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Source: *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 197-214
Published by: [Springer](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684793>
Accessed: 09/10/2013 09:56

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Ritualizing the Routine: Collective Identity Affirmation¹

Joseph C. Hermanowicz^{2,3} and Harriet P. Morgan⁴

Groups use rituals to create and preserve collective identities. Separation of sacred practices from customary activities has long been considered a key property of ritual. However, customary activities form the basis of some ritual celebrations. We explain how a different process of identity creation results: identity affirmation. We find that groups affirm their customary practices on ritual occasions when they intend to celebrate practices already associated with the sacred, and we explain the structure of such rituals using a case study of a university centennial celebration. We argue that attention to variation in ritual casts light on the values and collective identity of groups.

KEY WORDS: identity; ritual; culture; higher education.

INTRODUCTION

How and on what occasions do groups use different types of rituals to create and preserve a collective identity? Most sociological and anthropological studies of ritual emphasize separation from customary group practices on ritual occasions. Models have emphasized rituals' function in marking either a transition from one state to another or a temporary suspension of regular activities (e.g., Kapferer, 1979a; Turner, 1969).

¹A version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, August 13–17, 1993, Miami Beach, Florida.

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Yet on some occasions, activities *resemble* customary practices, albeit conducted with more dramatic flair. Groups affirm their identities through practices that “ritualize” the routines of their communal life. For example, three Chicago institutions—the University of Chicago, the Art Institute, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—recently celebrated their centennial years. The university held conferences and awarded honorary degrees framed as part of the centennial celebration; the museum assembled a special exhibition; and the orchestra held concerts with noted guest conductors. Similarly, in other contexts such as the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday and family reunions, rituals draw upon customary group practices to affirm the fundamentals of how groups know and show themselves to insiders and outsiders. Such cases contradict most theories about ritual. They lack suspension of customary practices and separation from them. Should one conclude that these cases are “misconducted rituals,” failed opportunities to mark identity?

In this article, we argue that the lack of separation indicates not poor design but a response to the nature of the activities being celebrated. Examining this type of practice—which we term *affirmation*—casts light on a central way that groups establish and sustain identities.

THEORETIC BASE

Identity Process

In order for groups to know themselves and others, they must “announce” their identities (Goffman, 1959, 1969; Lamont, 1992; McCall, 1978). They do this by engaging in social practices that highlight their symbolic place in the world. This may be especially true among groups who are closest to one another in status (Abbott, 1988; Gieryn, 1983, 1999; Hermanowicz, 1998); differences between distant groups are self-exemplifying. How are we to know that a given set of similar groups (e.g., Harvard, Columbia, Chicago; The New York Metropolitan Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, the Louvre) see themselves in different lights?

The process of identity announcement is itself a means of refining an identity over time or “finding” it at any one point in time. The identity may have a long and esteemed though evolving history (The New York Public Library) or a relatively short and perhaps struggling one (The University of the District of Columbia). But whether nascent or set in stone, identity often is constructed through a series of ritual practices: special

performances call attention to group attributes and to the sacred essence of the group itself.⁵

What use do rituals have for collective identity? The literature has followed two main approaches. The first, drawing on Durkheim (1915/1965), emphasizes the *integrative* functions that rituals serve for members of societies by revitalizing shared sentiments and beliefs (e.g., Shils and Young, 1956/1975; Warner, 1953/1974) or emphasizing common ground where disagreement also exists (e.g., Schwartz, 1991). These writers emphasize the role of ritual in maintaining social cohesion and preventing conflict (e.g., Shils, 1966, 1975). The Durkheimian perspective stresses how ritual is directed by a group at the group itself: ritual is used by groups to control themselves.

