship, and not only in its material support obligations. The sponsorship regime apprehends a refugee family (or fragment thereof) as a social unit that not only socializes its members, but which itself must be 'socialized' into Canada via the settlement and integration process. Sponsorship does not rely solely on contractual obligation, but also on the formation of personal, affective bonds of partiality, commitment and intimacy that given tensile strength to the formal connection. We contend that the delegation of resettlement to private, volunteer actors lends structural plausibility to the kinship analogy. The sponsorship program casts sponsors in the role of providing guidance and financial, social, and personal support to newcomers over the course of a year. The notional destination of this temporally compressed journey is independence, often reduced to economic self-sufficiency. Highlighting the functional resonance of these tasks with conventional parenting responsibilities risks giving the appearance of validating a patronizing depiction of refugees as 'child-like' and we emphatically reject this interpretation. We do not contend that sponsorship is actually like parenting; rather, we seek to provide a broader account of what may lie behind individual

⁵ We use the term 'parentalism' advisedly, as opposed to 'paternalism'. We consider it more appropriate in light of the disproportionate representation of women among respondents.

sponsors' invocation of familiar metaphors. Our survey comments indicate that sponsors try to negotiate the tension between providing guidance and respecting the autonomy of refugees, and actively reflect on the complexity of providing support while encouraging self-sufficiency.

Family as Metaphor

Several written responses invoked kinship metaphors to describe the nature of the sponsor's relationship to the sponsored family. The version of the survey provided to sponsors outside the twelve-month sponsorship period specifically asked if the respondent regarded the sponsored family as friends post-sponsorship, but neither version prompted respondents to consider an analogy between sponsorship and kinship. The response of three sponsors echoes the sentiment expressed by several others:

You also asked if I considered them friends, but not sure how to answer that question. In a way, they are more like family (214).

The family lived in our home for 10 days, and we became family. It was a much closer bond than we had expected. The relationship has continued with daily/weekly visits since February 2016 - more than we ever imagined (398).

It has been a wonderful, eye-opening, enriching experience that has left me with 6 people who now feel like part of my extended family (119).

It was such a wonderful experience. Our sponsored family quickly became part of our family. They refer to us as family (114).

One male respondent projected the kinship analogy onto the sponsored family as a means of signaling his belief that he had attained a level of intimacy and trust in his relationship with the family:

... I have been accepted almost as part of the family. I am allowed to be in the house with the mother/wife without the father being there (159).

Clearly, family as metaphor carries a lot of freight. However broadly or narrowly defined, family matters deeply to people. Designating a relationship as familial denotes it as profound and enduring. Mutual obligations and expectations of support (financial and emotional), socialization, labour and sacrifice, are mediated by affective economies of love, trust, gratitude, and intimacy. Decades of feminist and queer scholarship have revealed how the institution of the family is also replete with dynamics of hierarchy, power, dependence, inequality, and exploitation. Discourses of privacy, nature, and sentiment often shield family from critical scrutiny and intervention. We recognize that family is a complex, variable, and contested formation with multiple valences. Of course, we assume that when respondents speak of 'family,' they generally intend it in a positive sense; we do not hazard deeper speculation into the significance that respondents attach to the term 'family', or presume that a preponderance of sponsors would consider the analogy to kinship a good fit for their own experience of sponsorship. Finally, we observe that the family metaphor is mobilized by sponsors and sponsored alike (Kyriakides et al., 2018a), and note that one respondent expressed her discomfort at the implications of being regarded 'like a sister' by the sponsored family:

Their housing situation could change because the house they rented is for sale; this will require a huge effort to help them find another place they can afford; and they do not understand mortgages or buying property in Canada. They keep saying that since I am like a sister to them, I should give them the money and they will pay me back. They do not understand why I am not willing to do this or why I am insisting they will have to take out a mortgage like others (253).

The personal relationship structured through the private sponsorship regime is novel, and 80% of survey respondents were newcomers to it. That some sponsors reach for metaphors to depict that relationship should not be surprising. Of course, one could as easily find similarities between the specific tasks that private sponsors perform, and the job of settlement workers employed by the various agencies and organizations who serve Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). Yet no respondent likened him or herself to a settlement worker or cast their relationship in terms of service provider/client. Indeed, one respondent remarked that “some of us got the sense that the family thinks we are being paid for what we do” (84) as a way of explaining group members’ disappointment with the demands and expectations of the refugee family. Apart from the fact that sponsors are unpaid, the analogy is not apt in another sense. Settlement workers may be assigned to many government assisted refugees, and must serve them equally and without preferential treatment. They are public actors subject to public norms of neutrality. Refugee sponsors are avowedly partial. They feel a unique commitment to advance the welfare of the specific family they sponsor – or, as many sponsors say, ‘our’ family. This, too, echoes the particularity of kinship relations. There is a certain paradox in this: some refugee sponsors may be motivated to welcome the ‘stranger’ by a humanitarian ethos that regards human beings as equal in their suffering, and equally entitled to aid in relief of suffering. Yet refugee sponsorship trades on the formation of thick bonds that connect specific sponsors to specific refugees, despite the aleatory circumstances of the initial match that brought them together; sponsors are thus expected to care more about the welfare of the family they sponsor than about other refugees.

