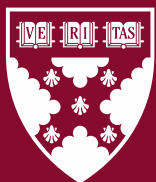# Institutional Emplacement and the Novel Resurgence of Independent Bookstores

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Working Paper 23-033

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December 15, 2022

ABSTRACT

This study reveals how actors leverage physical place as an asset to facilitate organizational adaptation and industry evolution. Through a longitudinal, qualitative analysis of the U.S. independent bookselling industry from 1995 to 2019, we outline how dispersed organizational actors responded to the rise of Amazon.com, an online retailer that threatened to displace traditional brick-and-mortar retail. While many analysts predicted that Amazon's emergence would incite a "retail apocalypse," independent bookstores proved to be far more resilient than expected. We introduce institutional emplacement – a collective process by which actors infuse value into physical "spaces," thereby transforming them into sacralized "places" – as a novel mechanism of industry evolution. Several practices are associated with this mechanism, including architecting the physical design and use of space, anchoring to the local community, and articulating the sacred meaning of place. Together, this study offers a counterbalance to narratives of virtual ascendancy and shows how physical place can be marshalled for organizational adaptation in mature industries.

In 1995, the American Booksellers Association (ABA) reported a historical high for the number of independent bookstores in the United States. Later that same year, Jeff Bezos founded Amazon.com, an online retailer originally positioned as "earth's biggest bookstore." Readers flocked to Amazon, beguiled by the convenience, "unlimited" inventory, and low prices afforded by the e-commerce format. In conjunction with the continued competition of big-box retailers and the emergence of e-book technology, Amazon's rise seemed the death blow for independent brick-and-mortar bookselling, and many analysts forecasted the collapse of the sector altogether. Yet surprisingly, these competitive and technological threats did not lead to displacement, as would be predicted by prevailing theories of industry evolution (Moeen, Agarwal, & Shah, 2020: 5; Suárez & Utterback, 1995). Instead, in 2010 independent bookstores saw an unexpected increase in numbers. Bolstered by mounting calls to "shop local," this trend continued such that, by the end of 2019, the number of "indies" across the country had risen by 56 percent, a function of both incumbent adaptation and new entry. At their annual industry conference, the ABA's CEO opened his keynote address by stating, "It is a great time for indie bookstores. Bigger is not always better. We've shown it's possible to change and adapt."

Scholars have typically conceptualized industry evolution as a progression of discrete phases (Agarwal & Tripsas, 2008; Klepper, 1996). Studies often document how these phases advance in a predictable pattern, from pre-emergence (Shermon & Moeen, 2022), to emergence (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Navis & Glynn, 2010), maturity (Tripsas, 2008), and ultimately decline (Baum & Mezias, 1992; Oliver, 1992). However, a growing body of research has shown that industries may evolve in less predictable ways. Industries have been observed to experience premature contestation (Ozcan & Santos, 2015), prolonged maturity (Tripsas, 1997), and even reemergence after a period of decline (Kroezen & Heugens, 2019; Raffaelli, 2019). Numerous

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explanations have been offered for why industries may evolve in a non-linear fashion, variously highlighting technical (Henderson, 1995), regulatory (Ozcan & Gurses, 2018), and cognitive (Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008; Munir, Ansari, & Brown, 2021) mechanisms.

What many studies of industry evolution have in common is an understanding that organizational actors interact "frequently and fatefully" (Scott, 1994: 207), often within the bounds of a specific location (Marquis, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2011). Indeed, there is no doubt that physical place plays a vital role in industry studies, as evidenced by the sheer abundance of papers that are anchored to named locations, be it Scottish knitwear producers (Porac, Thomas, & Baden Fuller, 1989), British motorsport enthusiasts (Aversa, Furnari, & Jenkins, 2022), French restauranteurs (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), Swiss watchmakers (Raffaelli, 2019), Indian artists (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010), or Italian grappa producers (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016). By studying how industries evolve within a single location, researchers often aim to hold constant extraneous cultural, regulatory, and economic factors that may also influence change processes. As a result, these studies tend to treat physical place as a *container*, a boundary within which industry dynamics unfold.

This study offers an alternative perspective by building theory about how physical place operates as a productive *asset,* both tangible and intangible*,* that organizational actors can harness when faced with competitive threat. By definition, "place" is a composite of location, material form, and the meaning that individuals and communities assign to it (Agnew & Duncan, 1989; Gieryn, 2000; Tuan, 1977). These components have been largely neglected in studies of industry evolution (Aversa et al., 2022). We argue that in order to better appreciate the dynamics of industries, we need to more fully consider the latent value housed within each component, and treat place as a construct infused with meaning (Selznick, 1957) that enables industry evolution

across geographic boundaries. We therefore ask: *how do actors leverage physical place for organizational adaptation and industry evolution?*

Drawing on a qualitative analysis of the evolution of the U.S. independent bookselling industry over a 25-year period, we illustrate how, when faced with discontinuous change from new entrants, dispersed organizational actors are able to utilize place as a catalyst of organizational adaptation and industry resurgence. Our contribution is two-fold. First, we introduce a novel mechanism – institutional emplacement – to describe the collective process by which actors infuse value into physical *spaces,* thereby transforming them into sacralized *places* (c.f.,Tuan, 1977). In doing so, we theorize place as a resource that organizational actors can leverage in unique and consequential ways. Second, as the world becomes ever more global, digital, and virtual (Giddens, 1990; Leonardi & Neeley, 2022; Srnicek, 2017), there is an impression that "placelessness" has become, or will become, the new normal. By studying the successful adaptation of incumbent independent booksellers, we complicate this narrative and show that physical place need not be an organizational remnant or liability. Instead, actors facing the threat of virtual ascendency may be able to reposition place as an asset, forestalling displacement and ushering in non-linear trajectories of industry evolution.

INDUSTRY EVOLUTION AND THE CONCEPT OF PLACE

The literature on industry evolution offers an ideal theoretical lens to consider the relationship between place and industry change. While prior empirical work has identified a number of factors that facilitate movement through the industry lifecycle (Agarwal & Tripsas, 2008), scholars have noted that place "has only [been] peripherally investigated" (Aversa et al., 2022). Below we summarize the ways that industry studies have implicitly relied on place and related concepts (e.g., location, community) to establish boundaries for empirical study.

Trajectories of Industry Evolution

Industry evolution is often described as a metatheory that can "cut across academic disciplines" (Aldrich, Ruef, & Lippman, 2020), including evolutionary economics, technology management, organizational ecology, and institutional theory (Agarwal & Tripsas, 2008; Suárez & Utterback, 1995). Common across these domains is an understanding that industries evolve through sequential phases of pre-emergence, emergence, maturity, and decline (Moeen et al., 2020). Papers often seek to identify mechanisms that stimulate or stall advancement through these phases, with emphasis colored by theoretical lens. For example, in making the shift from emergence to maturity, scholars have traditionally focused on economic and technological factors that shape processes of selection within an industry (Klepper, 1996; Utterback, 1974). Later work explored the ways in which cognitive factors additionally shape an industry's trajectory (Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008) through legitimation (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), framing and contestation (Gurses & Ozcan, 2015; Hiatt & Carlos, 2019), and meaning-making (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Zuzul & Tripsas, 2020).

Novel trajectories of industry evolution have also been exposed by studying deviations from the traditional progression of phases. For example, by studying the failure to move from pre-emergence to emergence, scholars have discovered that consensus among interdependent actors is often a precondition of industry growth (Ozcan & Santos, 2015; Zuzul, 2019). By studying the "unexpectedly long" life of optical lithography, Henderson (1995: 631) revealed how social context can delay the transition from maturity to decline. Recent work has also shown that industries in decline are able to reemerge, driven in large part by a redefinition of the value and meanings associated with a legacy product (Raffaelli, 2019) or production process (Kroezen & Heugens, 2019). These studies represent the rich variety of ways that scholars have

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conceptualized both the mechanisms and trajectories of industries. Collectively, they shed light on *when*, *why,* and *how* industries evolve, yet they remain relatively silent on *where* these dynamics unfold. As a result, we do not have a firm grasp of whether and how actors use physical place to influence industry evolution.

This critique aligns with a broader debate about the continued relevance of place in an increasingly globalized world. As organizations become more decentralized and individuals networked by digital technologies, "spatial proximity may no longer be a necessary condition for the creation of community forms" (O'Mahony & Lakhani, 2011: 9). Instead, geographically distributed actors can be anchored by a set of common beliefs and shared purpose (Chen & O'Mahony, 2009), existing even in an entirely virtual realm (Massa & O'Mahony, 2021). These findings have led some to suggest that we live in an "ageographic" world (Sorkin, 1992) and have achieved "the transcendence of place" (Coleman, 1993).

Yet, a subgroup of scholars has pushed back against such claims, arguing that we may have "(prematurely) mourned the demise of communities that are proximate and spatially connected" (O'Mahony & Lakhani, 2011). Place and proximity continue to hold sway. Local environments and their associated cultural, regulatory, and economic features have been shown to influence various organizational outcomes, including innovation and entrepreneurship (Kanter, 1995; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007), field configuration (Glynn, 2008), identity construction (Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013), and corporate social action (Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007; Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). In short, "the globalization of societies has not meant the end of the local but instead its reconstitution" (Hess, 2009: 241). These projects suggest that place remains an essential yet understudied variable of interest.

There is a limited body of work that has devoted explicit attention to the intersection of place and industry evolution. Research in this area has tended to focus on identifying economic indicators that make a geographic location more or less conducive to cluster growth (Buenstorf & Klepper, 2009; Feldman, 1999; Saxenian, 1996). Likeminded scholars have noted that co-location impacts knowledge accumulation and firm founding during the early phases of industry development (Aversa, Bianchi, Gaio, & Nucciarelli, 2021; Moeen et al., 2020). While this body of work offers a helpful foray into the theoretical role of place in the early of phases of the industry lifecycle, place is typically conceptualized narrowly as geographic location. In a notable exception, a recent study of the British Motorsport Valley showed how the region's "localized passion" for automobile racing in a pre-emergence phase paved the way for subsequent cluster formation (Aversa et al., 2022). This work highlights the fact that place is "not merely a point on some coordinate system" (McClay & McAllister, 2014), as often treated by many studies of industry evolution.

Place and Institutions

In the fields of sociology (Gieryn, 2000), social geography (Tuan, 1977), and environmental psychology (Lewicka, 2011), place is defined more holistically and often conceptualized in three parts. First, places have a unique location. They are situated in space and nested within one another: your country, your neighborhood, your home, each represent located places. Second, places have material form. They are constructed of physical objects, be it bricks-and-mortar or mountains and trees. Finally, places are invested with meaning. They are "doubly constructed," first built and then imbued with significance through interpretation, narration, and experience (Gieryn, 2000: 465). Without this third component, locations remain mere "spaces,"

disconnected from the individuals who inhabit them: "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan, 1977: 6).

This conception of place has recently found traction in organizational theory, particularly among institutionalists who share an interest in value infusion (Kraatz, 2015; Selznick, 1957). Oftentimes work in this vein positions place as a mechanism or outcome of institutional maintenance. Places house the various rituals, practices, and memories that allow institutions to endure over time (e.g., Crawford, Coraiola, & Dacin, 2022; Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010; Siebert, Wilson, & Hamilton, 2017). They can also be the subject of institutional maintenance themselves, as shown by Wright and colleagues' (2021) study of how an Ebola treatment hospital in Australia was maintained as a place of social inclusion, and Dacin and Dacin's (2019) study of how custodians renewed craft traditions on Fogo Island. On the other hand, places can also operate as catalysts of change. Research on field configuring events has shown that, by periodically assembling at conferences and ceremonies, dispersed actors can diffuse innovative ideas and develop a shared community identity (Furnari, 2014; Lampel & Meyer, 2008; Zilber, 2011; Zilber, 2018). Lawrence and Dover (2015) likewise noted that places can play a pivotal role in institutional work, influencing the ability of actors to identify problems and fashion solutions from available resources. These studies have advanced our understanding of the role of place in institutional maintenance and change. Yet they tend to theorize within bounded locations, be it Cambridge college dining halls (Dacin et al., 2010) or housing sites in Vancouver (Lawrence & Dover, 2015). As Lawrence and Dover (2015: 403) noted, we need more work on places that are "more broadly dispersed geographically."