The rite serves . . . to sustain the vitality of [common] beliefs, to keep them from being effaced from memory and, in sum, to revivify the most essential elements of the collective consciousness. Through it, the group periodically renews the sentiments which it has of itself and of its unity; at the same time, individuals are strengthened in their social natures. (Durkheim, 1915/1965:420)

The second approach emphasizes *power and conflict* rather than unity, arguing that ritual can be used *in* conflict as well as to prevent conflict. Writers taking this approach illustrate how ritual can sanction deviants, support shifts in political power, and allow parties in a dispute to claim positions of dominance (e.g., Kertzer, 1988; Paige and Paige, 1981; Thompson, 1991; Trexler, 1980).

These two approaches need not be mutually exclusive. Kunda (1992:257) observes that a third perspective views ritual as a dramatic form that can contain processes of *both social cohesion and conflict*. These writers (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1967, 1969, 1974) present evidence that ritual can both mark distinctions and promote unity, sometimes within a single ritual event.

Whether they promote acceptance of a group's values among group members, outsiders, or both, rituals are prescriptive. For group members, they reward group identification. In some cases, such as shaming rituals, they sanction deviants and warn potential deviants, protecting an identity. Rituals also can promote values or behavior among observers. They can be used to claim legitimacy. In all these instances, groups use rituals to

⁵Anthropologists and sociologists have long debated the constitutive properties of ritual (consider Goffman, 1967; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Moore and Myerhoff, 1977; Smith, 1995; Tambiah, 1985; Wuthnow, 1987). Others have suggested that a more fruitful line consists not in definitional disputes but in ritual processes and functions (Bell, 1992; Kapferer, 1986). We follow that lead, since we are using ritual to understand a broader concern with identity. In doing so, we adopt a liberal definition of ritual: it is a staged communicative dimension of social activity, both sacred and secular (Goffman, 1967; Gusfield and Michalowicz, 1985; Wuthnow, 1987).

define for themselves and their observers what they believe is valuable and right. In doing so, they promote and protect a collective self-image.

In the remainder of this article, we analyze how and why one identity process, affirmation, emphasizes customary forms of group activity. Affirmation differs in how people use rituals to mark their collective identity: it lacks a reversal of customary practice and a clear separation of sacred from profane practices. In the section that follows, we outline the theoretical reasons for this difference.

Affirmation

Shils (1975:260) has argued that charisma, in the sense of connection with what a society considers sacred, can be diffused beyond individuals to institutions in a society. This suggests that in the centennial examples, the organizations conducting the ritual are themselves sacred. Certainly universities and organizations devoted to high culture are invested with charisma in Shils's sense. Yet such institutions also hold rituals that do not replicate everyday events (e.g., the inauguration of a new university president). The necessary criterion for identity affirmation appears to be the sacredness not of the group celebrating the ritual but of the customary group practices being celebrated.

Identity affirmation occurs when practices being celebrated are both customary and already invested with a high level of sacredness. This is so because adopting separate ritual practices, as expected in traditional models of ritual, would entail suspending the valued activity. Suspension poses a logical problem under such circumstances: How does one show commitment to doing something by stopping the practice? Thus groups that consider their primary activities sacred—such as the museum, the family celebrating Thanksgiving, and the university—are likely to affirm themselves by “ritualizing the routine.” This is not to imply that the ritualized activity and ordinary life are wholly identical (we hardly have Thanksgiving dinners every day of the year; if we did, the ritual would lose its meaning); rather, the ritual draws upon the ordinary, intensifying and thus affirming it (meals possess sacred qualities at all times).

Nor does affirmation imply that groups never suspend activities invested with sacredness. For example, some museums have organized a “Day Without Art” to draw attention to the effect of AIDS on the artistic community. However, the sacred activity suspended (in this case, viewing and valuing art) cannot be the primary activity highlighted (in this case, fighting AIDS). Suspension only becomes problematic when customary practices are strongly associated with the values that are the focus of the

ritual. Affirmation, as the term suggests, honors valued practices not by suspending them but by intensifying awareness of their sacred aspects.

CASE STUDY

A case study of identity affirmation permits a more detailed illustration of how the process works: the centennial celebration of the University of Chicago.