Indeed, many respondents used ‘love’ to describe their feelings about the family they sponsored, and a level of emotional intensity is evident from these illustrative comments:

Surprisingly satisfying, surprisingly emotional involvement. Became like family members, made me very anxious about all the other people in the world who are suffering (112).

The sponsorship experience was far beyond my expectation for being so positive. Our family was exceptional and from the very beginning we all became very close to them...I have learned from them and have been so impressed by their hope and resilience (136).

This private sponsorship has been a very rewarding experience... We have become good friends with the family and I personally and I think the others have been very moved by the courage and determination of the adults and of the children to become good, self-providing citizens of Canada (146).

Being involved in private sponsorship is the most positive and rewarding experience I have ever had. It has brought me great joy and feelings of accomplishment. I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to be involved in this process, with an amazing group of people (co-sponsors) and a wonderful family from Syria (176).

For some, the emotional intensity they felt toward the family was also a source of worry and weariness, though not regret:

It has been vastly more time consuming and emotionally wrenching than I ever imagined. I do not regret sponsoring this family at all; in fact, it is one of the better things I have done in my life. However, it has definitely been good and bad for me personally (243).

We love this family but it has been extremely challenging and emotionally draining. We have been very involved with this family and we have now applied to sponsor several other members of their extended family. I am emotionally burnt out and sometimes feel as though I have "vicarious PTSD" from my involvement in their lives (36).

A few comments also expressed the deflation that can arise from the unrealized anticipation or rupture of affective bonds. For example, where sponsors established a relationship via skype or other social media prior to the refugee family's departure, bureaucratic obstacles that prevented the family's resettlement provoked a sense of loss. Some families may initially reside near (or sometimes with) the sponsor, and then move far away, which reduces contact. Or the relationship may not develop the emotional depth that a sponsor hoped for. Here are some illustrative quotes:

They have become part of our lives... The family lived with us for the first month of the sponsorship. I was saddened when they moved to an apartment a long distance from where we live, which has reduced contact. I feel, I hope that we will stay connected and caring for the rest of our lives (188).

We met the family when they arrived and immediately "fell in love" with the kids and were disappointed that they could not become closer to "adopted children and grandchildren" (86).

We were introduced to our first refugee family and made contact with them, collected birthday presents, sent emails, made phone calls, got library cards and rented accommodation. We then learned they would not receive travel clearance in the foreseeable future and had to opt for another refugee family. That was a wrenching experience (134).

Our team had a beautiful baby shower for [the mother] in our home, the first time I really seen her laugh and have fun... This would be our last family for it is very emotional to connect to a family like this, then they leave (19).

Although we have foregrounded the invocation of family, friendship was also prominent as a model. We hesitate to make any general claims about the significance of referencing kinship versus friendship. For example, in answer to the question about whether the sponsor maintained a friendship with the family after the twelve-month period, one respondent replied as follows:

I love the family and we have a lovely relationship, but because of language, it is hard to say we are friends. I care deeply for them – but are we friends – not sure (67).

In conversation, an Arabic-speaking sponsor explained that he also did not consider the adult refugees as friends. He would not, as he put it, “call up [the father] to go out for a pint,” although he devoted more time to sponsorship than others in the group and genuinely cared deeply for the family. He went on to explain that he regarded them more like extended family, people with whom you may not have much in common – the uncle you see at family events, or a distant aunt – but with whom you share a bond that transcends subjective affinity. In this version, friendship and kinship are not markers on a continuum of intensifying subjective affection (e.g. from indifferent, to like, to love), but are located differently in terms of the source and nature of the commitment. The cliché that ‘you choose your friends; you don’t choose your family’ captures some of this complexity and counts against ranking kinship more highly than friendship (or vice versa) as measures of the bond a sponsor feels toward sponsored refugees.

The specific form of kinship relations being invoked also matters to the analysis. We do not regard relations among parents and children, in-laws, cousins, grandparents, etc. as identical. Most notable to us were comments that analogized sponsorship to parenting:

The experience is life changing, for sure. It has been like raising a family, the toughest job you'll ever do (I thought it ended with raising my kids, but this is right up there), but the most rewarding thing you could ever do (149).

Overall, this has been a powerful experience for me. From the onset, I knew this would be my primary focus for the year and that has been pretty accurate... I did it for selfish reasons too...it has given me a renewed sense of purpose since my own children have "launched" into their own adult lives (156).