In sum, the literature on industry evolution offers a rich array of mechanisms to understand when, why, and how industries shift between phases of pre-emergence, emergence,

maturity, and decline. Yet industries do not always evolve in a linear pattern. By studying deviations from the more traditional trajectory, we enrich our understanding of the heterogenous mechanisms that influence industry lifecycles. Our study of one such case – the unexpected resurgence of independent bookstores – shows how physical place can shape industry evolution in unique ways. A review of industry lifecycle literature reveals that place has been conceived of primarily as a context rather than a construct of interest. This study invites scholars of industry evolution to embrace the promise of place as theoretical foreground rather than empirical background.

METHOD

Given our intention to develop theory on a relatively underexplored topic, we conducted an inductive, longitudinal study (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) of the independent bookselling industry in the United States from 1995 to 2019. Independent bookselling was an opportune setting for studying the role of place in processes of industry evolution for a number of reasons. For one, independent bookstores are bound to specific sites by brick-and-mortar. This physicality was made even more salient by the rise of e-commerce, which threatened to replace the place-bound form with virtual exchange. Indeed, bookselling was one of the earliest applications of e-commerce (Stone, 2013), which allowed us to chart a longer period of change than would be available in other settings. Moreover, independent bookselling offered a unique "success" case, and therefore the opportunity to induce mechanisms that enable effective industry and organizational adaptation (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

We selected 1995 as the starting point of this study for two reasons. First, based on our analysis, this year marked the historical peak of the number of independent bookstores in the U.S., after which the industry began its decline. Second, Amazon was founded in 1995, thereby

introducing an extreme environmental jolt to the bookselling industry. The sample ends in 2019 because the COVID-19 pandemic introduced complications that extend beyond the scope of this paper. This timeframe allowed us to chart 25 years of industry evolution.

Empirical Setting

Independent bookstores are a mainstay of main street and have existed in some form in the U.S. since the nineteenth century (Lehmann-Haupt, 1951). This form of retail – with independent merchants manning brick-and-mortar stores – remained largely unchallenged until the mid-twentieth century. The first major threat came in the 1960s with the rise of the mall chains Waldenbooks and B. Dalton. Located in suburban shopping malls, rather than downtown, the mall chains expanded rapidly across the country, with Waldenbooks opening a new store a week on average during the 1970s. By 1995, after a series of acquisitions and consolidations, B. Dalton and Waldenbooks were absorbed by Barnes & Noble and Borders Group, respectively. Fast-growing chains known for their large square-footage and discount pricing, together Barnes & Noble and Borders ushered in the era of the big-box "superstore." Independent stores struggled to adapt to the competition from superstores; by 1997, independents' market share of adult book sales had sunk below their competitors' for the first time in history (Miller, 2006). In the same year, Barnes & Noble and Borders accounted for nearly half of all bookstore sales (Miller, 2006). During this period, the ABA filed a series of lawsuits against superstore retailers and publishers, hoping to defend independent stores from discriminatory contract negotiations and pricing discounts (c.f., Ingram & Rao, 2004). While the ABA achieved select regulatory wins, the industry faced increasing threats from other quarters.

In 1995, Jeff Bezos quit his job on Wall Street and moved to Seattle to found Amazon.com, an online retailer. While the company would ultimately expand into numerous

product categories, it originated as a specialist in bookselling, positioning itself as "earth's biggest bookstore." Although superstores were a significant source of competition for independent stores, they made only incremental changes to the practice of bookselling: products were still stocked in physical locations that readers would visit in-person to make purchases. In contrast, by eschewing physical storefronts entirely, Amazon's e-commerce model introduced a revolutionary "placeless" organizational form. Considering booksellers as middlemen, transferring products from publishers to readers with limited ability to differentiate by product quality, Amazon treated books as commodities that could be traded online, sight-unseen. Transactions occurred via the company's online site and products would be delivered directly to readers' doors, replacing the physical with virtual exchange.

In 1997, Amazon went public. By 2004, e-commerce purchases of books reached 20 percent of total market share, "the point of no return at which, as industry after industry has discovered, Amazon's encroachment wipes out almost everyone" (Pandey, 2018). Amazon's impact on independent bookstores was compounded by claims that the company was engaged in "loss leading" practices: selling books at prices below their net operating costs and purposefully taking a loss in order to drive out competition and capture market share. Amazon buffered these losses by diversifying into higher-margin product categories over time (Milliot, 2020); in 2009, press reported that "Amazon has gone from 'that bookstore' in people's mind to a general online retailer" (Stone, 2009).

This rapid rise and increasing dominance of Amazon put independent booksellers in "a death struggle to stay alive" (Howell, 2006). By 2009, the ABA reported that store membership had hit an all-time low. Between 2006 and 2009, a third of all independent stores closed across the country. Taking note of this trend, many industry analysts began to predict the collapse of

physical bookselling altogether, part of a broad "retail apocalypse" facing brick-and-mortar businesses. According to a *Time* retrospective on U.S. retail, the loss of local retail jobs during this period was "on pace to surpass the worst depths of the Great Recession" (Sanburn, 2017). Yet despite such predictions, in 2010 the ABA reported a *rise* in independent bookstores. This trend continued for ten subsequent years, with independent stores increasing in number by 56 percent between 2009 and 2019. This unexpected evolution is depicted in Figure 1 and presents the paper's core phenomenological puzzle.

------------- *Insert Figure 1 About Here* -------------

Data Sources

To examine the factors contributing to independent bookstores' resurgence, we collected and analyzed four forms of qualitative data, encompassing multiple industry, organizational, and individual actors across the U.S. This diversity of data allowed for triangulation between retrospective and contemporaneous accounts (Creswell, 2003), which is especially important in longitudinal, historical case research (Langley, 1999). All data sources and their collection timeline are summarized in Table 1.

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Interviews. Our main data source is 154 interviews conducted by the first author with various members of the independent bookselling industry between 2013 and 2022. The sampling strategy was theoretical rather than random (Glaser & Strauss, 1999), to ensure that the sample accurately represented the heterogeneity of the industry. Interviews were conducted with an array of actors including independent booksellers and store owners, industry and retail experts, publishers, authors, and readers. Care was taken to ensure that both high-power (e.g., leadership of the ABA) and low-power (e.g., booksellers at small stores) actors were represented.

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Moreover, participants were purposefully sourced from a wide geographical spread, hailing from 33 states in the U.S. This helped to ameliorate possible concerns that the resurgence of independent bookstores was a coastal phenomenon. While many participants had been in the industry since 1995, and thus could comment on the industry's evolution since Amazon's emergence, others were relative newcomers and therefore offered diverse perspectives. The average interview lasted 57 minutes. Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed.

Field observation and focus groups. This paper draws on extensive in-person observation of the bookselling industry. The first author visited 68 independent bookstores located in 30 states across the U.S. These stores varied in size and status. For instance, Powell's City of Books in Portland, Oregon boasts 68,000 square feet of retail space and is renowned as one of the world's largest independent bookstores. This is in contrast to a typical, medium-sized independent bookstore, which averages 4,000 square feet. The bookstore sample is restricted to stores that: 1) were members of the American Booksellers Association; 2) sold new books (i.e., not exclusively used books); and 3) had a generalist inventory (i.e., not exclusive to a single genre, such as poetry or mystery). Field visits were documented in fieldnotes, photographs, and the collection of material artifacts such as bookmarks and leaflets. The geographic coverage of both bookseller interviews and bookstore visits is visualized in Figure 2.

------------- *Insert Figure 2 About Here* -------------

This study also draws upon the observation of focus groups and numerous field-configuring events, given that they serve as sites of professional norm creation and diffusion (Lampel & Meyer, 2008; Zilber, 2011; Zilber, 2018). In 2014, the first author attended the Book Industry Study Group's annual meeting of members, which gathers over 250 practitioners involved in the creation, production, and distribution of published material. In 2014 and 2018,

the same author attended two 3-day symposiums hosted by the ABA on the "Future of Book Retailing" attended by approximately 40 prominent booksellers, publishers, authors, and retail experts. In 2015 and 2020, the same author attended the ABA Winter Institute, the annual conference for the independent bookselling industry, which is attended by over 700 participants every year. At the 2015 conference, the author conducted two 90-minute focus groups with 80 booksellers on retail trends. At the 2020 annual conference, the author worked with the ABA to coordinate a series of 90-minute focus groups with 472 booksellers, consisting of both open-ended questionnaires and small discussion groups on the challenges facing the industry. Finally, in 2022 the authors led a focus group with 25 industry experts from the Bookselling Research Network. Together, these focus groups and event visits provided insight into how the various actors in the industry interact. This data is particularly valuable in the chosen context, given that independent bookstores are dispersed across the country and infrequently convene.

Finally, in 2015 the first author took a course for prospective and new bookstore owners on *How to Succeed at Retail Bookselling*. The course helped to acquire "interactional expertise," the knowledge required to communicate effectively in the language of the industry (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013).

Archival data. Because interviews may be subject to retrospective bias, we draw upon multiple sets of longitudinal archival data. In order to validate the industry's performance over time, we obtained independent store membership data from the ABA for the period 2005 to 2019. We also collected 62 "Letters from the ABA CEO" that were sent to members between 2005 and 2019, and 15 conference programs for the Winter Institutes hosted during these years. The ABA also provided annual reports, speeches, 990 tax forms, aggregate financial bookmarking reports, and bookseller training materials published during the study timeframe.

These materials offered useful insight into the industry's internal operations and communications. We also collected all articles in *Publishers Weekly* that mentioned independent bookstores published between 2005 and 2019.[1] *Publishers Weekly,* familiarly known as "the bible of the book business," is the leading trade magazine of the book industry and has been in continuous publication since 1872. To develop a representative subsample, we sampled one-third of all articles published per quarter, resulting in a final dataset of 423 articles. Finally, to expand our understanding of the longer-term evolution of the industry since the founding of Amazon, we collected all articles in *The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal,* and *USA Today* that discussed independent bookstores published between 1995 and 2019. This sample provided a third-party perspective on the industry, and consisted of 378 articles.

Data Analysis

Given the 10-year duration of the first author's field work, the second author was brought onto the project for data analysis and member checks. This collaboration was valuable as "the involvement of both insider and outsider authors offers a means to balance differing perspectives, combining intimacy with local settings and the potential for distancing" (Langley et al., 2013: 6). The combination of prolonged engagement and analytical distance served to bolster both the credibility of our analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as its sensitivity to both micro- and macro-level processes (Langley et al., 2013). Our analysis was iterative as we cycled between data, emerging insights, and preexisting theory. Data analysis consisted of four stages.

Stage 1: Constructing a historical narrative. We first constructed a longitudinal historical narrative of the industry (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Langley, 1999). This exercise

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[1] The American Booksellers Association did not collect consistent store membership data prior to 2009. Given this constraint, we chose 2005 as the starting point for our analysis of *Publishers Weekly* as this allowed us to analyze five years of data prior to 2010, when bookstore numbers began to rise.

aimed to identify the events and actors that played key roles in the evolution of independent

bookselling between 1995 and 2019. By drawing upon contemporaneous archival data, the

narrative helped to establish an account of action as it unfolded in real time. The narrative was

further elaborated and sharpened over time as new insights emerged from field research. The

essential finding from this phase of analysis was phenomenological: independent bookstores

faced mounting competition from multiple competitors prior to 2009. Post-2009, we observed an

industry-wide resurgence which was comprised of three elements: the adaptation of existing

stores; the expansion of existing stores to additional locations; and the opening of new stores by

new entrants to the industry. We therefore sought to induce the factors enabling this resurgence.