The University of Chicago centennial was celebrated between October 1991 and October 1992. The official program for the celebration listed 57 conferences, with titles ranging from “Popular Music in Asia” to “John Scotus Eriugena and the Encounter of Eastern and Western Thought” to “Steroid Receptors, Transcription Factors, and Gene Regulation: Implications in Cancer.” The program announced 30 lectures on subjects including Christian feminist philosophy, the Bill of Rights, Cubism, multiculturalism, and “Sociology and the Public Agenda.” It listed 25 “special university events,” including a book fair, a 5 kilometer run, the Graduate School of Business Follies, and several alumni reunions. The program also included concerts, visual arts exhibits, theater productions, and “related activities” such as a poetry reading and an arts fair.

Although some events on the centennial calendar were unusual, in general, the list of centennial events resembled the list of university events held in any year. The primary difference is that the number of events increased, and the events were framed as part of the centennial celebration.

Methods

To gain information on centennial events and their public reception, we attended events and we examined printed materials including press coverage of the centennial, university press releases, alumni magazines, texts of speeches given at centennial events, minutes of early centennial committee meetings, and books about the University of Chicago published as part of the centennial celebration. We analyzed the documents for discussion related to the value system of the university and for the ways in which the university attempted to reach different audiences.

To learn about the intentions of those who planned centennial events, we interviewed six of the eight centennial committee and subcommittee chairs, three former provosts of the university, and three other administrators, including the university president. Centennial planners were predominantly senior members of the faculty who had long associations with the

university. We also interviewed two people from a public relations firm hired by the university to assist with centennial publicity. The interviews covered the respondents' role in planning the centennial, perceptions of centennial events, and beliefs about the purpose of the centennial, including questions about desired participation and models for centennial celebrations.

Patterns of Affirmation

Case study material allows us to observe which customary practices are intensified during the celebration. For example, we can compare the number and type of events held during the centennial celebration to the number and type of events held in other years. The university newspaper provides a comparable list of activities for centennial and noncentennial years, although its calendar is more inclusive than the official centennial program. Table I shows the number of events listed for the centennial year and the years immediately preceding and following it.

The numbers of conferences and lectures listed increased dramatically during the centennial year, but the numbers of other kinds of events listed changed little. All customary activities are not equally intensified. Rather, the set of activities most closely associated with scholarship and knowledge are intensified while other practices remain constant. From a Durkheimian perspective on ritual, one could conclude from this pattern that the univer-

Table I. Number of Events by Type and Year, as Listed in University Newspaper^a

Type of event	1990–1991	1991–1992 (Centennial)	1992–1993
Conferences	19	50	28
Lectures	226	300	126 ^b
Special university events ^c	13	25	26
Musical events	133	126	150
Visual arts exhibits	35	27	21
Theatre productions	38	44	45
Related activities ^d	7	19	12

^aSource: *University of Chicago Chronicle*, Volumes 10–12, 1990–1993.

^bA group that listed weekly lectures in 1990–1991 and 1991–1992 ceased to do so in 1992–1993. This absence can account for a drop of approximately 30 in the number of lectures listed.

^cSpecial university events include such activities as book fairs, a five-kilometer run, a week-long winter festival, homecoming festivities, and alumni reunions. The closing events of the centennial are among the special university events in 1992–1993.

^dRelated activities were not sponsored by the university but were listed in the university calendar and sometimes included university participation. Examples of such events include poetry readings, children's book fairs, arts fairs, and local museum exhibits about the university.

sity community considers scholarship and knowledge sacred and that its rituals renew members' commitment to those values. From a power perspective, one might also conclude that regardless of the extent to which such commitment is shared or renewed, this ritual displays commitment to scholarship and knowledge to outsiders and claims recognition for those values. In short, it is a claim to status (and a corresponding identity) and to maintenance of boundaries between groups.

Observation of centennial events indicated that affirmation occurs not only through increased frequency of selected customary practices, but also through a process of calling attention to the value placed on them. The content of the conferences resembled the content of conferences in other years but centennial conferences generally began with remarks about the centennial celebration. Customary events became centennial events when participants ritualized them as such.