Unpacking the comparison between the role of parent and sponsor requires little effort. Parents socialize their children into the norms, practices, and morés of the world around them. Through techniques of support, discipline, and authority, they guide children from the dependency of infancy, to the independence and self-sufficiency of adulthood. For their part, refugee sponsors are expected to assist refugees in adapting and integrating into an unfamiliar society. Sponsors possess experience and knowledge of Canadian society that refugees lack. Sponsors aid in the transition from (putative) dependency on arrival to integration and self-sufficiency. If families are vehicles of socialization, then sponsorship is a vehicle of integration. In either case, promotion of autonomy and self-sufficiency are functional attributes ascribed both to parenting and sponsorship.

Critiquing the comparison between parenting and sponsorship is almost as effortless. The obvious objection to this analogy (however well-meaning) is its parentalist and orientalist tenor. In most cases, the sponsored refugees arrive as a family with at least one or two parents, and sometimes adult children or grandparents. These refugees are adults whose circumstances have, in Arendtian terms, stripped them of their place in the world and their capacity to flourish as they once could and did. We do not contend that the private sponsorship model casts sponsors into the role of parents who socialize individual refugees as if they were children. It seems more plausible to understand the sponsorship model as rendering the sponsored family unit as an object of external socialization by a sponsorship group. But even this model carries obvious risks of denigrating the status of adults as autonomous agents who come with their own identity and biography and competencies. In short, the parental comparison seems irremediably patronizing and, in relation to Syrian refugees, orientalist in its specific manifestation. As we elaborate below, the comparison we draw is structural, and neither subjective nor normative. We do not presume that many or most sponsors conceive of their role as quasi-parental, or that their conduct necessarily conforms in all respects to a pattern congruent with that role.

Institutional Structure of Sponsorship

In our view, the analogy between kinship and sponsorship does not originate (solely) in sponsors' imaginations. The relationships engendered by private sponsorship transpire within a policy framework that, in significant respects, mimics the more established family class sponsorship regime governing family reunification in Canadian immigration law. Where a Canadian or permanent resident seeks reunion in Canada with a foreign national partner (spouse or common law), dependent child⁶, parent or grandparent, the Canadian or permanent resident must apply to sponsor the family member. Like refugee sponsors, family class sponsors submit a police clearance. They must also demonstrate an income above the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) minimum⁷ or, where sponsoring a partner and/or children, must not be in receipt of income assistance. Refugee sponsors must prove that they are in possession of the total amount of funds to necessary support the sponsored family for one year as a pre-requisite to sponsorship.

Family class sponsors undertake financial responsibility for sponsored family members for at least three years and up to twenty, depending on the filial relationship.⁸ The family class sponsorship undertaking with Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada does not prohibit sponsored members of the family class from accessing income assistance during the period of the undertaking, but it does oblige the sponsor to fully reimburse the government for any amount of income assistance paid to the family member. Sponsored refugees are barred from social assistance for the twelve-month duration of the sponsorship. The financial obligations of a family-class sponsorship undertaking, and the concomitant enforcement power of the state against the sponsor, survives any ensuing relationship breakdown. Where a refugee sponsorship breaks down, the sponsorship group will be liable for default if it is found responsible for the sponsorship breakdown; if not, it will be released from further obligations (IRCC, 2020).

The following excerpts from the text of the family class and refugee sponsorship undertakings reveals the striking congruence between the two undertakings:

⁶ A dependent child is defined as a biological or adopted unmarried child under the age of 22, with age exceptions for children with disabilities.

⁷ Statistics Canada defines the LICO as the income threshold 'below which families would likely have to spend a substantially larger share of their income than average on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing and thus would be living in a difficult economic circumstance'. See <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0011x/2012001/notes/low-faible-eng.htm>

⁸ The undertaking lasts three years for partners, 3-10 years for dependent children (depending on age) and twenty years for parents. See <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=1355&top=14>.

Family Class Sponsor ⁹	Refugee Sponsor ¹⁰
<p>I undertake to provide for the basic requirements of the sponsored person and his or her family members who accompany him or her to Canada, if they are not self-supporting.</p> <p>I promise to provide food, clothing, shelter, fuel utilities, household supplies, personal requirements, and other goods and services, including dental care, eye care, and other health needs not provided by public health care...</p> <p>I promise that the sponsored person and his or her family members will not need to apply for social assistance.</p> <p>I understand that the sponsored person and his or her family members will be admitted solely on the basis of their relationship to me (as sponsor) and that they do not need to have the financial means to become established in Canada....</p> <p>I understand that the undertaking remains in effect no matter what may change in my life. For example, if I am divorced, change jobs, become unemployed... I will still be responsible to the sponsored person....</p> <p>I understand that all social assistance paid to the sponsored person... becomes a debt owed by me to Her Majesty in right of Canada.</p>	<p>This undertaking specifies the obligations of the sponsoring group with respect to the principal applicant and all accompanying or non-accompanying family members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reception - Meet the refugee upon arrival in the community; • Lodging - Provide suitable accommodation, basic furniture and other household essentials; • Care - Food, clothing, local transportation and other basic necessities of life; • Settlement Assistance and Support - Assist the refugees to learn an official language, seek employment, encourage, and assist them to adjust to life in Canada, as outlined in the Settlement Plan. <p>I understand that, as a group member, I am jointly and severally or solidarity bound with the other group members to perform the obligations of the sponsorship undertaking and am liable with the sponsorship group for any breach of those obligations.</p> <p>The sponsoring group's obligations commence upon arrival of the sponsored persons in Canada. The refugees are supported for 12 months or until they become self-sufficient.</p>