Stage 2: Identifying emergent themes. In the early years of data collection, interviews

were open-ended, exploring the participants' experiences in the bookselling industry and their

reactions to various jolts such as the emergence of superstores, e-books, and Amazon. With time,

these conversations made clear that the threats posed by superstores and e-books were waning,

whereas Amazon's dominance continued to intensify (McLoughlin, 2022).[2] These observations

inspired more direct questioning regarding sellers' perceptions of the (dis)advantages of the

brick-and-mortar format, particularly relative to the e-commerce model. In tandem, interviews

were inductively analyzed. After open coding the transcripts, we progressively moved towards a

more focused codebook, collapsing similar descriptive codes together and abandoning others.

For example, the codes "design of store displays" and "curation of inventory" were eventually

abstracted, along with others, into a second-order code for "architecting the experience of

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[2] Between 2013 and 2019, the number of e-books sold in the U.S. declined by 30 percent, whereas the number of print books sold increased by 11 percent. By 2019, Amazon had achieved over 50 percent market share of all book sales in the U.S.

physical place." We continued this process of collapsing and abstracting until we developed a final codebook.

      Stage 3: Triangulating longitudinal patterns. Next, we aimed to cross-validate our interview participants' retrospective narratives (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by analyzing a contemporaneous industry publication by year. To do so, we coded our sample of *Publishers Weekly* articles using our emergent codebook and graphed the frequency of each code's use over time. We then examined the codes' relative sequencing and salience, particularly pre- and post-2009. For example, we were intrigued to find an increase in codes related to bookseller's engagement with non-market strategies, including involvement in the "shop local" social movement and other acts of "community outreach." This process helped us to develop a better understanding of the longitudinal life of each code and its co-movement with the decline and resurgence of the industry.

      Stage 4: Assembling findings into a theoretical model. To refine and validate our emerging theoretical model, we returned to the field and conducted a series of in-person focus groups with 472 independent booksellers at an industry conference in January 2020. In these sessions, we asked individuals to discuss aspects of our findings, and to complete an open-ended questionnaire designed to gauge the extent to which they identified with statements such as, "We communicate to and enable the core customer to participate in a broader movement to shop local" and "We have established the store as a gathering place." The trends found in these data led us to pursue a broader lens on the phenomenon; while non-market strategies, such as social movements and community outreach, may have been partly a source of the resurgence, they were also partly a symptom: proof that the actions of the industry had gained traction.

We therefore returned to our codebook, longitudinal patterns, and preexisting theory, iterating in effort to induce root mechanisms. After returning again to the data, we were struck by the recurrence of themes relating to physical place (e.g., location, materiality, community), as well as their increasing incidence in the archival data post-2009. This finding resonated with the rise of the "shop local" movement, and also with experiences in the field. In many cases, interviews were conducted within the bookstores themselves, which allowed participants to give tours of their stores. During these interactions, both store design and geographic location were frequently referenced by retailers. Together, these findings recalled preexisting work in the sociology of place, and so we reviewed that literature to better understand the defining components of "place" and any extant understanding of its role (if any) in processes of industry evolution. Finding that a majority of work in this area had focused on place as a context, rather than a theoretical construct, we worked to develop a model of how actors use place as an asset for organizational adaptation and industry evolution.

In a final phase, we advanced in abstraction towards theoretical codes and graphed longitudinal patterns over time. We then conducted further member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), including two presentations at bookselling conferences and follow-up interviews with booksellers and industry experts. Through this iterative process we ultimately induced a theoretical model of institutional emplacement, described below.

THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONAL EMPLACEMENT

In this section, we outline a collective process we term institutional emplacement, depicted in Figure 3. We present our findings longitudinally, first outlining how booksellers struggled to respond to the emergence of Amazon, a "placeless" organizational form, and then outlining how they marshalled physical place to facilitate adaptation and resurgence. The model

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centralizes the practices of organizational actors (booksellers), and also highlights how industry

associations (ABA) and individuals (authors, readers) are relevant to the diffusion of

emplacement across an industry. Supplemental figures chart the longitudinal salience of the core

practices found in our theoretical model (Figures 5-7).

<center>------------- *Insert Figure 3 About Here* -------------</center>

Emergence of a Placeless Organizational Form (1995-2009)

Negotiating the meaning of space versus place. The emergence of Amazon in 1995

presented an environmental jolt (Meyer, 1982) to the independent bookselling industry, inciting a

14-year decline in store numbers. At first, booksellers did not realize the potential threat posed

by Amazon's "placeless" organizational form. One bookseller recounted an early exchange with

Jeff Bezos at a national bookselling conference in the mid-1990s:

> Bezos is sitting there and we're all like, "Who is this guy? He wants to open up a store in his garage and he's on a computer." Not all of us at that point were computer literate...We just thought he was this odd character in the back of the room...I think the problem was none of us understood it. It was like, *you mean you're not going to have four walls?* It is going to just be a warehouse and you're going to be shipping out?...I just didn't understand that. It didn't make sense to me (B_28).

With time, the placeless form proved to have clear strategic benefits, including nearly unlimited

inventory, heavily discounted prices, and convenience for consumers would who no longer need

to drive to a store location.

These three differentiators – scale, price, convenience – represented a significant

advantage in bookselling, in particular, given that product quality was undifferentiated. As one

bookstore owner explained:

> In our business the product – the book – is basically the same no matter where you buy it. You don't get a better ending if the book gets lovingly hand-sold to you by some thoughtful, intelligent, independent bookseller as opposed to buying it off the skid in Costco or being sent to you by buying it online (B_98).

Accordingly, Amazon treated books as products that could be exchanged without physical interaction. This orientation was drastically different from prevailing norms in the industry. Indeed, certain booksellers refused to consider books as "products" at all. In an interview, one owner explained that, "I have to say 'so-called product' as an independent bookseller because you can't think of a book as a product. It's weird to think of a book as a product…I think of things like 'friend.' I mean, it's highly personalized, charged, powerful" (B_80). Thus, not only did Amazon's online platform introduce novel practices, it also challenged taken-for-granted beliefs within the industry.

As Amazon's sales grew, its radically different practices and norms ushered in an era of instability for independent booksellers. One long-time bookstore owner recalled of that time:

> [Pre-1995], those were good times. You really didn't have to refine your business practices, and you really didn't have to think up here, because it just wasn't necessary. You just thought about books. And when the change came, suddenly the floor drops out from under you, and you think, "Either I'm going to go broke, or I'm going to rethink this and figure out what to do" (B_21).

Faced with the escalating threat, and the risk of store closure, independents were forced to rethink long-held beliefs in favor of new practice experimentation. Many independent booksellers attempted to keep pace with Amazon, experimenting with larger inventory and lower-price practices. For example, some store owners enlarged their footprint, hoping to appease readers who were attracted by the variety offered by superstores and online sites. As one store owner described: "We expanded our store… I moved across the street and doubled the space and sunk a lot of money into it" (B_31). Booksellers acknowledged that this approach was less successful in the new age of e-commerce. One bookseller reflected on this realization:

> In 1995 somebody invented the internet…suddenly having 300,000 titles went from being very cool to being very stupid…Suddenly it's like, well, wait a minute. You can buy all these books online. Everything. It's not like you can buy some of these books, or

the good ones…You can buy *everything*. So having everything in physical form on a shelf is suddenly not such a brilliant inventory management technique (B_38).

In this phase, booksellers viewed their limited physical space chiefly as a liability, a constraint on inventory size. Bound by four walls, independents could not match Amazon's scale (Stone, 2013), and so they sought other ways to compete.

Independent booksellers also experimented with Amazon's pricing scheme by offering price reductions and book-bundle deals. They experimented with various models, including discounts on best-selling hardcover titles (NYT_2004; WSJ_2008; PW_2009), frequent buyer cards (PW_1998; NYT_2001), and even vouchers for free parking (UT_2007). However, like with inventory, booksellers reported that these practices were ill-fit to the model of brick-and-mortar selling because stores operated on "razor-thin" margins to begin with, as low as zero- to four-percent (PW_2018), making further reductions infeasible. In an interview, one independent bookseller reflected that, "Amazon and others have taught people to not pay full price. And in a margin sensitive business, that's deadly" (B_44). Or as Jeff Bezos put it in an early Amazon press release: "There may be reasons to shop in the physical world. But price is not one of them" (PW_2002).

Taken together, throughout this phase booksellers were forced to reckon with the disadvantages afforded by their physical boundedness. Despite booksellers' efforts at experimentation, consumers continued to embrace e-commerce as a placeless alternative. Indeed, sellers would often observe this substitution real-time as customers engaged in "showrooming," the practice of taking a picture of a book in the bookstore only to later purchase it on Amazon at a discount. The independent bookselling industry was increasingly confronted with consumers' indifference to the physical form, a sentiment captured by one bookseller's comment that, "We

were battling against the modern age. Our values were pure, our motives were sincere, but it was just too big of a fight." (PW_2008). In 2009, ABA store membership reached an all-time low.

Institutional Emplacement (2010-2019)

Yet in 2010 the ABA reported an unexpected increase in independent store numbers. Our analysis revealed that surviving bookstores began to reassess their competitive advantages, reframing their physicality from a liability into a potential asset. A member of the ABA leadership team discussed how independent booksellers shifted their approach:

> We became a lot less preoccupied with what all of our competitors were doing…If you're operating a bricks-and-mortar, how do you remain relevant? How do you make a bricks-and-mortar place someone wants to still come to? (B_98)

Independent booksellers began to look inward, reevaluating their own strengths rather than racing to keep up with their competition. This introspective turn inspired a series of new practices that transformed physical stores into meaningful places worthy of patronage. The practices associated with our model of institutional emplacement are discussed in turn below.

Physical architecting: curation and ornamentation. Booksellers used material practices to cultivate meaning (c.f., Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007) through *physical architecting.* We identified two associated sub-practices – curation and ornamentation – that booksellers employed to accentuate the individual character of their stores. Every detail of store design was considered, all centered around the physical products themselves: the books. As one seller argued:

> Books are…a piece of art…You want to pick it up…You walk into a bookstore and you feel enveloped by the words, the books. People love to bring that home, and have those things that they love in their bookshelves, and be surrounded by them. It is a piece of art. And that's what people are buying (B_34).

Booksellers capitalized on this aesthetic materiality of books by designing their stores in ways that would both highlight and enhance their products.

Given space constraints, booksellers used curation to tailor their inventory of books. Great care was put into designing artful table displays and front windows, and categorizing shelves by theme. Instead of featuring *New York Times* best-selling titles at the front of the store, akin to Amazon's homepage, independents' shelves were often labeled as "Staff Favorites" or "Indie Bestsellers," and featured lesser-known titles and up-and-coming authors. As two booksellers commented:

> I enjoy my job more now than I did five years ago because I can now really spend more time curating my store. I don't need to carry monster best sellers…I can look out for authors and titles and books that I think, "Wow, this sounds really good and I bet nobody else would carry it" (B_75).

> People say to me all the time, "I can tell you chose all the books in this store. I can tell by your personality. I can tell that you hand-picked these books. This is your store. I can tell by your displays." Even if I didn't build the display, it's our voice. We have a voice (B_94).

Throughout stores, staff also utilized "shelf-talkers," handwritten note cards that hung on shelves, in order to infuse books with the personality and preferences of the booksellers who inhabited the space. For example, a description of one of Elena Ferrante's celebrated novels read: "This is one of the most powerful novels I've ever read…The most-heart-wrenching, emotionally raw prose...I was transfixed." Booksellers also increased the number of "faceouts," books with covers rather than spines facing outwards, in order to highlight attractive cover art. Thus, rather than a source of inventory constraint, stores' physical boundedness became a productive friction that forced booksellers to be intentional about the selection and arrangement of their products. This led booksellers to explain that "people come to our stores now for a sense of discovery" (B_31).