Ritualizing customary practice offers yet another opportunity to emphasize values, to announce, define, and reaffirm commitment to sacred aspects of customary practices. The values espoused by the university or at least by the subset of its members who planned the centennial account for much of the deliberately and proudly academic tone of the centennial celebration. Centennial planners, publications, and conference opening speeches extolled the image of the University of Chicago as the "teacher of teachers," a "community of scholars," a place where what matters is "the life of the mind."

For example, in his address to the centennial convocation, former Harvard University president Derek Bok described the way the University of Chicago self-consciously projects commitment to what the university considers a distinctive academic role.

Among America's leading institutions of learning, Chicago has consistently been the one most concerned with thinking carefully about what it means to be a university, what a university should and should not do. . . . If you harbor any doubts on that score, look carefully at Chicago's experience during these past several years of criticism. You will not find a chapter by Dinesh D'Souza on political correctness at the University of Chicago. You will look in vain for investigations by the NCAA into recruiting violations by the Chicago coaching staff. You will find no speakers disinvited by the University to accommodate protesting students. And I do not think these omissions are accidental. Rather they result from a long tradition of careful reflection on the nature of a university. (Bok, 1992)

Newspapers covering the centennial also emphasized the university's academic values:

The University of Chicago is a rare sort of place where people love knowledge more than anything else. (*Chicago Tribune* September 22, 1991, Section 4:1,4)

Given the choice of the entertainment of a Whoopi Goldberg [who appeared at the Stanford University centennial] and the excitement of an intellectually stimulating,

vibrant and energetic place like the University of Chicago, they—and we—will take the university every time. . . .

At its heart is a sometimes raucous but always determined infatuation with ideas, truth, and excellence. It is a complete, head over heels commitment to discourse and learning that at once endows the university with its unique stability and respect for historic values while firing it up with an energy and openness that welcomes the new, untested and unfashionable. (Editorial, *Chicago Sun-Times* Sunday, October 6, 1991)

The key value in each discussion—whether described as a love, a purpose, or a priority—is scholarship. The sacred—knowledge and scholarship—legitimizes the community’s customary practices, and one function of the centennial is to announce this to both insiders and outsiders.

Interviews with centennial planners provide evidence of how their values shaped the identity process toward affirmation rather than suspension, and how affirmation, like other ritualizing practices, is intended to highlight group values. For example, a subcommittee chair explained:

It had been well understood that this was going to be an academic centennial. That is, the Whoopi Goldberg Stanford extravaganzas were out. . . . People said, ‘do you agree with that?’ I said yes, and as things often happen in this university, great decisions are made in matters of seconds because there is no fundamental disagreement about values. . . .⁶

An administrator also emphasized the extent to which planners wanted the centennial to mirror their ideal of the university, with scholarship—particularly faculty research—at the center:

[The centennial] committee had made it clear, and actually the president of the university had made it clear, that they wanted the focus of the centennial to be an academic one, that the core of the centennial observance really ought to be the celebration of the academic life here.

Note the assumption that the best way to celebrate academic activities is to do more of them.

Planners chose activities that contributed to scholarship over activities that required suspension of customary scholarly activities: They decided to assemble a university archive rather than sponsor an official history of the university that they believed would be, like many official histories, of little scholarly value (Harris, 1992:8). Initial plans for conferences based on the university’s historical achievements—its role in the region and as part of the Chicago renaissance in the 1890s, the development of “Chicago schools” in three disciplines—were dropped because faculty members were not interested in planning them. Instead, faculty members planned conferences related to their current research interests, even if, in the words of one planner, “many of the events that were done were so unremittingly aca-

⁶Where no references occur, quoted passages come from interviews or other unpublished documents.

democratic that nobody on earth was interested in them except the people who organized them.”