⁹ IRCC, Application to Sponsor and Undertaking, Retrieved 10 December 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/kits/forms/imm1344e.pdf>.

¹⁰ IRCC, Undertaking/Application to Sponsor Convention Refugees Abroad and Humanitarian-Protected Persons Abroad, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/kits/forms/imm5373e.pdf>, accessed 4 January 2018. Note that sponsors must also produce a Settlement Plan that itemizes in detail how the obligations contained in the undertaking will be fulfilled.

Both family class and refugee sponsorship conjoin two facets of the 'private' character of family and sponsor. First, they are private insofar as they operate in the realm of particularity, affect, and 'thick' commitments that distinguish them from the universal, egalitarian, generic qualities associated with relations in the public sphere. Secondly, the undertakings represent a transfer of a public responsibility -- income assistance and settlement support -- to a private actor. Privatization typically refers to an allocation of responsibility and authority from the state to the (private) market, with its associated transactional norms. The privatization effectuated by family class and refugee sponsorship is slightly more complicated, insofar as family and charitable societies were, historically, the state's preferred locus for economic redistribution and social welfare. Contemporary family class and refugee sponsorship undertakings thus reinstate private actors -- the family and groups of citizens respectively -- as primary bearers of financial responsibility.

The Syrian resettlement initiative also reinforced the family as organizing principle in another way: In its roll-out of the program, the government indicated that it would not admit single, unaccompanied, heterosexual men, and would prioritize fragmented or intact families. This was widely interpreted as a gambit to pacify or pre-empt Islamophobic backlash that associated young Muslim men with terrorism. Only in the company of the paradigmatic refugee -- woman and child -- could men be figuratively disarmed and partake in the non-threatening category of harmless refugee victim (Agier, 2010). The dominance of the family form among the population of resettled refugees may also have increased the salience of familial tropes and facilitated the discursive transition from 'refugee family' to 'our family' to 'like family.'

Navigating the Private Sponsor-Sponsored Refugee Relationship

If sponsors' recourse to kinship metaphors is indeed linked to structural features of the sponsorship regime, it becomes important to delve more deeply into how the architecture of private sponsorship might shape sponsors' perception and enactment of their role in creating relationships with sponsored refugees.

Recent scholarship by Kyriakides et al. (2018a; 2018b) explains how sponsored refugees resist the orientalist script that consigns refugees to a generic and passive victimhood (Agier, 2010). Kyriakides et al. argue that resettled refugees struggle to reclaim their 'eligibility to exist' within the frame of their 'pre-conflict practical identity' (2018a, p.75). They assert their 'authority to act' in accordance with a self-understanding of social status that precedes and contests the inert and disempowering confines of refugee status. Kyriakides et al. hypothesize that dynamics between sponsor and sponsored depend significantly on sponsors' willingness to 'recognise persons of self-rescue and to orient their interactions with "the sponsored" such that the orientalist involuntarism of refugeeness is challenged' (2018a, p.75). Conversely, if 'sponsors assume a disconfirming 'parental' role, which confined the sponsored to diminished identities of dependency, interviewees resisted by asserting their authority to act beyond the refugee label' (Kyriakides et al., 2018a).

One might hypothesize that private refugee sponsorship synchronizes humanitarian paternalism (Barnett, 2011) with interpersonal paternalism: a program organized around rescuing victims, implemented by volunteers who understand their role in quasi-parental terms. Fassin's (2012) concept of humanitarian reason suggests that private sponsorship is a mechanism *par excellence* for harnessing moral sentiments into a governance project. But Fassin also notes that mobilizing sentiments of compassion and responsibility creates a tension "between inequality and solidarity, between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance [that] is constitutive of all humanitarian government" (2012, p.3).

These tensions, while cast in overtly political terms, belong to the same genre as those we have associated with parental and sponsorship roles, namely offering guidance while respecting autonomy, and providing support while facilitating independence. Kyriakides et al.'s (2018a) pejorative reference above to parentalism puts into question the normative stakes of positing any conceptual affinity between sponsorship and parenting. When we suggest the functional resonance between 'raising' children from dependence to independence or 'assisting' refugees to integrate, we do not presume this to dictate the micro-level behaviours and patterns of interaction between sponsors and sponsored. We understand parentalism in the context of refugee sponsorship to capture interactions involving advice or assistance which diminish or fail to properly recognize the identity or capabilities of the sponsored person from the perspective of that sponsored person.