Store displays and inventory were also curated to spotlight local authors or place-specific topics. For example, on field visits to stores in college towns, such as Literati Bookstore in Ann

Arbor, Michigan and Flyleaf Books in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, we observed curated sections

of books written by notable college alumni and professors. A cookbook section in a store in

Vermont had a prominent display of books on how to make maple syrup; in contrast, a store in

Texas prioritized cookbooks relating to barbecue. Similarly, many children's sections in the

Boston area highlighted Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings,* which is set in the

Boston Public Garden, while children's sections in the New York City area highlighted Kay

Thompson's *Eloise,* which is set in Manhattan's Plaza Hotel. As summarized by one owner:

> Every store is going to be different, and every community is different, and part of
> [independent bookstores'] strength in our world is that they all are different. The store
> that you find in Boston is not going to be the same as the store you find in Southern
> California (B_98).

By carefully curating inventory within the four walls of their stores, booksellers treated books as

more than commodities, but rather meaningful objects (e.g., "friends," "pieces of art") deserving

of a unique home. In this sense, bookstores became living spaces, as described by one

bookseller: "So what is it that independent bookstores actually do?…They're basically cultural

preserves in a dynamic way, a very alive and interactive way" (B_80).

If curation was a practice of trimming, a second practice, ornamentation, aimed to create

atmosphere by decorating stores with additional design elements. In the field of architecture,

ornamentation is "applied embellishment in various styles…that is a distinguishing characteristic

of buildings…often having symbolic meaning" (Brittanica, 2016). Booksellers used

ornamentation to distinguish themselves from competitors, as one bookseller explained:

> When someone walks into this building, if we're doing our job right, they know
> immediately that it's not a big-box store…We've had lots of customers say that it's an
> oasis. They come here, sometimes not even to buy books, just to be in the
> environment…That kind of aesthetic combines what the floor is made out of, what the
> shelves are made out of, the lighting, everything inside (B_67).

As this quote conveys, booksellers began to reinvest in numerous elements of physical store

design. For example, efforts were made to craft whimsical children's sections, which oftentimes

featured toy trainsets, child-sized seating, framed illustrations from popular children's books, and

cardboard cutouts of well-known characters such as the Cat in the Hat and the Hungry

Caterpillar. New industry actors emerged to offer consulting services to rookie bookstore owners

who hoped to elevate the physical design of their stores. In an interview, a bookstore interior

designer explained the principles that she had gleaned from successful existing independent

bookstores:

> When you walk in, they have warm and inviting pools of light…They have places that
> make you feel big, they don't make you feel small. The ceilings are lower, the walls are
> tighter. They make you feel ensconced…It invites you to linger and invites you to really
> settle in…You don't get overwhelmed when you walk in the door with merchandise and
> books. There is a foyer, there's a resting place. It might be a table with some flowers or
> something simple, but instead of pushing constant merchandise it invites you to the fire.
> It invites you to gather around the fire and sit and talk awhile (E_130).

These practices helped booksellers create unique in-store experiences for consumers, further

distinguishing themselves from Amazon and its placeless, price-centric approach.

Ornamentation served a financial, in addition to an aesthetic, purpose. Due to

longstanding contracts with publishers, booksellers were not able to charge more for a book than

the price printed on the cover. They therefore began to sell "sidelines," higher-margin non-book

items such as tote bags, coffee mugs, and book-themed socks. A long-time store owner explained

this change in the industry:

> The people who are around today and who are still successful, or at least surviving, are
> people whose business models have shifted some. So in 1980, when we started our store,
> no bookstore that I knew of – or very few bookstores, anyway – would have had more
> than 10% of their inventory in non-book items…what's called "sidelines" in our business
> now (B_35).

However, our interviews revealed an internal conflict; while sidelines afforded greater margins, many booksellers expressed concern that they "compromised [their] cultural mission" (B_80). As one bookseller summarized: "There are diehards who would like us to not have any [sidelines]…But my board is very much focused on the bottom line. [Sidelines] better your margins…It's a strange balance to try to find" (B_108). In order to mollify this conflict, booksellers used sidelines as design elements, placing them intentionally throughout the store to create themed, room-like atmospheres. One owner outlined this design strategy:

> We buy a lot of those little stuffed animals and we use them to frame books. So we'll have *Curious George* and we'll have all those cute monkeys hanging around on the shelf...In the cookbook section, a beautiful bamboo salad bowl probably will sell, but will also say to the customer, "Oh, here are the cookbooks" (B_21).

Sidelines ranged in size and prominence across stores. In addition to the objects described above, some booksellers took more extreme action by installing higher-margin coffee shops or bars into their store layout. These practices were not unique to independent bookstores; superstores such as Barnes & Noble, with their in-store cafés, had long positioned themselves as America's "piazzas" (PW_2002). However, whereas Barnes & Noble's cafés were outsourced to the Starbucks chain, independent bookstores opted for locally-sourced coffee and baked goods. In this way, sidelines served two functions: augmenting both the reader's in-store experience and the bookseller's profit.

Collectively, the practices curation and ornamentation were aimed at an ostensibly simple goal: architecting bookstores into pleasant places to discover new books. Illustrative photos from field visits are presented in Figure 4. These findings are supported by our longitudinal analysis of *Publishers Weekly,* which shows that mentions of *physical architecting* practices increased between 2009 and 2019 (Figure 5).

-------------- *Insert Figures 4 & 5 About Here* -------------

Community anchoring: convening and outreach. Booksellers used social practices to embed their physical stores into the local environment through *community anchoring*. We identified two associated sub-practices – convening and outreach – that booksellers used to accentuate the ties between stores and their communities.

Successful booksellers used their stores to facilitate social convening by hosting numerous events, including author readings and signings, children's storytime, and book clubs. Bookshelves were often placed on wheels so that they could be reconfigured to create open space for these events. A bookseller explained the diversity of events hosted at his store: "One night I was standing outside watching. We had a Spanish language event with about 40 people. We had an English-speaking author in another part of the store. We had music in our courtyard. Our café was filled in the back…and I'm thinking, 'this is heaven'" (B_31). Some of these practices were not new for independent bookstores, which had commonly offered author readings and launch parties for notable books such as *Harry Potter* (NYT_2000; WSJ_2003; PW_2007). However, the frequency and diversity of independent stores' events increased considerably during this period. As extreme cases, one owner noted that she would host upwards of 600 events a year in her store (B_81), and another up to six authors a day during the holidays (B_64). In 2014, another owner mentioned that she was hosting so many events that she needed to hire an events coordinator because she could not keep track (B_94).

The practice of convening comprised more than group events and author readings; the simple existence of local gathering places also offered individuals a source of community connection (e.g., Oldenburg, 1999). As explained by one bookseller:

> We have a lady that comes in several times a week…we have a little French coffee shop on the corner, and she goes around and gets coffee...and then she sits in front of our store and smokes a cigarette. And then she comes in the store, and we have a conversation, and more times than not she buys something. But she's not going to get that anywhere

else...First of all, she's not going to get that if she goes in Barnes & Noble. And she's not going to get that, *clearly*, from the computer (B_94).

These workaday social interactions established bookstores as natural extensions of customers' daily lives. This led many booksellers to view their convening practices as nourishing a basic human need. For instance, one owner effused that, "you know, people are social animals. They love going out into their community...You're part of that web of community. It's one of the sweetest things about life, really, and that really is at the basis of what we're doing" (B_21). Because they offered a public place for social interaction, some readers viewed bookstores as a form of "community service" (R_5). This neighborliness further distinguished independents from their competitors:

> I recognized that [independents] really aren't in the same business as Amazon…You can buy a book anywhere, but you can't buy community. If you want community you have to be a part of one, and all these stores are very much part of the fabric of their surroundings and their neighborhoods (B_90).

In short, through convening practices, booksellers pulled readers into their stores, establishing bookstores as sites of social experience and cohesion.

In addition to bringing readers into the store via convening practices, booksellers increasingly anchored themselves to local institutions through outreach. This practice is summarized by one bookstore owner who explained that, "We are very heavily integrated in our community. It's like we have tentacles of partnerships all over the place, all the time" (B_38). These "tentacles" came in numerous forms. For example, many interviewees discussed the importance of having close partnerships with local school districts (B_31; B_38; B_81; B_94). One owner discussed a school initiative that they organized for young readers:

> We have huge relationships with the school district…A local woman wrote a children's book…We saw the book, she's local to us, and we thought, "Okay, let's do this whole program about this book." We developed a whole module. It's a semester's worth…I'm not making any money on it, but I'm involving myself in the community… Their parents

are all going to feel a little bit better about us as a business. So maybe when I'm in public [and say] "support your community," it will connect a little bit (B_38).

In a separate interview, a teacher and customer of the store commented on what the partnership meant to him and local schools: "They do a lot of outreach with schools. They bring authors to our school on a regular basis. They're also hyper-aware that not every kid can purchase a book, and so they make a point of trying to go out to the Title I schools" (R_4). Other booksellers similarly spoke to the ways they cultivated long-term relationships with current and future readers through the practice of outreach. For example, one bookseller said:

> We've been open fifteen years. There are kids coming back from college now who were like, "I went to storytime here." There's a connection and that that feels important…So there is a buy-in, not a dollar but an emotional buy-in with the store (B_96).

Outreach to local schools was a natural way to integrate into the community, to gain access to a population eager for books, and to establish lasting relationships with readers.

Outreach also took the form of partnerships with other nearby institutions, such as local foundations and non-profits supporting the arts and humanities, and local Chambers of Commerce (B_31; B_71; B_81). Booksellers also often reached out to nearby independent businesses, and described forming collaborations with neighborhood yoga studios (PW_2012), animal shelters (B_96), theaters (B_20), and hotels (B_20; B_31). By stepping out from their stores and into their surrounding environment, booksellers sought to establish themselves as neighborhood fixtures. As one store owner explained, "We've done various things outreaching in the community…part of it is we're selling books, but part of it is people are seeing [our store] as part of the community" (B_20). These diverse partnerships were viewed as an essential way to secure the long-term viability of independent retail. Booksellers noted that they anchored their stores to the local environment so that they were "not 'too big to fail,' [but rather] 'too important

to fail.' We have to be too important to the community…Everything we do has to be geared to make us just too important to fail" (B_31).

In sum, while bookstores had long endeavored to be a center for the intellectual community (Miller, 2006), through the practices of convening and outreach, they deepened their social and local integration over time. As one owner explained:

> I think we always were seen as the fount of knowledge about books…All that stuff hasn't changed. But we weren't seen as the center of our community in nearly as powerful ways as we are now…Even then, it wasn't as central as it is now. I think now, we are the very center of the web in every way (B_21).

These findings are supported by our longitudinal analysis of *Publishers Weekly,* which shows that mentions of *community anchoring* practices increased between 2010 and 2019 (Figure 6).

------------- *Insert Figure 6 About Here* -------------

Sacralizing: normative claim-making. Whereas physical architecting was comprised of material practices, and community anchoring was comprised of social practices, *sacralizing* represented a discursive practice of normative claim-making. Drawing from Durkheim (1912), organizational scholars have defined the sacred as something that is "revered, transcends everyday life, and evokes passions and strong feelings" (Munir et al., 2021: 880). Once booksellers architected the experience in their stores, and anchored to their surrounding environment, they began to infuse these practices with sacred meaning by explicitly articulating the normative value of place.

Booksellers spearheaded collective calls to support local retailers. They popularized phrases such as "buy local" (PW_2012) and "indies first" (PW_2013; PW_2014), which found purchase in a broader shop local movement that highlighted the positive externalities of patronizing community-based businesses. Booksellers discussed their coordinated effort to communicate this concept of "localism":

> The thing that we really wanted [was]…to take that message out to the public. So they're walking down the street, they're seeing the "local" brand. And then it happens all over the country...And pretty soon everybody in your community comes in and says, "I'm so happy you're here. I'm doing all my shopping locally" (B_21).

While this movement has long roots, and has cropped up in some form at varying points in history (c.f., Ingram & Rao, 2004), independent booksellers shared a sense of authorship of this more recent iteration. For instance, in a focus group three booksellers argued that:

> *Bookseller 1*: If you ask John Q. Public, "what's the first thing that comes to mind when you say, 'Independent business'?" He's probably going to say, "bookstore." I think we were—
> *Bookseller 2*: In the beginning of it.
> *Bookseller 3*: I think that in most communities, booksellers have carried the [shop local] flag (FG_2015).

