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COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES, CONTRASTING IDENTITIES: A STUDY OF INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY-LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we report on a study that explores how organizational participants "learn" the concept of collective identity. Through an examination of two different organizational settings, we attempt to show how organizational members jointly create and recreate distinctive, recognizable collective identities. Their construction of collective and individual identities can be viewed as an ongoing reciprocating process of learning, interpretation and negotiation. Just as the concept of individual identity can be conceived of as a sense of self that is not only produced within the situation but also brought to it, so too can the concept of collective identity be conceived of as a sense of organizational self which is both produced within the situation and also transcends the situation. Collective identity is seen as that sense of organizational self that is experienced and learnt by organizational members which endures over time and is transmittable to future generations.

What does it mean to speak of collective identity? At the very least, we can say that the concept of collective identity suggests the existence of some form of relationship between the individual self and some larger referent such as a group, community, or organization (Koschmann, 2013). With the work environment providing a substantial arena for the enactment of such a relationship, it should come as no surprise that the nature of collective identity has been of particular interest to organizational scholars. Researchers studying person-organization fit (Cha, Chang & Kim, 2014), gender and occupation (Ashcraft, 2012), organizational sensemaking (Patriotta & Spedale, 2009), entrepreneurship (Wry, Lounsbury & Glynn, 2011), and organizational identification (Lok, & Willmott, 2014) have shared as a problematic the relationship between the individual self and the collective. The nature of this relationship has had a long history of being researched by social identity and self-categorization theorists (Tajfel, Flament, Billig & Bundy, 1971), anthropologists (Geertz, 1973) and symbolic interactionists (Hewitt, 1988). Earlier theorists of organizational learning had used cybernetic metaphors (Argyris & Schon, 1974) to articulate how relationships between individuals and collectives traverse various contingent and dialectic terrains, through a series of feedback loops. Using these theories collective identity has been associated by current organizational researchers with both remembering and forgetting (Anteby & Molnár, 2012), with time as well as space (Ybema, 2010), with the workspace and life beyond it (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). Common to all these theories is the assumption that the study of the collective is a necessary companion to the study of the individual self. Despite the breadth and depth of this scholarly activity, there is much

that remains elusive in our understanding of the relationship between the individual self and the collective.

Specifically, our interest in this research is in understanding the interactive processes through which both individual and collective identities are mutually created, experienced, learnt, and transmitted. In this paper, we attempt to examine how organizational members create and recreate distinctive, recognizable collective identities for themselves and the organizations they are associated with. In order to examine these issues, we report on an extensive qualitative research project conducted by the lead author in two student-run businesses at a large university in the northeastern United States. Collective identity forms an integral part especially of organizations that articulate a mission beyond the profit motive (Ergas, 2010), which makes the non-profit organization an especially rich terrain to examine this concept empirically. Our empirical analysis shows that individuals construct collective identities through their daily enactment of organizational processes, rituals, and symbols within the organizational space. We study the sense-making and meaning-making activities of individual organizational members, because it is from their inter-subjectively shared meaning that the organization emerges as a social reality (Smircich, 1983). From this perspective, we can begin to see how collective identity may in turn, become a critical part of the individual self. An examination of this process holds promise for not only better understanding how organization members contribute to and experience collective identity, but also how members of organizations with superficially similar structures and processes may construct substantially different collective identities.

In the rest of this paper we report on our findings, which reveal both similarities and contrasts in the ways members of these two organizations make sense of their collective identities.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The organizations studied in this research are Grassroots Cafe, a vegetarian restaurant, and Copyserve, a photocopy and graphic design service (all names in the paper have been changed for confidentiality). Both are collective organizations composed and managed exclusively by undergraduate student members. Within the structure of the university, the businesses operate under the University Entrepreneurship Center (UEC). The purpose of the UEC is to provide support and resources to Grassroots, Copyserve, and eight other student managed businesses on campus.