We also note that unlike the forms of humanitarian intervention Fassin (2012) references, private sponsorship's remit is not confined to alleviation of suffering, either as finite event or indeterminate program. The refugee sponsorship regime has a temporal arc (one year) and a destination (self-sufficiency). It contemplates a twelve-month passage out of alienation of refugee status, (with its connotations of passivity and dependency), and into the charmed circle of liberal market citizen. Perhaps inevitably, sponsors confront the disjuncture between the actual people they sponsor and these 'before and after' caricatures of refugee victim and market citizen. It is in this zone of quotidian interactions where the tensions described above are enacted, negotiated and sometimes transformed. As one respondent remarks:

Interesting personal experience from a sense of rescuing a family to understanding you can support and guide and must let them make their own decisions (78).

The remainder of this chapter explores how sponsors recognize, negotiate and manage their role, as they confront a multitude of practical challenges relating to language barriers; expectations around availability and material support; medical, dental and mental health problems; transportation; accommodation; bureaucratic hurdles, employment; gender dynamics and child rearing. Rural sponsors also coped with longer distances and fewer support services. These trends are consistent with the results of quantitative survey in which respondents were asked this question: 'What do you consider to be challenges in your interaction with the sponsored Syrian family'? Respondents could rank the issue as extremely/very/moderately/somewhat/not challenging. Among most highly represented answers among the 530 respondents were language and communication barriers (309), providing support vs. encouraging independence (306), managing expectations around transportation assistance by sponsorship group (300) and managing expectation about sponsorship availability (299).¹¹

Each of these practical issues merits its own attention. Here, however, we canvas the larger themes arising from the structural features of sponsorship that shaped interpersonal relations. We begin by highlighting respondent comments that reflect on the asymmetrical power relations between sponsor and sponsored refugee. Next, we explore sponsors' comments about the tension between guidance and respect for autonomy, where autonomy refers to refugees' ultimate authority to make decisions that may or may not align with sponsors' advice. Independence relates to the capacity of refugee families to attain sustainability in the management of their daily lives, including but not limited to economic self-sufficiency.

¹¹ The quantitative survey did not force responses to these questions and so there is a different total number of respondents for every challenge identified.

Power

Inequality of social, economic, legal, linguistic, and political status is not a provisional feature of sponsor-refugee relations; it is the premise of the scheme¹². As Fassin notes about compassion-induced action, the inequality between the donor and the beneficiary is sociological and political, not psychological:

It is not the condescension the part of the person giving aid or the intention of their act of assistance that are at stake, but the very conditions of the social relation between the two parties, which whatever the goodwill of the agents, make compassion a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity. [...] Thus, if there is domination in the upsurge of compassion, it is objective before it is subjective (and it may not even become subjective). The asymmetry is political rather than psychological; a critique of compassion is necessary ... because it always presupposes a relation of inequality (2012, pp. 3-4).

A handful of respondents' comments reflected explicitly on this ineluctable power imbalance between themselves and the refugees they sponsored. One respondent reported difficulty reconciling this structural inequality with the subjective, social dimension of the relationship:

The relationship I feel to the Syrian family is an uncomfortable one and I've never been able to figure out how to accept my "sponsor" role and the position of power that brings - I feel it is an uncomfortable power dynamic and it makes me shy away from spending social time with the sponsored family (222).

Another respondent situated the inequality within a broader critique of the privatization of refugee integration and a propensity among some sponsors to enhance their own status by showing themselves to be the 'better' sponsor or the sponsors of 'better' refugees:

The power imbalance between a sponsor and refugee family is immense. [...] There is no doubt the private sponsorship program saves lives and is absolutely valued by resettled refugees. But the rush for Canadians to embrace this charitable model of resettlement versus holding politicians accountable to provide support and financial assistance to all refugees regardless of category does not sit well with me. Outside of my sponsorship group I have seen far too many examples of patronizing behaviour and 'competition' (i.e. 'well I just bought 'my' family a car', 'my family were very wealthy back in Syria') from other private sponsors. Even the general outrage that 'my family didn't arrive when they were scheduled to' seems misplaced in the larger world of refugee resettlement (229).

Without wishing to belabour the kinship-sponsorship nexus, the reported competitiveness among sponsors does trigger an image of competitive middle-class parents boasting about their children.

¹² As a practical matter, sponsors' exercise power through persuasion and negotiation. Sponsors have no formal authority to compel or coerce, and they may not withhold financial support to extract compliance or direct expenditures: 'Refugees have the right to manage their own finances, and should be encouraged to do so. Sponsoring groups cannot require the refugee(s) to submit their funds for management by others' (RSTP 2018).