While discussing the Small Business Saturday initiative sponsored by American Express, another bookseller argued that:

> I can guarantee that American Express wouldn't have done [Small Business Saturday] if we weren't hammering our communities about shopping local…We've positioned ourselves in the middle of this thing, the way no other industry has (PW_2015).

By valorizing shopping local, booksellers attempted to reduce consumers' ambivalence toward brick-and-mortar retail. More so than this, they worked to infuse the act of shopping local with normative meaning that transcended market exchange.

Booksellers also made conscious efforts to educate consumers about how independent bookstores enriched their communities. In the late 1990s, there was little information on the economic spillovers of shopping at independent stores versus at chains or online. Struck by this lack, a well-known independent bookstore commissioned a team of economists to conduct an economic impact analysis. The owner explained his reasoning and the results of the analysis:

> I said, "Look, let's just find out. Is it quantitatively better to shop at locally-owned business or not? I mean, I know it feels good for us, but is it good for anybody else?"...[And they find] that there's a three-and-a-half times greater local economic impact if you shopped at locally-owned business than when you shop at chains (B_38).

Similar studies followed suit in other regions. Booksellers used these findings to articulate the continued relevance of locally-owned businesses. As one bookseller explained, "It's teaching people about every dollar they spend, where it goes – it's that consumer education part that you can never stop" (B_81). Independent bookstores were persistent, and took a multi-media approach: "Every other bookseller I know has an NPR program. We do radio reviews. We do reviews in newspapers. We all have not just print newsletters, but online newsletters, and we are all doing social media. We do so much to get the word out" (B_21). Many stores included such messaging on material artifacts in stores, such as bookmarks, pamphlets, and receipts. For example, the bottom of one bookstore's printed receipt read:

How much money stays in your community when you spend $100?
At a locally owned business: $68
At a chain store: $43
At Amazon: $0

In order to further distinguish their stores from e-commerce, booksellers made explicitly normative claims against Amazon. In interviews, booksellers would often criticize Jeff Bezos by name. One owner of a well-known independent store in the Pacific Northwest argued, "Books are not important to Jeff Bezos. *Business* is important to Jeff Bezos. *Owning the world* is important to Jeff Bezos…He's basically the mafia...Man, that guy's a shark" (B_71). Another bookseller went so far as to say, "I would like to maybe stab Jeff Bezos sometimes" (B_94). These opinions were actively and openly expressed to customers. Stores placed placards in their front windows with slogans such as: "Books curated by real people not a creepy algorithm," and "Buy books from people who want to sell books, *not* colonize the moon." These normative calls to action invited readers into the narrative, giving them the agency to influence the character of their communities. As author and bookstore owner Ann Patchett articulated:

Amazon doesn't get to make all the decisions; the people can make them, by choosing how and where they spend their money. If what a bookstore offers matters to you, then shop at a bookstore. If you feel that the experience of reading a book is valuable, then read a book. This is how we change the world: We grab hold of it. We change ourselves. (Patchett, 2012).

Through the practice of normative claim-making, independent booksellers authored Amazon into an archetypal foil. In doing so, they infused positive meaning into shopping locally, leading readers to proactively patronize independent stores. Independent bookstores became sacred places, with one reader going so far as to say: "I don't really have a church, but if I had a church it would probably be a bookstore" (NYT_2019). These findings are supported by our longitudinal analysis of *Publishers Weekly,* which shows that mentions of *sacralizing* practices increased between 2011 and 2019 (Figure 7).

------------- *Insert Figure 7 About Here* -------------

In a speech at the ABA Winter Institute, Malcolm Gladwell told the crowd that, "Amazon has made you better booksellers…It has forced you to differentiate yourselves" (PW_2013). Indeed, the David-and-Goliath narrative helped booksellers to assign normative worth to independent, brick-and-mortar retail. Yet this narrative was also founded upon practical change. As our analysis reveals, it was through the combination of multiple practices – *architecting* their physical stores, *anchoring* to their communities, and *sacralizing* local retail – that independent booksellers were able to transform their physical spaces into relevant and recognized places.

Diffusion of Emplacement Across the Industry: Coordination and Authentication

The practices described above were not limited to one geographic location, rather they diffused throughout the industry through both top-down and bottom-up mechanisms (e.g., Scott, 2008). Below, we describe how coordination and authentication facilitated the spread of emplacement practices.

The independent bookstore industry association, the American Booksellers Association

(ABA), played a critical role in coordinating the practices of geographically dispersed stores. An

essential field-configuring event (Lampel & Meyer, 2008) for diffusion was the yearly ABA

Winter Institute, which was widely attended by numerous industry actors including booksellers,

bookstore owners, publishers, and authors. While the Winter Institute had always aided the

diffusion of practices, this role expanded in 2010 when a new ABA CEO bulked out the

programming of the yearly event, leading to a four-fold increase in session types and a more than

three-fold increase in total session minutes from 2010 to 2019 (WI_2010-2019). Programming

spanned a range of topics, including sessions on "Successfully Managing a Cafe in Your

Bookstore," "Creating Profitable Events," "Selling Direct to Schools," and "Leveraging Local:

Actionable Ideas" (WI_2017-2019). In interviews, ABA leadership stressed the importance of

coming together: "The reason this event is such a success is that we put [hundreds of]

entrepreneurs under one roof and get them to interact with each other. When you own and

operate a retail business, you're very isolated" (B_98). Booksellers corroborated the sentiment:

> We are, I think, an unusually close-knit industry. That understates it. We're freakishly
> close-knit…I talked to my friend who has a toy store, my friend who has a camera store,
> my friend who has a hardware store, my friend who is a florist. And we talked about
> challenges about our businesses, and they say, "I don't know what I'm going to do
> about," fill in the blank. And I say, "What do other toy stores do?" And she says, "I have
> no idea." That brings home to me, like, wow. We are astonishingly close-knit. We're
> communicative, collegial. We share incessantly, really. ABA facilitates that (B_33).

Top-down organized events like the Winter Institute allowed for a constellation of bottom-up

practices from individual stores to crystalize into best practices.

The ABA-sponsored, field-configuring events also became essential sites of industry

belief creation and value infusion. They provided a platform where the industry's burgeoning

resurgence could be expressed and spread. For instance, at the 2012 Winter Institute, the ABA

CEO celebrated the industry's recent progress:

> Nobody in this room today is naive, but we have reason for optimism. We have proven to the industry that our business model is well-positioned for the future. Now more than ever, customers appreciate our curated selection; our local ownership and close ties to our towns and cities; our many in-store events; and the opportunity to connect face to face in our stores with other passionate readers. The experiences you create every day in your stores simply cannot be downloaded or replicated online (PW_2012).

While in 2012 the industry was only beginning to experience an increase in store numbers, such

talks served the purpose of "infusing day-to-day behavior with long-run meaning and purpose"

(Selznick, 1957: 151). Therefore, not only were specific practices diffused – such as the

importance of curating inventory, hosting events, and creating ties with local institutions – but

also a sense of collective purpose and hope.

Finally, emplacement practices were diffused and authenticated by individual actors,

chiefly authors and readers. These individuals served as institutional carriers, "go-betweens –

intermediaries that do not create but transmit" (Scott, 2003: 888) the emplacement practices.

Many authors, who relied upon local stores as sites for book tours and press events, took a

personal interest in the plight of the independent form. James Patterson donated $1-million

dollars to independent bookstores around the country (NYT_2014). Writers such as Neil

Gaiman, Richard Russo, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. penned communications in support of local

stores, often encouraging other authors to recognize their responsibility and take supportive

action (Gaiman & Palmer, 2014; Rice, 2017). A number of well-known authors even opened

independent bookstores themselves, including Ann Patchett, Jeff Kinney, Emma Straub, Judy

Blume, and George R. R. Martin. Conversely, those authors that were not sufficiently supportive

were chastised. In 2009, *Publishers Weekly* published an article titled, "How to Be a Great Local

Author; A Bookseller Prescribes 10 Rules to Stay on the Good Side of Your Town's Bookstore."

One of the rules instructed: "Don't tell everyone you meet that your book is available on Amazon. Amazon isn't telling all of its customers about your book, throwing you a party, contacting the local newspaper on your behalf, and dealing with your overbearing mother" (PW_2009).

Readers, both high-status and unknown, also took to social media to proselytize the importance of supporting local bookstores. Social media channels, such as Instagram and TikTok, emerged as arenas of virtual interaction, places where bookish types could tag their visits to stores across the country. By 2018, the "bookstagram" hashtag had been used on more than 25 million Instagram photos (Chittal, 2018). Sidelines such as tote bags with branded logos of specific stores also served as physical identity markers, signaling that individuals had assigned personal value to independent bookstores. Such activities of readers offered evidence that emplacement practices, especially sacralization, had caught hold beyond the four walls of the store. Together, institutional carriers both diffused and authenticated the belief that independent bookstores were places worthy of sustained, proactive patronage.

Outcomes of the Emplacement Process: Industry Evolution and Adaptation

Through the process of institutional emplacement, independent booksellers transformed their stores from spaces into meaningful places, facilitating the industry's adaptation and unexpected resurgence. In 2019, the ABA reported that store numbers had increased by 56 percent since 2009, growing from 1,651 to 2,581 stores. Existing bookstore owners were at the forefront of this resurgence, experimenting with new practices and sharing their story with the public. Sensing promise, a new generation of bookstore owners entered the industry, with 479 new entrants joining the ABA between 2009 and 2019. In his 2019 annual state-of-the-industry letter, the ABA CEO reported that independent stores had seen a 7.5 percent growth in sales over

the preceding five years. This upswing was reflected in "a sea change in the media's coverage of independent bookstores" (L_2019). No longer predicting the collapse of the industry, popular press headlines instead noted that "Small Bookstores Thrive" (NYT_2019), and that they had found "The Secret to Succeeding in the Amazon Age" (WSJ_2019).

In sum, our model of institutional emplacement illustrates how independent booksellers abandoned the misfit practices of their "placeless" competitors, and instead amplified the advantages of physical place (Figure 3). By architecting their physical stores, anchoring to their local communities, and articulating the sacred meaning of place, booksellers transformed their stores into emplaced entities. These practices diffused through the interaction of new and longstanding booksellers at field-configuring events (e.g., Lampel & Meyer, 2008), and were authenticated by institutional carriers, such as authors and readers. Local bookstores become recognized cornerstones of communities across the U.S. as the experience of shopping in brick-and-mortar became infused with meaning. Table 2 provides additional quotes supporting our theoretical model.

------------- Insert Table 2 About Here -------------

DISCUSSION

By examining the unexpected survival and resurgence of independent bookstores in the United States, we reveal how place can be employed by incumbents as an adaptive asset for change. We introduce institutional emplacement – a collective process by which actors infuse value into physical *spaces*, thereby transforming them into sacralized *places* – as a novel mechanism of industry evolution. Below we highlight how this mechanism holds theoretical and practical implications for research related to linear and non-linear trajectories of industries and institutions.

The Critical Role of Place in Industry Evolution

Our study extends recent work that has signaled the relevance of location and community in processes of industry evolution. In doing so, we answer calls for a deeper understanding of the relationship between place and the industry lifecycle (Aversa et al., 2022; Boxenbaum et al., 2019). Our study contributes to this line of work in multiple ways. First, while recent studies have examined how place can catalyze industry growth during the pre-emergence and emergence phases (Aversa et al., 2021; Aversa et al., 2022), the role of place in mature industries has received scant attention. Traditional models of industry lifecycles (Moeen et al., 2020; Suárez & Utterback, 1995) would have likely predicted e-commerce to dislodge brick-and-mortar retail given its advantages in inventory, price, and convenience. Indeed, when introducing his seminal theory of creative destruction, Schumpeter (1942: 85) drew inspiration from a similar setting as our own, stating: "the competition that matters arises not from additional shops of the same type, but from the department store, the chain store, the mail-order house and the supermarket which are bound to destroy" the prevailing shop form "sooner or later." However, independent bookstores offer an unexpected counter-narrative. Our findings reveal that physical place is more than mere location; it is a construct infused with meaning that can be used agentically by incumbents as an asset for adaptation, forestalling displacement in later stages of the industry lifecycle. We thus add to the accumulating evidence that industries evolve in irregular ways (Henderson, 1995; Raffaelli, 2019; Tripsas, 1997) and establish theoretical grounding for the role of place in both linear and non-linear industry trajectories.