The research was conducted with the prior permission and extensive cooperation of members of both businesses and the UEC. The principal researcher obtained prior permission from the UEC leadership, and of the student leaders who managed both organizations. He then conducted an extensive observation of these sites over four months. Activities observed included servicing customers, coordination of meetings and various other organizational functions. The researcher attended planning meetings, purchasing runs and financial reconciliation meetings. He also observed people preparing and selling food at the Grassroots café, and volunteered in those activities, including set-up and cleanup. With Copyserve, he participated in print-runs, copier maintenance, troubleshooting and cleanup routines as well. In addition, he interviewed a number of organizational members across both collectives, using unstructured, naturalistic techniques (Putnam, 1983). Participant observation was meticulously documented through more than 400 pages of field notes, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and other researchers were used

to provide feedback on coding methods, concept cards and evaluative schema (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The methodology applied was in data analysis interpretive and phenomenological in character; indeed, an interest in identity was not the entry point for this research project, but rather an issue that emerged over time. This research project be characterized as exploratory; what it lacks in breadth of scope can be compensated for by an internal validity that is more important for theory building (Jacobides, 2005; Yin, 2013).

Upon analysis, we found that the members of Grassroots and Copyserve have fashioned organizations that their members experience in strikingly different ways. Grassroots has been described by its members as viable, creative, a place to learn and grow, and an arena for the development of satisfying personal relationships. Copyserve, by contrast, has been depicted in more diffuse and varied ways. Struggling for its financial viability and losing its relevance in the era of digital communication, it has been depicted as a place to express personal creativity for some, but not others. Moreover the organization has, over time developed a hierarchical character, with the organizational membership divided into two distinct parts, the "copy side" and the "design side." The "design side is seen as more prestigious, which produces intra-member tensions more characteristic of a traditional organization, rather than the egalitarian collective it aspires to be. The implicit tensions between the two organizations, with one seeming more in tune with its broader vision than the other, also create further dynamics which are relevant to the identity issues we are examining here.

Early on, the principal researcher became intrigued by the interplay of similarities and differences in these two organizations thrown up by the data, and resolved to focus subsequent observations and interviews on illuminating the ongoing processes that have created and are continuing to create organizational meanings experienced by the members of Grassroots and Copyserve.

This paper marks our attempt to "make sense" of our observational and interview data that was generated from that process, by engaging in an exploration of the collective identities that emerged from the study. Just as the concept of individual identity may be conceived as a sense of self that is not only produced within the situation but also brought to it (Hewitt, 1988), collective identity is conceived as that sense of "organizational self" experienced and constructed by organizational members which endures over time and is transmittable to future generations. This sense of organizational self became apparent early in the research, as members of both Grassroots and Copyserve seemed to share a strong sense of connectedness and commitment to images of their organizations.

Initial research suggested that members from both organizations viewed this strong sense of connectedness and commitment in direct contrast to other, hierarchical, organizations operating in the geographic vicinity of the university. Frequent reference to "no bosses here" and "we are all managers" and direct comments to suggest that "we're different from a real business" tended to support this contention. These sentiments were expressed across both organizations, suggesting an exploration of their common, egalitarian and democratic structures and processes. Consensus decision-making, "all-staff" meetings, and peer evaluation processes might explain the strong sense of collective identity we perceived.

Or, perhaps it was the overarching influence of the university environment and common access to institutional resources, which would account for the observed phenomena. Institutional theorists (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) argue for the power of isomorphic tendencies whereby diverse organizations evolve toward greater similarity due to the homogenizing forces of the

environment. Could isomorphic evolution provide a reasonable explanation for the similarities in the collective identities we observed?

As we began to analyze the primary data from the observations, we began to sense however, that these collective identities, while similar to the extent that organizational members contrasted themselves with "other" external organizations, were also quite distinct from one another. Grassroots' members seemed to exhibit model practices of cooperative action, decentralized and regenerative leadership, collective decision making, and reasonably efficient and profitable operation, along with a confident view of the organization's future. Copyserve's membership seemed to be characterized by confusion, centralized and inconsistent leadership, distrust, and a lack of faith in ongoing financial viability. These differences became increasingly visible to us as our research progressed, and it became clear that structural and isomorphic explanations provided an insufficient account of the complexities we observed.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

A more fruitful exploration of the collective identities of these two organizations flows from a phenomenological approach (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Husserl, 1970.) Such an approach is grounded in the belief that objects have no *a priori* meanings. Only through individuals' interactions with those objects are they imbued with meaning. "Reality," thus, is a "social construction." Members of an organization are not engaged in an act of "finding" an organizational identity, but are rather engaged in an ongoing process of identity creation through their acts of sense making.