Another sponsor speculated on how the power differential might affect refugees' willingness to trust sponsors:

I think it can be difficult for newcomers to be honest with their sponsor groups given power differentials, potential fears, the desire to please and show gratitude and because newcomers hear so many different and often conflicting information from other newcomers, settlement agencies and sponsors, I imagine it is hard to know who to trust (124).

Apart from whether sponsors self-consciously advert to their structural power in relation to sponsored refugees, the more salient issue for present purposes is how they manage it in the daily, ordinary interactions that constitute their relationship¹³.

Autonomy

Sponsors clearly wrestled with how to provide guidance on matters where they believed they possessed superior knowledge and experience, while respecting the autonomy of the Syrian family to make their own decisions.

It was a constant challenge and source of debate within our group determining the appropriate balance between assistance and promoting autonomy -- this was perhaps the greatest of all challenges. We also constantly struggled with understanding how many of our own norms and expectations should be communicated to the newcomer family -- particularly around self-care, gender roles and child rearing and birth control (84).

A few comments adverted to trust as a mediating principle. As one experienced sponsor stated:

The most important element is to develop trust with the family, respect their values and culture, and help them find their way, without imposing ours. Within our church sponsorships (1st, 3rd and previous), this has been the general approach by all members, and has been successful (30).

¹³ Financial control may seem like the most obvious way to exert power, but sponsors are obligated to provide monthly support to sponsored refugees. They are instructed that 'Refugees have the right to manage their own finances, and should be encouraged to do so. Sponsoring groups cannot require the refugee(s) to submit their funds for management by others'. Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP), 'Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program FAQs Post-arrival Financial Support for PSRs,' Updated 20 August 2018; http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/EN-FAQs_BVOR-parity-FINAL_AUG-20.docx.pdf (accessed 4 January 2019).

Figuring out when to offer advice, how to offer it, how to listen, and when to withdraw is both ingredient and outcome of trust-building. Friction around guidance and decision-making is also a locus for seeking evidence of a parentalistic disposition and the absence of trust. The written comments certainly contain multiple remarks by sponsors about advice not taken. Specific and recurring examples concerned professional treatment for significant mental health or behavioral issues; ESL attendance; and various 'lifestyle' choices. Kyriakides et al. (2018b) highlight sponsored refugees' reports about cars and smoking as sites of parentalistic interaction, and so we supplement those findings with respondents' perspectives on those same issues.

The purchase of a car was very important to the father of the family but members of our sponsor group thought it would be unaffordable and attempted to dissuade the purchase. The family decided to buy the car and are managing the costs effectively (52).

Overall, this has been a positive experience. I have been frustrated with one issue and that was their determination for three members to get driver's licenses and then a car. Their budget does not really support this (especially the car). They would not take advice and we just don't discuss it with them, deciding that they had the right to make their own decisions. However, for us, it seems like a waste of money. We are worried about their budget when our sponsorship ends in a few short weeks (137).

[The family was] also strongly influenced by family members who'd arrived the previous year, at times disregarding what we thought was sound advice (i.e. don't buy a car) (283).

In each case, the respondent acknowledged what Kyriakides et al. (2018b) would call the sponsored family's 'authority to act,' even admitting in the first case that the sponsors were wrong. Of course, one cannot infer from the comments the tenor of the actual interactions with the family around the issue.

Several respondents identified smoking as a recurring source of friction, and here the comments reveal a nuanced tonal range.

We have tried everything possible to have the husband give up smoking. Initial success, but eventually we failed (465).

In the house lease the landlord was very clear there was to be no smoking in the house. However, the father would not respect this and continues to smoke in the house; this has strained the sponsorship group's connection with the landlord (17).

Smoking is so common in Syria, so it was difficult to explain to our newcomer that there are very few places to smoke in Canada. We had to consistently remind him that you cannot smoke inside, or near the doorway, of the rented apartment, or any public building. Unfortunately he was smoking at a subway stop while waiting for a bus, and a transit officer was a bit rude to him and, because of the language barrier, did not understand that he was a new Canadian, so he was issued a large ticket (luckily, it was reduced in court) (497).

After describing a series of resettlement challenges around banking, ESL attendance, and mental health, another respondent stated simply, 'Our group decided to ignore the couple's smoking' (298).

One might frame the first respondent's somewhat relentless campaign to persuade the husband to give up smoking as unvarnished parentalism, in which dissuading the husband from smoking become a disciplinary project of behaviour modification. The comment about the landlord reveals more layers to the structural parentalism of sponsorship: the sponsors evidently leveraged their social capital to assist the family in securing accommodation, and it is not uncommon for landlords to require sponsors to co-sign leases as precondition to renting to sponsored refugees. Thus, the husband's smoking in the apartment had repercussions for the sponsorship group because they have been made notionally 'responsible' for the sponsored family's conduct as tenants. In the third case, the respondent (who describes the sponsored person as 'newcomer' and 'new Canadian' rather than 'refugee') was sensitive to the difficulty of adapting to the pervasive regulation of smoking. She frames the group's repeated interventions about smoking as a matter of informing and reminding the newcomer about the consequences of non-compliance, and seems to maintain a non-judgmental posture, even after he was ticketed.