Hittites and Muons

Many of the events that did not directly advance learning nevertheless had a scholarly tone. At the convocation held at the beginning of the centennial, the university awarded 20 honorary degrees, and in June it awarded an additional 25, as compared to the 2–5 per year it normally awards. Following a tradition established decades ago (although not dating back to the university’s founding), all of the degree recipients are scholars. People associated with the university still report with pride that the faculty declined to give Queen Elizabeth an honorary degree when she visited the university because she had not made a significant scholarly contribution to a field of study. Furthermore, several respondents emphasized that each of the recipients was selected through a process comparable to tenure review in gravity, thoroughness, and amount of required faculty time. The faculty did not alter its degree standards or procedures for the centennial.

The university president’s pronouncements to degree recipients further emphasized this serious regard for scholarship. She commended Oliver Gurney, professor of Assyriology at Oxford:

Meticulous copyist and translator of Akkadian and Hittite literary texts, careful and judicious chronicler of early Hittite history, reconstructor of the historical geography of Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age, you have laid an invaluable foundation of solid research and publication upon which subsequent generations of scholars are now building. You have been a pioneer in the way only a scholar can be, revealing insights about civilizations previously hidden from us. (University of Chicago, 1991)

And to a professor of physics:

Valentine Telegdi, your discovery of parity violation in muon decay heralded the modern revolution of symmetry breaking in nature. . . . Your scholarly approach to science makes you a role model for your students and colleagues. (University of Chicago, 1991)

The tone of the commendations contributes to the dramatic realization (Goffman, 1959) of a scholarly identity. The president plays her role in a way which “infuses [her] activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure” (Goffman, 1959:30). She not only praises scholarship, but also, with arcane references to Hittites and muons, portrays the image of a scholar.

The university’s activities for external groups similarly announced a connection with the sacred based on commitment to scholarship. Press

releases listed the names and achievements of prominent figures associated with the university (e.g., 61 Nobel Laureates, Robert Maynard Hutchins, John Paul Stevens). Some press releases publicized the practical applications and social value of research done at the University of Chicago (e.g., the first successful chemotherapy treatment for cancer, computer systems that predict the weather, and the development of the Dick and Jane readers). A dinner launching the university's five-year fund-raising campaign—held shortly after the start of the centennial year—also drew on sacredness associated with scholarship: Chicago civic leaders dined with 17 Nobel laureates associated with the university.

Taking Fun Seriously

Even the explicitly “fun” events emphasized the image of the university as a scholarly institution and involved only limited suspension of customary practice. Several respondents reported that when the centennial committee presented its initial, purely academic plans to the faculty council, one member of the council asked “Where’s the fun?” Fun was thus defined as something other than the conferences, lectures, symposia, and archives first planned. Yet as Table I shows, the university did not stage many additional concerts, plays, or other such typically “fun” events for its centennial celebration.

The Subcommittee on Fun and Festivals, appointed to arrange activities other than academic events, never strayed far from the theme of scholarship. Other universities celebrating anniversaries had supplemented academic events with performances by popular entertainers. The University of Chicago “fun committee” published a humorous coloring book of university scenes, sponsored an “Inconsequential Lecture Series,” and organized a match between members of the Chicago Bears and the University of Chicago football team, including events in shotput tossing and poetry reading. (In a double upset, the University of Chicago team won the shotput toss and the Bears won the poetry reading.)

By taking satiric aim at the academic seriousness of the university—weighty lectures, football players who read poetry—“fun” events, like other centennial events, called attention to the university’s projected character and values. Indeed, much of the humor works by setting up a contrast to the university’s usual serious self-regard.

Participation

The literature suggests that ritual can be directed at group members, for whom it strengthens social cohesion, and at outsiders, on whom it makes

claims of group legitimacy. The case of the University of Chicago centennial provides evidence that identity affirmation serves both these purposes.

The concentration of academic lectures and conferences suggests that the centennial was intended to heighten visibility and consciousness of the collective self for the university's existing community of people involved in its scholarly activities. Centennial events provided additional occasions for internal scholars to take part in academic activities, some of which were made more elaborate as part of the centennial celebration. A greater than usual number of outside scholars visited the campus to deliver a paper, attend a conference, or receive an honorary degree. However, such people are already part of the broader community of the university. Customary patterns of participation, like customary patterns of action, were not suspended.