Second, preexisting work has focused on "specific spatial locations" (Aversa et al., 2022: 1341), whereas we study an industry assembled from geographically distributed actors. Nathaniel Hawthorne once said of Anthony Trollope's novels that, "They read as if some giant

had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business, and not suspecting that they were made a show of." In effect, prior research on industry clusters has followed a similar style: it cordons off a singular location and scrutinizes the dynamics unfolding therein (Buenstorf & Klepper, 2009; Feldman, 1999; Saxenian, 1996). In contrast, we study an industry setting where actors were dispersed across multiple locations, yet still able to co-create and diffuse both meanings and practices. By zooming out in this way, we show how place is a uniquely telescopic construct operating at both the local and global levels. Place is not only "stuff" – bricks-and-mortar, mountains and trees – but also symbolic (Gieryn, 2000; Tuan, 1977). It is a source of meaning that can transcend locational borders, umbrella innumerable "glass cases." Independent booksellers shared this common asset; however, on the ground, each store's execution was uniquely its own. Thus, while stores served as pillars of their communities, sites of cohesion and continuity, they also served as sites of variation, innovation, and change. Whereas prior work has focused on the maintenance of top-down "industry recipes" (Spender, 1989) or "industry systems" (Hirsch, 1985), our study reveals how simultaneous homogeneity and heterogeneity – shared meaning diffused top-down, and diverse experimentation diffused bottom-up – enables industries to adapt more fluidly in response to environmental jolts.

The Transformation of Spaces into Places

Another key contribution of this study is to outline how actors transform spaces into places through a process we term institutional emplacement. In prior research, institutionalists have highlighted how places can be sites of both constraint and agency (Dacin & Dacin, 2019; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Wright et al., 2021). However, this work largely assumes that places are preexisting and ready for individuals to make sense of or maintain. But a sense of place is not

always a given, nor does it materialize spontaneously; rather it is "as much an achievement as a given condition" (McClay & McAllister, 2014: 3). Thus how abstract spaces become places imbued with social, cultural, and emotional meaning (Boxenbaum et al., 2019; Tuan, 1977) has remained an underexplored topic (Aversa et al., 2021; Marquis & Battilana, 2009). In response, our study applies a longitudinal lens to place, informed by early institutionalists' views that institutions are not an outcome (Zucker, 1977), but an ongoing process of value infusion (Selznick, 1957). Our model of institutional emplacement introduces three distinct value-infusion practices associated with turning spaces into places.

Physical architecting captures how actors use material objects to cultivate meaning (c.f., Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007). In our setting, booksellers both infused meaning into, and drew meaning out of, material objects in order to elevate their stores from settings of market transaction, to settings of discovery and aesthetic experience. Booksellers used shelf-talkers to spotlight their favorite titles, thereby imbuing the objects with individual personality and creating a sense that seller and consumer were engaged in a communal activity. This intentional curation stood in stark contrast to Amazon's unlimited, but anonymous, online inventory. Whereas the practice of curation aimed to *condense*, practices of ornamentation offered booksellers an opportunity to act *expansively*. By placing the children's *Magic Treehouse* series near a treehouse-shaped reading nook, a bookseller might invite budding readers to see the links between their own physical world, and the world captured in books. These findings extend prior work that has shown how individuals attach emotion and meaning to objects (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004) and spaces (Siebert et al., 2017), by highlighting the agency and flexibility of physical placement. As Yanow's (1998: 215) study of museums affirmed, "built spaces are at once storytellers and part of the story being told." Yet whereas museums are archives meant to

preserve prior institutions, restricting physical interaction with the objects they house, we show how actors architect "living institutions" (Lok, Creed, DeJordy, & Voronov, 2017). When individuals have the freedom to engage with material objects, they can assign and update the symbolic meanings attached, enabling places to evolve and adapt over time.

Community anchoring captures how actors use social practices to embed a physical place into its local environment. In studies of real estate development, the concept of an "anchor tenant" refers to a national department store in a shopping mall "that pulls in customers who also patronize smaller, more specialized shops" (Powell, Packalen, & Whittington, 2012: 439). In part, this is what community anchoring achieves: using physical space to pull in members of the surrounding community, who can then interact and establish shared meaning. In our case, booksellers increased the number of events that they hosted in order to draw in readers and invite them to linger. In this fashion, the modern independent bookstore harkens back to the age-old watering hole where community members would congregate for reasons beyond transaction. Whereas convening aimed to *pull in* members of the community, the practice of outreach involved *reaching out*. Booksellers did not remain confined to their stores, rather they embedded themselves in local schools, politics, and cultural institutions, spreading "tentacles" of partnership beyond their four walls. Whereas prior research has examined how communities may exert downward forces that shape individuals' attachments to locations (Lewicka, 2011), we reveal how actors use place to exert upward and outward forces that facilitate the construction of community. Places are made meaningful when individuals gather to discuss the norms and values that define their community (Oldenburg, 1999). Our study gives agency to this process.

Sacralization captures how actors use discursive practices to attach sacred meaning to otherwise mundane activities. Through normative claim-making, booksellers aimed to elevate

their offering in contradistinction to less worthy market alternatives, namely, Amazon. By fostering the "shop local" social movement, placing explicitly anti-Amazon placards in their windows, and educating their consumers about the positive externalities of local businesses, independent booksellers transmuted something mundane – shopping at brick-and-mortar retail – into a moral accomplishment. This rhetoric was so powerful that readers were willing to pay more for a book from an independent store, feeling that they were carrying out a noble, identity-affirming act. Past research on the morality of markets has argued that all "market exchange is saturated with moral meaning…[through] more or less conscious efforts" (Fourcade & Healy, 2007: 300) and that there has been "an increasing moralization of the economy" (Balsiger & Schiller-Merkens, 2019: 8). Here, we document how an industry was segmented into heterogeneous normative worth – running along a spectrum from profane (Amazon), to mundane (Barnes & Noble), to sacred (independents) – through the intentional action of a threatened population. Our work thus offers a companion piece to Munir, Ansari and Brown's (2021) study of the desacralization and commodification of yoga. Instead, our findings chart the reverse course of "secular enchantment" (Munir et al., 2021: 35), outlining how industries become sacralized (c.f., Zelizer, 1979), and how normative claim-making can be used as a defensive strategy by incumbents under threat. As a discursive practice, sacralization works in tandem with physical architecting and community anchoring; it amplifies and unifies the collective meaning-making of institutional emplacement.

Taken together, we illustrate how the act of turning spaces into places requires both top-down and bottom-up processes. According to Scott (2008: 191):

> Top-down processes…allow high level (more encompassing) structures to shape, both constrain and empower, the structure and actions of lower level actors…Simultaneously, counter processes are at work by which lower level actors and structures shape – reproduce and change – the contexts within which they operate.

Scholars interested in place have focused largely on top-down processes, specifically "how and why place-bound features of local communities such as market structures, types of public policies, relational systems and networks, history, tradition, and even physical geographic factors maintain a significant influence on organizations" (Marquis & Battilana, 2009: 284). While this focus has provided valuable insight into the ways organizations are influenced by their local environments, our study additionally examines how actors galvanize "counter processes" from the bottom-up. Each of the material, social, and discursive practices we advance offer micro-instances of meaning infusion, which accumulate into a more profound sense of place. These practices were authenticated and diffused upwards; for instance, authors on cross-country book tours spread novel practices and norms "from place to place" akin to institutional carriers (Scott, 2003: 879). Thus, our model of institutional emplacement shows how actors on the ground influence macro-transformations (Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998), answering calls for a greater focus on the collective action (Aldrich, 2010) and micro-mechanisms (Glynn & D'Aunno, 2022; Powell & Colyvas, 2008) of industry and institutional change.

The Persistence of Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

It is a paradox of modern life that, as the word becomes more global, digital, and virtual (Giddens, 1990; Leonardi & Neeley, 2022; Srnicek, 2017), physical environments and local communities have become only more prominent (Agnew & Duncan, 1989; Kanter, 2020; Marquis & Battilana, 2009; Quelch & Jocz, 2012). Localist social movements have been revived and redoubled (e.g., Ciuchta & O'Toole, 2018; Hess, 2009), prompting renewed advocacy for the protection of independent businesses (Ingram & Rao, 2004). Moreover, local-level variables continue to influence diverse organizational outcomes (Glynn, 2008; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007), leading strategy scholars to argue that "locational decisions

pervade every aspect of corporate strategy. …Questions of locational strategy will become more, not less, important in the coming years" (Florida & Adler, 2022: 474, 482). Our study recognizes this continued need for place, in both lived experience and academic theory. By studying a place-bound form, and positioning place as theoretical foreground rather than empirical background, our study reveals how physical place is a productive resource, not remnant, of modern society.

Local independent businesses, in particular, remain cornerstones of economic, cultural, and social life in the United States. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, small businesses created two-thirds of net new jobs and accounted for 44 percent of U.S. economic activity in 2019, the final year of our study. That same year, only 11 percent of total U.S. retail sales were generated from e-commerce purchases (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2020). Economic estimates indicate that for every dollar spent at an independent retailer, more than three times as much money returns to the local economy compared to spending at national chains (AMIBA, 2021). Independent businesses also serve an important social function. Without local footholds, individuals confront risk of civic disengagement and social dislocation (McClay & McAllister, 2014; Oldenburg, 1999; Putnam, 2001). These trends recall Schumacher's (1973) influential dictum that economies are best built around communities rather than corporations.

A theoretical contribution of this paper has been to show how actors design, cultivate, and diffuse the local gathering places that have been cited as sources of community prosperity, sociability, and character (e.g., Burton, 2005; Carrión, 2017; Lehmann-Haupt, 1951; Miller, 2006). In doing so, we offer a model that attributes greater agency to local business owners, who all too frequently are miscast as "cultural dopes" next to "hyper-muscular" entrepreneurs with ambitions to transform the global economy (Aldrich, 2010; Powell & Colyvas, 2008: 277). Thus, our work addresses recent (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018) and seminal (Schumacher, 1973) critiques that

scholars tend to neglect small businesses, a foundational sector of economic and social life, in favor of high-growth organizations such as Amazon.

An Agenda for Future Research

While any single case is limited in its generalizability, observations suggest that institutional emplacement may indeed be relevant in other settings. For example, independent coffee shops and beer pubs often tailor their spaces to community tastes (e.g., Oldenburg, 1999). Professional sports leagues also offer an example where dispersed actors appear to share a common repertoire of practices and norms that on the ground result in uniquely local teams. Stadiums draw community members together for a shared and location-specific experience such that they become sacred places for the city (Price, 2001). Likewise, ballet companies (e.g., The Philadelphia Ballet) and symphony orchestras (e.g., The Los Angeles Philharmonic) are housed in concert halls whose design and use are meant to reflect the character and tastes of the local community. Like bookselling, these examples are cultural industries. While this may make the process of meaning-making more visible (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010), we recognize that institutional emplacement may be less effective in industries where the core product is more technical in nature. We see promise in exploring this question more thoroughly in other settings, such as banking (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007) or technology (Grodal, 2018), where scholars have already intimated the importance of community.