Respondents repeatedly articulated their recognition of the refugees' entitlement to make their own decisions, however much the sponsors disagreed with those decisions. The challenge was how to manage this tension while building or sustaining a level of trust capable of maintaining the relationship. Sometimes this meant 'letting go' of certain issues -- like ignoring smoking. And as the following comments suggest, when parenting of adolescents is actually at issue, sponsors are sensitive to the limits of their role:

Further, as the kids acclimatize to Canada and head further into their teens, the dynamics between the parents/kids is strained, at best. The active sponsors are in an awkward position as they are not the parents but do hold insights into "Canadian Life" and resources (227).

The teenage daughter has had some issues (not serious) with her dad about wearing western clothes and I found that the daughter looked to me to support her position (235).

Several commented on the evolution in their relationship with the family in terms of mutual trust, respect, and confidence in one another. Admittedly, our respondent pool may under-represent sponsors who withdrew from active participation in sponsorship out of dissatisfaction with how the tension between guidance and autonomy was negotiated.

Independence

The sponsorship undertaking explicitly states that the sponsored 'refugees are supported for 12 months or until they become self-sufficient,' Twelve months thus becomes the default benchmark for attainment of self-sufficiency. Although sponsorship entails much more than financial support, economic independence plays a dominant role in defining 'self-sufficiency,' and the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website informs readers that of refugees' responsibility to attain it in minimum time:

The newly arrived refugee is expected to make every effort to become self-sufficient as soon as possible after arriving in Canada. This may include settlement activities

such as language training classes, college or university courses, employment preparation programs, and employment (IRCC, 2020).

Many sponsors extolled the initiative, resilience, and motivation of the people they sponsored:

Our sponsored family worked very hard to learn things on their own and to gain their independence in multiple areas. It was a joy to work with them and to welcome them to Canada (22).

A lovely family with exceptional children who are smart committed and engaged in the life in Canada. A beautiful Mum who will want to be able to work and participate more in the community in the future but is still at school now. Dad who is actively employed, has friends and loves driving his family everywhere (106).

A few comments were notable for their alignment of hard work and self-sufficiency with the performance of Canadian citizenship:

[...] I personally and I think the others have been very moved by the courage and determination of the adults and of the children to become good self-providing citizens of Canada. The man of the family has worked very hard and with success to attain a high-level job in his field of work... This is a family who arrived with English level skills and a fierce wish to become functioning Canadian citizens. It has been an honour to know them and to become their friends (146).

And the family, itself, is warm, loving, kind and very grateful for the small things we have been able to do for them. They are committed to becoming good Canadian citizens, they are dedicated in their pursuit of English language training and we are confident they will be amazing citizens and contributors (244).

As with autonomy, however, many sponsors were conscious of the tension between providing support and encouraging independence. Of those who addressed as 'providing support vs. encouraging independence' a potential challenge, just over half reported it a slightly or not challenging, a quarter reported it as moderately challenging, and the remaining 23% reported it as very or extremely challenging. Some sponsors were deflated by the apparent disconnect between actions they thought were responsive to stated concerns and the family's receptiveness:

We struggled in general with concerns being expressed by the family, members of the sponsorship group hustling to help solve the problem, and then not seeing follow-through. This happened with recreation, language classes, and health care, most notably. It is difficult to know what the reasons were for this. I suspect gender roles played a role - mom is very young and seems to lack the confidence to venture out on her own or with the children. As a result, mom and the kids spend a lot of time inside at home, rather than using the local park/playground, or riding the bicycles they were excited to receive ... I suspect pride is another - the family's desire to appear like they are adjusting well (463).

More broadly, several respondents worried that the expectation of independence within twelve months was unrealistic for the family they sponsored:

The most difficult was helping them to be independent, as much as possible, when they still needed (and still need) a lot of support to understand the various systems (e.g. banking, education, etc.) in Canada. And language and employment acquisition are the two areas of most challenge (97).

Many simply believed that “one year is very short time period to learn English, find a job, build a community of friends, make your way in a new city” (209). Other sponsors were disappointed by what they perceived as a lack of adequate progress toward self-sufficiency by the family they sponsored. A few respondents had to persuade the adults to take full advantage of English classes during the sponsorship period rather than take the first job they could find. Many sponsorship groups extended financial assistance beyond the twelve months, to varying degrees. This seemed to pose less of a problem than one might have expected, perhaps because so many first-time sponsorship groups had raised funds beyond the required minimum.