From this perspective we began to explore the meanings and interpretations of their organizational experiences held by individual members. The strength of the phenomenological approach was its ability to illuminate the particular, specific, and fluid meanings which members attached to various organizational processes they experienced. Thus, as our analysis progressed we examined ways the differential enactment of organizational processes (hiring, evaluations, training, control, and decision making) and the nature of work (routine, non-routine) as understood by organizational members contributed to the construction of contrasting collective identities.

Hence, while institutional examination of organizational processes and structures as distinct objects points out the similarities between the two organizations, phenomenological accounts of individuals' experience of these processes and structures provide a multiplicity of meanings, and thus, an explanation for the differences we observed between the two organizations. In sum, our purpose is to explore the concept of collective identity and describe the processes that have led to the creation of the distinctive, recognizable collective identities we have observed at Grassroots and Copyserve. First we examine the structures, organizational inputs and processes the two groups share. We then explore the divergent enactment of organizational processes through which organizational members have created, and continue to create the distinctive collective identities of Grassroots and Copyserve.

Collective Identities

Existing as they do within a common institutional framework, Grassroots and Copyserve exhibit considerable similarities in organizational inputs, structures and processes. Grassroots and Copyserve are composed of members drawn from a common pool of undergraduate students,

and are connected to the university bureaucracy through a common "linking pin," the University Entrepreneurship Center (UEC). The members of both groups are similar in age and developmental stage. According to Karen, the coordinator of the UEC for the past eleven years, many of them are on their own for the first time, relatively free from parental influence or control. They exhibit a confident attitude in the face of challenges: "We can do it on our own!" is a typical response of group members. This attitude notwithstanding, Karen and the other staff of the UEC offer a number of resources to all the student businesses, including group process training, office space, and accounting support. The UEC also encourages interaction and cooperation among the businesses through their members' joint attendance at training sessions and participation in an umbrella "Board of Student Entrepreneurs" which is designed to represent and advocate the interests of the student businesses to the larger university system. Karen is not only the supervisor of and advisor to the student businesses, but also appears to be their "spiritual leader," the guardian and transmitter of their histories and a self-avowed champion of collective organization.

Thus, as a consequence of structural isomorphic forces Grassroots and Copyserve are similarly organized as collectivist-democratic organizations, and appear to exhibit many of the characteristics that distinguish such organizations from bureaucratic forms (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979.) First, rejecting position-based authority, they locate authority in the collectivity as a whole. This can be seen in the institution of the consensus-based "all-staff meeting", at which the entire membership of each group meets in order to consider "proposals" for policy changes, major purchases and to supervise the activities of the organization's operating committees whose members are chosen through a process of self-nomination and election by the all-staff meeting.

Also consistent with a collectivist-democratic form of organization there exists no formal hierarchy of positions within the groups. Each member is a "worker-manager" who is responsible to all the other "worker-managers." This is often expressed by members of both organizations as "There are no bosses here!" which is reflected in both groups' use of a self-report system in controlling lateness and a peer-appraisal performance evaluation process. Both organizations rely on individuals' honesty and willingness to cite themselves for tardiness on their shifts, as exemplified by Grassroots' "Spot Policy" and Copyserve's "Dot Policy". Those with excessive "spots" or "dots" are asked to explain their lateness to democratically appointed committees and make plans to work out a compensatory "contract." Similarly, performance appraisal is accomplished non-hierarchically through the "evals" process, whereby once each semester the members of each group participate in their own daylong forum to provide one another with performance feedback. The "evals" experience has been described by members of both Grassroots and Copyserve as rewarding, emotionally intense, anxiety provoking and tiring.

Third, compensation is basically egalitarian, with differentials based only on seniority within the group ("new" first semester or "old" member). An additional criterion determining compensation at Grassroots is the number of committees on which the member serves.

Fourth, formal organizational processes are designed to encourage appreciation for the "whole" person. This can be most readily seen in the practice of punctuating meetings with "Opening Words" and "Closing Words" from members. Meetings begin with each member greeting the others, and communicating whatever personal information about his/her day's activities, problems, experiences, etc. the member chooses to share. They close with members sharing their feelings about the meeting.