With few exceptions, planners were unified in their definition of who would participate in the centennial. They chose to focus on internal participation. One respondent stated:

[When celebrating its centennial, the university] should make itself visible and try to express what its characteristic goals are, not in a sort of false way, but in a way that genuinely reached out to *people who care about those kinds of values and find that sort of world interesting and involving*. (emphasis added)

The primary participants in the centennial were university faculty members. Events were open to students and, in most cases, to the general public, but centennial planners chose to focus the celebration on the accomplishments and roles of the faculty, the group most associated with the valued practice of scholarship.

Some respondents believed it was to the university's advantage to concentrate on internal participation and minimize attention paid to external participation.

We are a well-kept secret, and that is not a bad thing. We have a lot of independence. Once you begin to serve the public in some way, you get coopted into what the public is interested in and you cannot go your own way.

The reluctance to involve external participants extended to media. A former administrator emphasized these concerns:

More faculty would have misgivings about the University of Chicago *being* in the press than *not being* in the press. The faculty gets nervous when they are in the press; [they worry] we are losing touch with our essence.

Despite these statements, the university sent out press releases and employed a public relations firm. This suggests that the ritual functioned in part to make claims on outsiders. As noted above, affirmation can provide a public demonstration of customary behavior held to be sacred. At least some planners appeared to acknowledge this as a goal of the celebration.

The most central participants in the community's customary activity, faculty members, distanced themselves from explicit external display. A faculty subcommittee on public identity and institutional visibility was created but met only once before disbanding. The subcommittee's goal—to identify ways in which the centennial could reach audiences outside of the university—was ultimately pursued by the public relations firm hired by the university at the request of its board of trustees. The public relations firm focused its efforts on providing a positive background for the fund-raising "Campaign for the Next Century," including meetings that led to editorials about the centennial in local newspapers.

We can attribute the patterns of external display to the dynamics of affirmation. Customary practice involves customary participants. Where customary practice is associated with the sacred, outsiders may be less adept at the required behaviors and may not subscribe to the group values. The modifications to customary practice that facilitate inclusion of outsiders (e.g., making lectures accessible to a general audience) also detract from rigorous adherence to sacred forms. Thus the group can most clearly demonstrate its association with the sacred and distance from the profane by maintaining its distance from outsiders. In the case of the university centennial, the group most associated with the celebrated practice of scholarship remained most distant from overt public display.

COMPARISON OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY PROCESSES

The pattern of affirmation can be further clarified through comparisons with collective identity processes rooted in anthropological and sociological discussion of ritual. We postulate three ideal-typical ways that groups use rituals to construct identity: *transformation*, *suspension*, and *affirmation*. These types are not mutually exclusive; rituals can have characteristics of more than one type. However, recognizing distinctions between ideal types can clarify our understanding. While all three processes are ways that groups promote, affirm, and make claims about their values, they differ in how this is accomplished.

We propose five dimensions divided into three major categories that structure identity and account for patterns of relations among ritual participants: (1) who leads the ritual—*Locus of Control*; (2) the patterns of participation in the ritual—*Participation*; and (3) how the ritual is constructed—*Tone*, *Duration*, and *Space*. The five dimensions are clearly related and do not necessarily operate independently of one another. For example, space (e.g., a concert hall) and tone (e.g., staid) affect the conduct of participants (e.g., decorous). These dimensions, while perhaps not an

exhaustive list of categories that can differentiate among collective identity processes, emerged in this study and can be used in others as the salient axes along which collective identity rituals unfold.

Table II shows the characteristics of the three types for each of the structural dimensions of collective identity.