The collapse of other brick-and-mortar retailers during our timeframe suggests that institutional emplacement cannot be seamlessly replicated. While independent bookstore owners were able to leverage physical place, others were not. Borders bookstores, notably, went out of business in 2011, citing the rise of e-commerce as a contributing factor (Osnos, 2011). Amazon itself attempted to foray into brick-and-mortar bookselling in 2015; however, the company

announced plans to shutter all locations in 2022. One reading of these trends is that institutional emplacement is limited to a certain organizational form: small and independent. Further research should consider whether and how actors can transform spaces into places in large corporations, where standardization is often paramount for efficiency gains (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1988). A notable example of this tension can be found in Whole Foods, which appears to have maintained emplacement practices from its independent roots (e.g., highlighting locally-sourced foods with shelf-talker-like tags), despite being acquired by Amazon. On the other hand, large organizations are often criticized for attempting to coopt independents' strategies (Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021; Jaffee, 2014), which could manifest as an inauthentic form of "local washing" akin to greenwashing. In short, future work should explore the conditions under which actors can shape spaces into places in large, global, or publicly-held organizations.

Our inquiry began with an intention to understand the unexpected resurgence of the U.S. independent bookstore industry. By studying an industry that deviated from a linear trajectory, we uncovered that institutional emplacement operates as a novel and neglected mechanism of adaptation and change. Recent developments within the bookselling industry suggest that emplacement can be productively employed at the organizational level, as well. After nearly going bankrupt, Barnes & Noble has recently undergone a "remarkable rehabilitation" under new CEO James Daunt's leadership (Harris, 2022) driven in part by its effort to "act like an indie bookseller" (Buckley & Deveau, 2020). Yet emplacement need not be a mechanism of resurgence, applicable only during periods of decline. Future work should explore its relevance at other phases, including pre-emergence, emergence, and growth, at the both the industry and organizational levels.

A final more distant, but relevant, application of institutional emplacement is to research on the changing nature of workplaces (Ashforth, Caza, & Meister, 2022). Work has become increasingly remote or hybrid, a trend only accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Neeley, 2021; Rhymer, 2021). This shift towards entirely or partially "placeless" work environments provokes many new questions, chief amongst them whether physical workplaces will persist or be eclipsed by remote work. Office buildings sit vacant and companies attempt to "lure their employees back into the workplace" post-COVID (Ho, 2022), reflecting a need to infuse workplaces with meaning beyond production. Our model of institutional emplacement extends prior studies of workplace design (Davis, 1984; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007; Stephenson, Kuismin, Putnam, & Sivunen, 2020), and invites further research into how actors can transform "workspaces" into more meaningful "workplaces."

CONCLUSION

In order to fully appreciate the dynamics of industry evolution, place must be elevated to an active motor of change. The novel resurgence of independent bookstores serves as evidence that physicality and proximity continue to shape how individuals interact, transact, and find meaning. We hope this work encourages scholars to remain sensitive to the fact that innovation and change are not the exclusive property of the large and powerful. Rather, local communities hold clout. Our study offers a humble reminder that industries can be shaped by the collective action of individuals who recognize and marshal the potency of place.

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Table 1: Summary of Data Sources

INTERVIEWS	
- Bookstore owners and booksellers (B); industry and trade association actors (I); industry and retail experts (E); publishers (P); authors (A); readers (R)	154 interviews (average length: 57 mins) States represented in interviews: 33 + Wash. DC
FIELD OBSERVATIONS	
Field visits: - In-person visits to independent bookstores throughout the United States	68 store visits (conducted between 2013 and 2022) States represented in visits: 30 + Wash. DC
Field-configuring event attendance: - Winter Institute; annual industry conference with booksellers, publishers, and authors - ABA "Future of Retailing" symposium with booksellers, publishers, authors, and retail experts - Book Industry Study Group annual meeting with publishers and authors	8 total days, 10 hours/day, ~700 participants (2015 and 2020) 6 total days, 12 hours/day, ~40 participants (2014 and 2018) 1 day, ~250 participants (2014)
Professional training: - Attended prospective bookseller course on "How to Succeed at Retail Bookselling"	1 day, ~50 participants (2015)
FOCUS GROUPS	
- Focus groups with bookstore owners and booksellers at ABA conferences (FG)	2 focus groups, 80 total participants, 90 mins each (2015) 10 focus groups, 472 total participants, 90 mins each (2020)
- Focus group with book industry experts from the Bookselling Research Network (FG)	1 focus group, 25 participants (2022) *Total focus group participants: 577*
ARCHIVAL DATA	
- Industry trade magazine articles about independent bookstores published in *Publishers Weekly* (PW) - Popular press articles about independent bookstores published in *The New York Times* (NYT), *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), and *USA Today* (UT)	423 articles (2005-2019) 378 articles (1995-2019) *Total articles: 801*
- ABA "Letters from the ABA CEO" to independent bookstore members (L)	62 letters (2005-2019)
- ABA Winter Institute annual programs and individual session descriptions (WI)	15 programs, 470 session descriptions (2005-2019)
Supplemental data from ABA archives: - Number of members; annual reports; aggregate financial bookmarking reports; 990 tax forms; bookseller training materials; CEO and board member speeches (ABA)	(2005-2019)

* Letters in parentheses indicate the naming convention used for sources referenced in the text (e.g., B for a quote from an interview with a bookseller; PW for a quote from *Publishers Weekly*).

Table 2: Supplemental Evidence from Interviews and Archival Data

Physical Architecting

Curation	Ornamentation
"In the old days before the internet, you'd walk into my store and you would say, 'Do you have that book on blah, blah, blah?' and I'd go, 'No, I'm sorry. I don't carry it.' They'd go, 'You call yourself a bookstore and you don't have that book?'…[Now] the more esoteric our selection, the better off we are...they go, 'I've never seen a bookshop like this.'" [B_31]	"Carl Davis, of Beaufort, S.C., visits Shakespeare & Co. when he's in New York and said he likes supporting a local bookstore. 'It's lower-key and smaller, and I can find my way around…Before I leave I'm going to buy a cup of coffee and walk down the street. You can't do that online.'" [WSJ_2016]
"I think that why a lot of the bookstores that have survived is because they've been able to adapt, but they have personalities behind them. They weren't just a big bookstore with a lot of products and then you could go online, you can get that product...The stores that made it were the ones that have a personality all their own." [B_94]	"They actually have this little café right in their store, and it's not only a café, but they serve wine and beer, which I just think is brilliant…There are just so many facets that they have done that make [the store] so beautiful." [R_12]
"In an age when millions of books can be found online, the 'curator skills' of local booksellers 'to match a book with an individual reader is more important than ever.'" [UT_2011]	"The 2,300-sq.-ft. store has a cozy kids' section with a carpeted area for storytimes and a small pillow-filled reading nook, as well as a Hogwarts-inspired mural." [PW_2019]

Community Anchoring

Convening	Outreach
"We basically took the relationship to the community and redefined what the bookstore is. It is about the community which surrounds the bookstore and those interactions between author and reader, and readers and booksellers, and readers with each other." [B_80]	"[The bookstore is] really involved in the Teen Book Festival...They are one of the primary sponsors of that. It's a free festival where the kids can come and see their favorite authors and panels and that kind of thing." [R_4]
"Our customers come in and they're coming in to strike up a conversation with me. And they're going to tell me something that's happened at the pool, and they're going to buy their book club book, and they're going to remember that they need to get a present for their father-in-law." [B_94]	"Bookstores have joined in, organizing day camps structured around children's books…the biggest buzz has recently been around Camp Half-Blood, based on the popular 'Percy Jackson and the Olympians' series…This year, the camp's 450 spots sold out in an hour and a half." [NYT_2010]
"Booksellers have coopted Cyber Monday as well; in the independent bookstore community it has been rebranded Cider Monday...stores serve hot apple cider and snacks to woo customers away from shopping online" [PW_2017]	"Booksellers are also hard at work in the fight against illiteracy and often partner with literacy councils and nonprofits. Many are committed to finding ways to give back and foster reading in their communities." [PW_2013]

Sacralizing

| Normative claim-making |
|---|
| "To put it plainly...the book industry is being held hostage by [Amazon] a company far more interested in selling flat screen TV's, diapers, and groceries. It is clear they are prepared to sacrifice a diverse publishing ecosystem to achieve retail dominance." [PW_2014] |
| "[Amazon] used books...They used books as a marketing tool to get the name of their website out there, because they are making more money now on other stuff than they are on the books...Which is why a lot of their recent moves have been very tone deaf because they don't come from a culture of books. They are not really that. They are something else." [B_31] |
| "While Amazon is always a presence in retail at this time, we do not compete with Amazon. What we offer is something we will never cede to an algorithm – commitment to making the world a more just and compassionate place." [NYT_2019] |

Figure 1: Trajectory of U.S. Independent Bookstores, 2005-2019
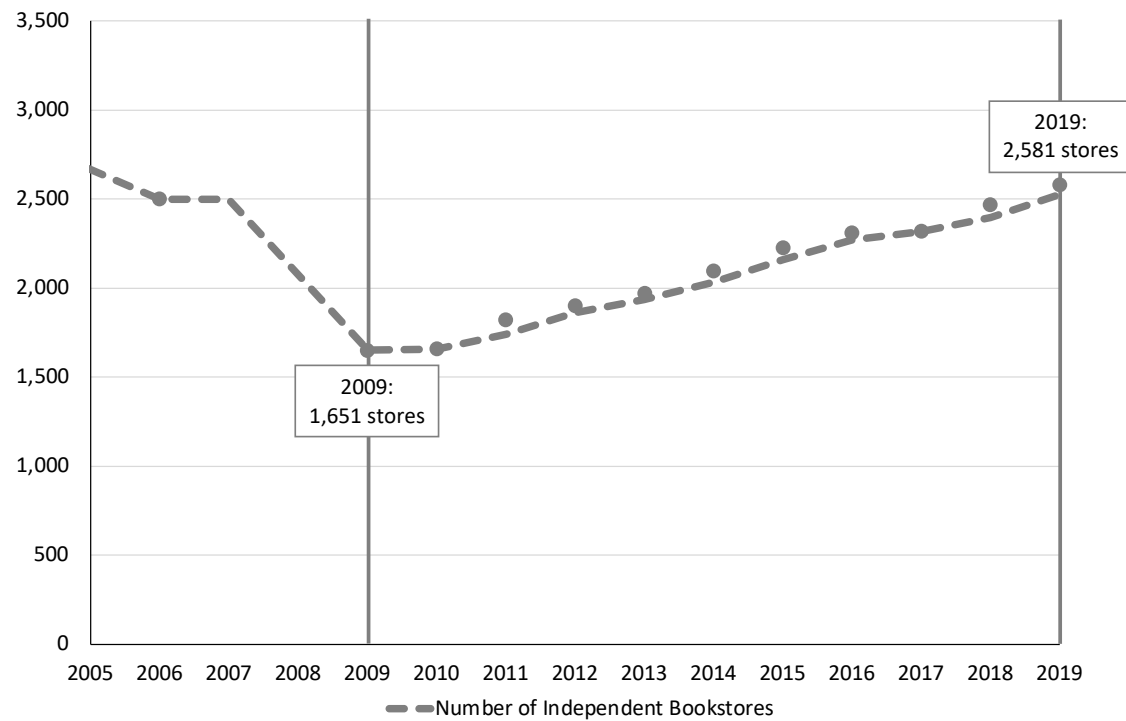
Figure 2: Interviews and Field Visits by Location

