Author’s Note

This book uses fictitious names for the studied county, company, and people. Let me explain why.¹

During the beginning of this project, I promised labor and management at the private ambulance firm that I studied that I wouldn’t publish their real names. I made this commitment under the assumption that they would speak more candidly and act more “natural” if they trusted me not to print their identities. I obviously don’t know how the alternative would have played out, but I think this was a fair assumption to start with. I also was, and continue to be, skeptical that any of the potential benefits of unmasking workers and managers’ identities would have outweighed the potential costs of doing so (e.g., the increased risk of embarrassing particular individuals).

My decision to conceal the identities of patients, nurses, cops, firefighters, doctors, bystanders, and other individuals was much easier. While my primary focus was on ambulance crews, I couldn’t ignore their interactions with these other people. But at no time did I feel like I could ask these individuals to consent to my use of their real names. Such requests would have been impractical and could have potentially interfered with emergency services.
Still, it’s one thing to print fictitious names for individuals and something else to mystify a place. There are obviously fewer counties in California than there are ambulance workers, patients, nurses, cops, and so on. I accept that many readers will probably correctly guess where this book takes place. Even so, I think many of those correct guesses would be somewhat lucky. There are many counties that run ambulance operations in a way similar to what’s detailed in this text. I should also note that there are multiple counties where it would have been more or less equally “convenient” for me to conduct this study. Ultimately, my goal is to leave you a little confused as to where exactly this book takes place.

This, of course, raises the question as to why I would want to confuse you at all. The main reason I don’t print the county’s real name is because I want to obscure the specific ambulance company I studied. As is the case for the county in this book, local governments that rely on privatized 911 ambulance operations typically hold contracts with one ambulance firm at a time. Thus, if I explicitly named the county, I might as well name the company. And that option seemed to be a bit distasteful to management. A number of managers claimed they liked the idea of me not printing the firm’s name. They said this helped separate me from some of the journalists who liked to write “hit pieces” on the organization. That seemed like a reasonable point to me, even if it was only articulated by a few people in the firm’s leadership. Plus, if I were to explicitly name the county and by extension the company, I would only be making it easier for curious readers to deidentify the small number of upper- and mid-level managers who appear in this book. So, as part of my commitment to use a pseudonym for the company, and also as part of my efforts to mask the identities of individual managers, I simply don’t name the county.

Please trust that I did not hide the real names of people, places, or organizations in an effort to conceal methodological flaws, nor did I do so as a thoughtless commitment to customs in my discipline.