Transformation marks a transition from one social category to another: for example, the changes in social status marked by marriage ceremonies, funerals, inaugurations, and initiation rites (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1971; Strauss, 1959). This process not only marks but also facilitates a change in a life or a society, usually in part through a temporary suspension of ordinary practice. Rituals such as rites of passage and festivals can transform persons and societies and transcend ordinary societal boundaries (see Van Gennep, 1960). Studies such as Kapferer's (1979b) and Tambiah's (1985) analyses of Sinhalese healing rites and Turner's discussion of Ndembu rituals (1969) discuss the processes by which rituals formally mark changes—and temporarily or permanently create changes—in individuals and in society.

Identity transformation is characterized by a hierarchical and institutionalized *locus of control*. For example, village elders control tribal initiation rites, the state and the church control weddings, and schools control graduation ceremonies. Although many transitions are celebrated, the *tone* of identity transformation is typically serious or solemn. The changes marked by this process are those a group believes are important. Identity transformation usually has a fixed, relatively short *duration*. It tends to take place in a *space* external to that used for ordinary activities, such as a church, a court, or an area apart from the rest of a village. Most *participants* in the process observe or have minor roles; a few are key participants: the priest, the judge, the commencement speaker, the shaman; and the individuals undergoing the transition.

Suspension marks categories less recognized in ordinary life by suspending conflicting categories that are usually present. For example, at an

Table II. Structural Dimensions of Collective Identity Processes

Dimension	Transformation	Suspension	Affirmation
Locus of control	Hierarchical, institutionalized	Community, may be organized by nonelites	Customary hierarchy
Participation	Few key participants, others with minor roles	Fairly broad and diffuse	Predominantly internal
Tone	Serious	Celebratory	Customary
Duration	Fixed, usually short	Short	Can be long
Space	Predominantly external	Internal or external	Predominantly internal

office holiday party, the usual hierarchical relations are briefly suspended in favor of more social and equal interaction emphasizing common membership. Celebratory occasions such as Labor Day and Lent also suspend ordinary activities in order to focus attention on an event and the values associated with it.

Suspension provides a way for society to cope with conflict (e.g., Turner, 1969, 1974; Shils, 1975; Kertzer, 1988). Some of these conflicts are structural. The identity process in this case counteracts some of the patterns and tensions in the existing social order, allowing participants to reaffirm their commitment to that order. For example, Victor Turner's model of ritual as "metaphors of anti-structure" (1974:272–299) characterizes ritual as an occasion on which normal behavioral rules and hierarchical positions are temporarily suspended, creating a sense of equal membership in the group. Other rituals recognize and formally replicate existing tensions. To again take an example from Turner (1967), Ndembu female initiation rites include a contest among women from different villages that emphasizes the competition among villages for social resources. The rites provide a separate and sacred outlet for the ongoing competition.

Suspension, in contrast to transformation, is characterized by a community-based *locus of control* in which nonelites can participate and at times organize the events. For example, secretarial staff often plan office parties. People from all parts of a community can take part in planning for holidays (see, for example, Warner, 1953/1974). Societies regard suspension as a special occasion; the *tone* is celebratory, as in the case of the Fourth of July when social divisions are suspended in order to draw attention to shared national identity. The *duration* of the suspension, as in transformations, is typically brief. Suspension can take place in either internal or external *space*, but familiar internal locations often are decorated and made different for the occasion. Examples of this include prom decorations in a high school gymnasium, a family Christmas tree in a living room, and red, white, and blue bunting in a town square on the Fourth of July. The *participation* in suspension, like the locus of control, tends to be broad, including most members of a community or group. In addition, participation is diffuse; the boundaries of a group celebrating a national holiday, for example, are ambiguously defined.

Affirmation, in contrast, tends to highlight group boundaries. While customary practice may entail some relations with the profane, affirmation reasserts its sacred aspects. Although outsiders may be able to observe ritual events, *participation* is predominantly internal.

Other dimensions reflect repetition rather than suspension of customary practices. Affirmation, like transformation, tends to reflect a group's usual hierarchy in its *locus of control*. The *space* in identity affirmation is

predominantly internal and, in contrast to suspension, it is not given disguising decorations for the occasion. Indeed, the university centennial decorations consisted predominantly of labels: new signs on campus buildings and banners bearing the university name and crest.