Shaded state = represented in bookseller interviews
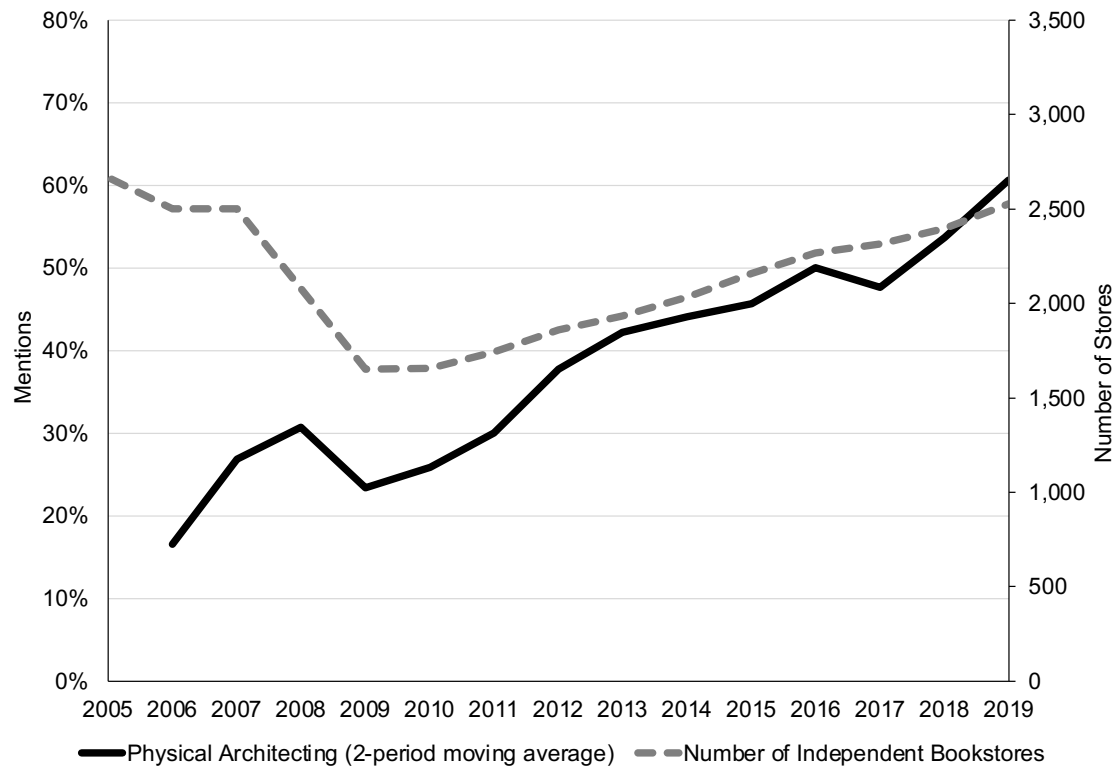
Pin = location of bookstore field visit
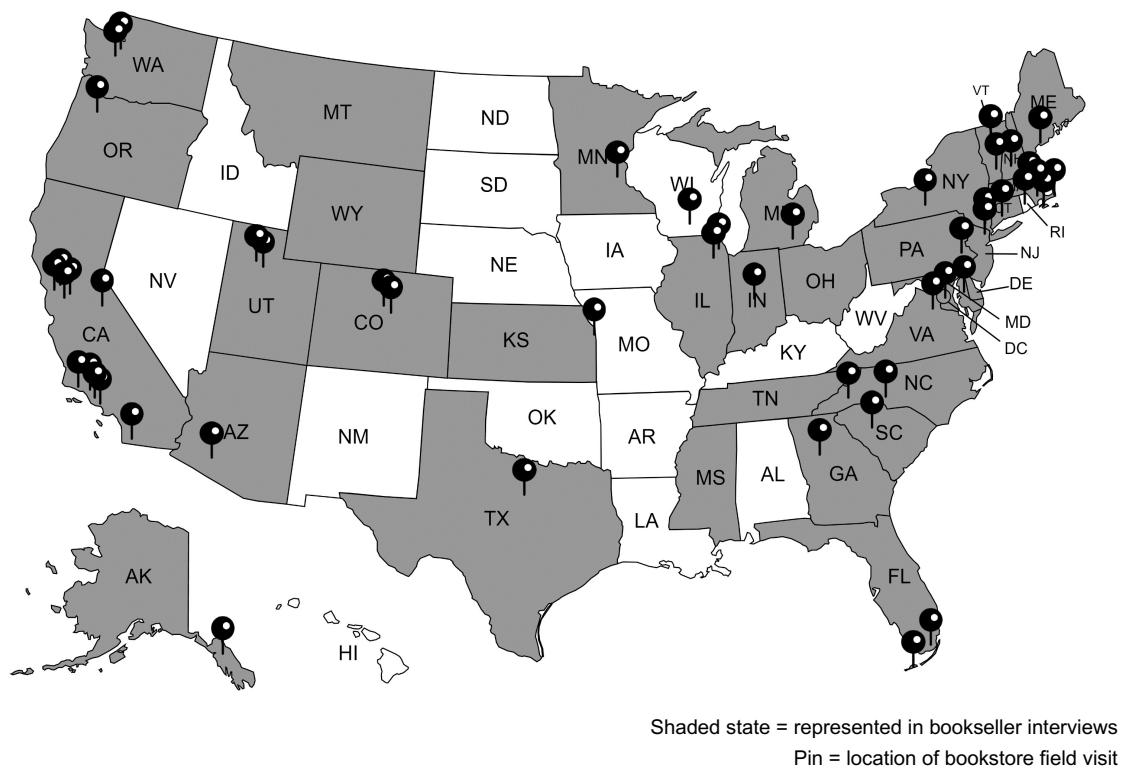
**Figure 3:** The Process of Institutional Emplacement
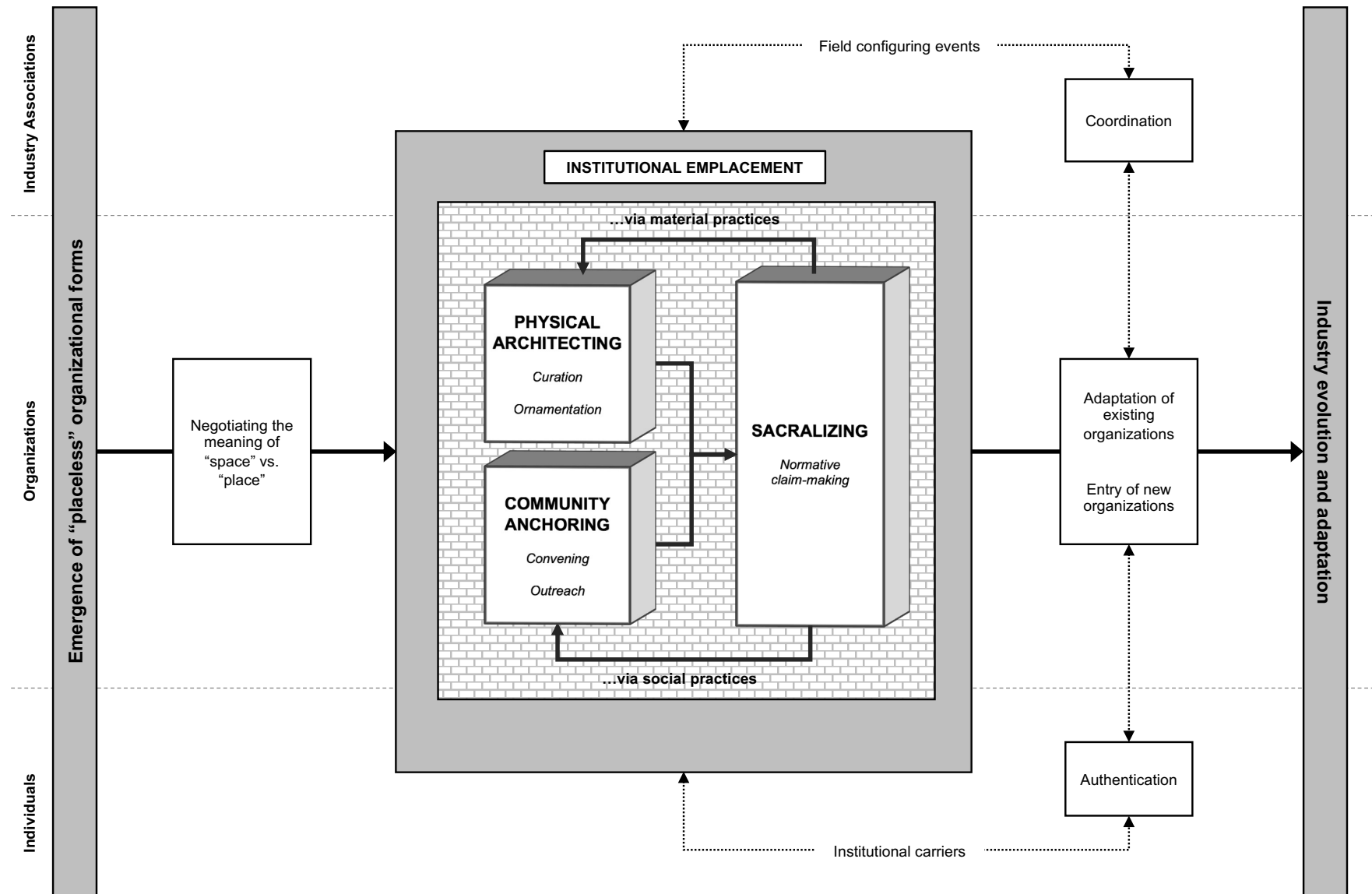
Figure 4: Pictures of Independent Bookstores from Field Visits

Figure 5: Frequency of Physical Architecting Practices Mentioned in *Publishers Weekly*

Physical Architecting (2-period moving average) — — Number of Independent Bookstores

Figure 6: Frequency of Community Anchoring Practices Mentioned in *Publishers Weekly*

Community Anchoring (2-period moving average) — — Number of Independent Bookstores
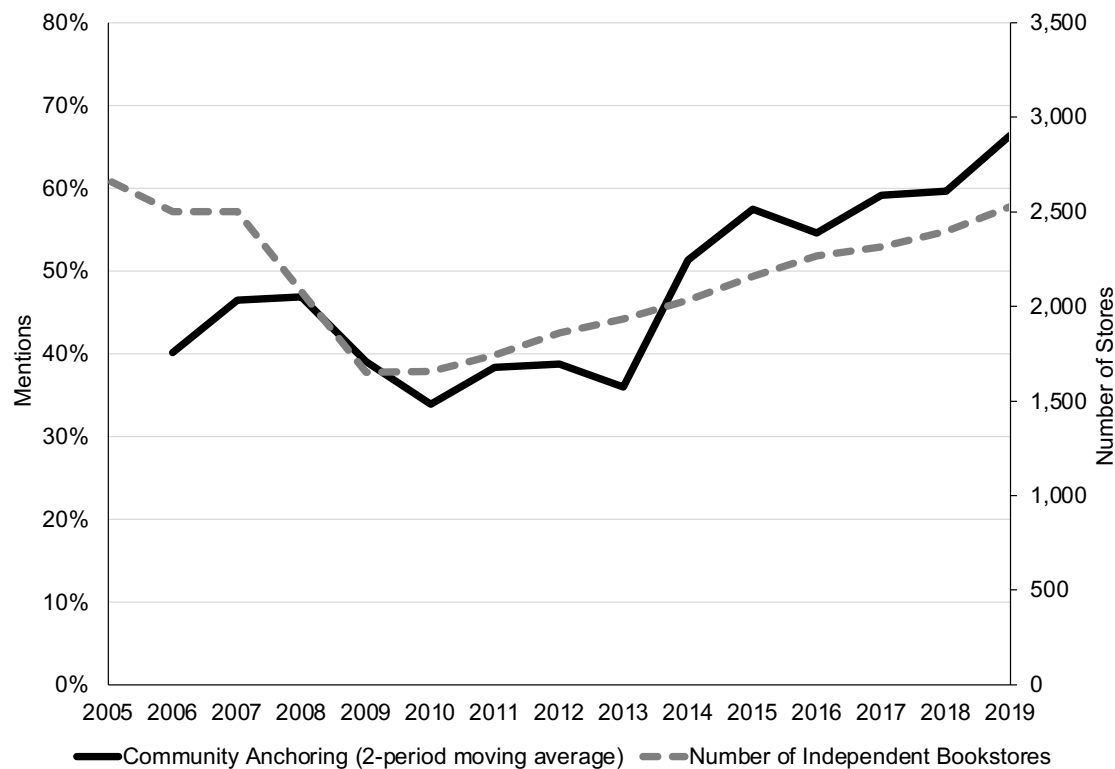
Figure 7: Frequency of Sacralizing Practices Mentioned in *Publishers Weekly*