As noted earlier, many skilled, educated refugees were commended for their initiative and motivation. This was, however, tempered in some cases by sponsors’ anxiety that a parent’s (usually man’s) determination to resume a former profession in Canada would prove unrealistic and should be relinquished. Some sponsors grasped what Kyriakides et al. (2018b) described as refugees’ “demands for status-recognition in the present” based on “pre-conflict social roles” (p.6). But this did not necessarily assuage their disquiet about perceived reluctance to seek or accept employment that did not align with pre-conflict roles:

The family's difficulty in accepting change in their economic/class position because of inability to find comparable work has been the biggest challenge (87).

Managing expectations of material and employment success is the hardest challenge. The father of our group is a radiologist and determined to practice in Canada (175).

Biggest challenges – [...] 12 months was not long enough for support (18 would have been ideal); unwillingness of refugee to allow wife to work, unwillingness of male refugee to start working at a job that was "beneath" him as he came from the upper middle class (433).

A significant proportion of Syrian families transitioned to social assistance after the end of the twelve-month sponsorship. Some sponsors viewed this as a more or less structural consequence of the limited labour market opportunities for those with low education and/or poor language skills:

We are concerned that opportunities for employment are low for 'dad'. He came to Canada with a grade 8 education. He is working hard at his English skills, we are concerned that it will be difficult for this family to be independent of social assistance (168).

Many more respondents disparaged what they perceived as indolence, and a willingness to rely on social assistance:

Unwillingness of adults in sponsored family to seek paid employment has been a great frustration and embarrassment to sponsorship committee members, and a disincentive for future sponsorship involvement (20).

The biggest challenge is to convince the father of the family to seek employment rather than go on welfare. He wants to continue his ESL classes, and we want him to get a job so that he has to speak English more regularly, and to become independent, work and pay taxes (150).

I think we have, as a group, found it challenging to motivate the family towards independence, particularly financial independence. They seem to accept that they will be living on social assistance as a reasonable state, not a temporary situation to be as short term as possible (139).

Among the many written comments, overtones of parentalism -- the voice of the disappointed parent, to be more precise -- were perhaps most evident in relation to employment. Interestingly, the only two written comments out of 256 that explicitly referenced sponsored refugees' religious practices arose in reference to employment¹⁴. One respondent remarked that "the time taken by our family to observe Ramadan (the entire month of June) caused some tension [in the sponsorship group] because it came at a critical time in the job search and many on the sponsorship group felt that precious time was lost" (235). Another respondent described the group's impatience with the father's approach to employment:

The father is very picky and wants to be paid at least \$23/hr although he has no formal training. He has done some training since arriving in construction and hospitality however nothing has worked out. Now he may go back to school but will not take out a loan as it is "against Islam" (142).

Conclusion

Refugee sponsorship constitutes and configures relationships between strangers. Even as this chapter focuses on the perspective of sponsors toward sponsored, it is vital to recall the obvious fact that as a matter of interpersonal relations, sponsors are equally strangers to refugees, and many sponsors commence as strangers to at least some in their sponsorship group. But sponsored refugees are strangers to Canada, and this fact decisively allocates power as between sponsors and sponsored, marking the former as benefactors and the latter as beneficiaries.

Sponsors and sponsored refugees inevitably contend with the fluidity and contingency of interpersonal relationships. We have traced one trope -- kinship -- as a thread that winds through different dimensions of sponsorship. Building on Hyndman (2010), Kyriakides et al. (2018b) provide an account of how sponsored refugees resist and subvert the refugee script. We complement their analysis with evidence of how sponsors may perform, disrupt or deviate from their assigned script. This includes managing structural and affective analogies to kinship as both resource and constraint. Across the considerable range of written comments, we observed sponsors grappling, questioning learning, reflecting, and simply muddling through.

A couple of qualifications are important to emphasize. First, we attend to respondents' remarks as sponsors' subjective accounts and make no claims about the veracity or accuracy of the depiction. Our research does not compare sponsors' accounts with those of sponsored refugees. Secondly, each sponsor's experience is unique, and this is true within

¹⁴ A few comments referenced Syrians' Muslim or Christian faith as such.

and between sponsorship groups. We do not presume that any single sponsor's account is representative of sponsorship as such, or even their own sponsorship group.

This salience of this latter point emerges vividly when placed against the welter of written comments that addressed relations within the sponsorship group. For example, the time commitment that figured so prominently among the challenges that sponsors faced was often accompanied by observations about how other group members did not put in the time, often leaving a small number of dedicated sponsors to do a disproportionate amount of the work. Several sponsors remarked that the first order challenges they experienced with the family were less onerous than the second order challenge of dealing with intra-group conflict about how to best to approach those first-order challenges. Some groups possessed or developed skills at governance and deliberation that enabled them to manage divergent views and personalities. In other cases, group deliberation devolved into conflict, factions, and defection. The impact of sponsorship group dynamics on sponsors' evaluation of sponsorship is thus a crucial variable in sponsors' overall assessment of their experience of private sponsorship. It warrants extensive examination that lies beyond the scope of this chapter and will form the basis of future research and analysis.

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