The *tone* of the process reflects the group's customary tone, but with increased consciousness of group activities and values. Customary practices take place with greater frequency and self-consciousness than usual, but they remain recognizable as conventional activities with some added flourish and flair. Unlike transformation and suspension, affirmation can be of long *duration*; ordinary activities and structures are more sustainable than extraordinary ones. Affirmation provides a way that ritual can serve the Durkheimian function of intensifying collective self-consciousness without the dramatic and uncommon process of collective effervescence. The affirmation offered is perhaps less dramatic, but it is also perhaps more attainable.

In its general form, identity affirmation involves little transition or suspension of customary behavior. Although perhaps all rituals involve elements of everyday life, such as walking, eating, or speaking to others, such behavior tends not to be the object of the ritual. In affirmation, customary behavior provides the basis for and focus of ritualized activity. Routine events are intensified, made more elaborate and visible, but their content does not depart from the regular practices of the community. For example, Thanksgiving feasts represent an elaborate version of a shared meal; family reunions represent an elaborate version of visiting relatives. The increased visibility of the events that make up affirmation serves to highlight what the community values about those events.

The heightened awareness of values is perhaps the most important ground for sociological concern with collective identity affirmation. Through affirmation, a group constructs and conducts a ritual that exemplifies its daily life. The ritual heightens participants' awareness of the ideals on which they base their daily life by heightening the ceremonial, communicative aspects of customary events invested with sacredness rather than by creating separate, extraordinary events.

Moreover, understanding collective identity affirmation enables sociologists to use examples of its occurrence to gain insights into the nature and values of the group performing the ritual. First, *patterns of affirmation indicate which customary activities a group considers sacred* since affirmation occurs when a customary practice invested with the sacred is celebrated. Identity affirmation can be as universalistic in collective awareness as Thanksgiving and Father's Day or as particularistic as family reunions and neighborhood block parties. In all of these cases, however, they reflect attributes of the celebrating groups. A group whose primary activities are

mundane (e.g., businesses that produce widgets)—far removed from the sacred—would likely turn to a ritual process other than affirmation such as transformation or suspension to create and preserve an identity. In this instance, transformation and suspension offer greater leverage on projecting a suitable self-image than everyday symbolic resources would make possible.

Second, *identity affirmation is most likely to occur in groups with broad agreement on values*: It does not provide release from tensions of existing structure (e.g., Turner, 1969, 1974; Kertzer, 1988). Nor does it represent ambivalence about values, as in Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz's (1991) study of the Vietnam Veteran's memorial. Instead, identity affirmation emphasizes acceptance of values.

Third, *identity affirmation is most common among groups that are social institutions* such as the family, schools, arts organizations, and religious orders. These groups sustain their status as institutions in part by using collective identity affirmation to proclaim their values. In the case of the university, this builds upon Parsons's view that institutions of higher learning act as "guardians of culture," protecting while also pointing the way toward ideals (Parsons and Platt, 1973).

But note that not all institutions affirm the same sacred features of their everyday lives. It is interesting, for example, that the University of Chicago did not parade many of its charismatic successes as a teaching institution. Rather, all institutions hook onto different values within the wider environment to define their identities. We would, therefore, expect a different type of university—a more "teaching-centered" university—to affirm itself in different ways by playing up the virtues of individually oriented instruction, accessibility, practical relevance to society, and promotion of upward socioeconomic mobility. In doing so, each institution not only affirms its identity but does so by building boundaries around it, carving a niche in a system of similar types.

Where customary practices of a group are rooted in the sacred, affirmation offers a way to reinforce commitment to values both among members and for observers who choose to notice. Identity affirmation calls attention to shared values and expresses the desire of the group to maintain those values in its everyday life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank members of the Ogburn-Stouffer Center Education Studies Group and the Culture and Society Workshop at the University of Chicago, and Charles E. Bidwell, Wendy Griswold, and Jonathan Z. Smith for many

helpful comments and suggestions. We also acknowledge comments furnished by the two anonymous reviewers.

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