In summary, we found both organizations "sharing" various aspects of collective identity associated with (a) common access to institutional resources and leadership, and joint

participation in training; (b) a sense of being "different" from the "regular" hierarchical/bureaucratic businesses that abound in their task environment (represented by the University as well as by the restaurants and copy stores on campus and in town); and (c) a set of collectivist-democratic structures and processes that provide both Grassroots and Copyserve with a common organizational framework.

Contrasting Identities

As we have seen, Grassroots and Copyserve have many common structural features that, we have argued, have led to similarities in the collective identities experienced by the members of the two organizations. An explanation for the differences between their collective identities can be found in actual organizational processes such as *staffing, training, control* and *decision-making* as enacted within each organization, and in the *nature of the work* itself that is performed by the members of each group. Each of these processes will be examined to reveal how individuals within each collective have come to understand and enact them in quite different manners.

Staffing: Through attracting and choosing new organizational members, the staffing process serves a critical function by conveying key organizational values to prospective members while allowing for the assessment of "fit" between these prospective new members and the organization. Organizational values can be transmitted through the organization's recruitment literature, its choice of recruitment sources, information contained on the application, and the selection process itself (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). Specifically, staffing processes are intended to ensure that the organization chooses the "right kind of people".

In both Grassroots and Copyserve, staffing is handled by the "hiring committee," which has responsibility (as conferred by all-staff) to process applications and conduct interviews at the beginning of each semester to ensure adequate staffing. Given the limitation of membership to undergraduate students, both organizations experience considerable turnover of their workforces at the end of each semester with the exit of graduating members.

While recruitment is accomplished similarly by the two groups (due, at least in part, to their limited pool of potential applicants) through the posting of notices on bulletin boards and the efforts of current members to recruit their friends, selection, and the selection interview process are enacted in very different manners. In both organizations, applications are screened by the hiring committee. The surviving candidates are interviewed by the hiring committee as a panel. At Copyserve the key to "fit" is generally seen in the individual's previously acquired skills and experience. Selection interviews at Copyserve focus on the applicants' possession of technical skills for the "copy side" and artistic ability and design experience for the "design side." Interview questions tend to pose scenarios hinging on the solution of technical problems in an independent manner. A typical question might be "What would you do if you were alone on shift, there were a line of customers out the door, and the copier broke?" Less attention is paid to pre-existing "personality characteristics," according to members of the hiring committee. As one hiring committee member explained, the person's "personality" is not so important, because "people grow in Copyserve...they even change their personalities."

At Grassroots, by contrast, interviewers pose scenarios focusing on the management of interpersonal relationships. Tricia, a soon-to-graduate steering committee member, reports having been asked "How would you handle it if someone on your shift just wasn't doing his/her job properly?" Jim, a first-semester apprentice was asked: "What would you do if you had a

problem, or you noticed that someone wasn't performing up to par? How would you handle it?"

He believes his answer was significant in his being selected:

> *First I'd approach the person, individually, and just bring it up kind of lightly, like 'How do you feel about this?' Ask them, like if they're having trouble or, you know, basically approach the person. And if that didn't work, then bring it to ...a group or a committee - this is before I even know what an all-staff was or whatever. I was just like 'I'll bring it to the group.'... I think they liked that...*

In summary, members of Copyserve tend to look primarily for technical skills and previous experience and to pose scenarios focusing on independence and ingenuity in the solution of technical problems, while members of Grassroots concern themselves with interpersonal relationships and the effective resolution of problems among interdependent members of the group.

Training: Training of new-hires is intended to bring those individuals "up-to-speed" by helping them acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to allow them to function on the job. On-going organizational training is focused on maintaining or increasing individual organization members' skill level and breadth of knowledge of the work of the organization. Members of Copyserve and Grassroots experience quite different forms of training as well as contrasting emphases in the content of that training. In Copyserve the focus of training is on the technical aspects of the job: operating the cash register, computer, and photocopier. New members participate in cash register training and are exposed to a series of independently structured tutorials (designed by former members) intended to generate familiarity and competence working with the computers and photocopiers. While the technical aspects of new-hire training are also performed at Grassroots, the context in which they are introduced is quite different, focusing on teambuilding rather than independent learning. As one member recalls:

> *[There were] 14 of us...There were 4 people on the training team. We had to fill some paperwork out, obviously.... And then we went in the kitchen. They told us about the history, and that was good. We made honey mustard dressing.... They showed us how to make it, like one part mustard, one part honey, and this and that. We made that. Another group made...beans and rice, and another group made the salad, and we took a tour to the loading dock...Took a tour of the kitchen...like where everything was...we all came together ...an hour or two later...We came together and we ate, and we all brought the food, we all set up the food on the table...and we sat down at the table where we first came in. It was more comfortable. Very much more comfortable, like people were starting to talk amongst themselves...and we ate...It was good.*

Thus, while training for new members of Copyserve emphasizes the independent acquisition of necessary technical skills, training for Grassroots recruits, while accomplishing the transmission of necessary "survival skills" (e.g., Where is the dumpster to which I'll have to take the trash?) and the modeling/trial of specific job skills (e.g., How do we make the rice?) has an additional outcome. New-hire training at Grassroots creates a feeling of "community" or "family." The training format of working together, and then sitting down to share the fruits of those joint endeavors provides a powerful introduction to the cooperative, interdependent nature of the work roles members will be performing.

Ongoing training also differs in emphasis between the two organizations. Whereas technical skills appear to receive constant emphasis throughout one's tenure at Copyserve, at Grassroots the technical aspects of training are quickly complemented by interpersonal process training (meeting facilitation, shift facilitation, group decision making). The need for members to appear technically competent on the job following training was apparent in our observations at

Copyserve. A member of Copyserve sums up the feelings often associated with acquiring this competence:

> *You don't wanta ask questions cause the person who got hired with you isn't asking questions anymore and he or she may be just as shaky on what they're doing but it's just ... it's that feeling in the group that your training wheels are off now and that's the pressure...that you have to learn to just be independent in the organization.*

While Copyserve members transmit the value of independence through their training processes, Grassroots training conveys the value of interdependence:

> *It's more than just a job. It's kind of like having a baby...It's like a family and a small child. Everyone has a responsibility. As a whole. Not as individual parts...*

Much of the learning by members of both organizations takes place through observation, both informal, and as a formal program of "shadowing" senior members of the groups. Observing the behavior of senior members is an additional way that neophytes are introduced to the "collective identity" and underlying values of the group. One member of Copyserve described his own observations and reactions.

> *Sally would just go about her business, like she was independent, like she was taking care of the group's business but she was doing it independently, like she knew what she had to do and went and did it no questions asked--nothing, and then I saw Jane (also hired at the same time) starting to do that and I was like O.K. maybe I should just try and push all the buttons on the copier or I'll just try to handle this RSO card by myself...I have to learn how to do this by myself.... it's like you have to individually decide to take on stuff and you can only do that if you're independent enough to do everything by yourself.*

Independence is valued as a positive force for learning, as another Copyserve member suggests:

> *I mean you learn how to do things. I can design a flyer, I can fix the photocopier, I can do the bookkeeping, and work the computer...I mean it forces you to learn how to do everything.*

The ongoing learning process at Grassroots takes place in the context of an informal hierarchy of experience. Teaching, modeling and sharing organizational knowledge are seen as part of the role of the senior members:

> *Even though it's a collective, certain people have been there longer, and have to...help other people learn how to run the collective before we leave...We want to give everyone as much information as possible, so that they can run the collective on their own, and then they'll do the same thing.*

So, while members of both Copyserve and Grassroots learn by observing and modeling behaviors of senior members of their groups, what they learn is quite different.

Control: Control of organizational members' attendance is accomplished through each organization's "Dot" or "Spot" self-enforcement policy. At Copyserve, however, there is a generalized belief that no one will ever get fired, the final action prescribed for repeat-offenders.

> *You would never get fired from Copyserve ... Somehow they find some redeeming factor in you and make you part of the group, and an effective part of the group. It's like a family, you never get turned away. You never get turned away.*

By contrast, we witnessed the process by which a member of Grassroots was terminated. William had accumulated sufficient "spots" to be called before a meeting of the steering committee, where the members tried to impress on him the seriousness of his behavior. They asked him to explain his excessive and repeated lateness and lack of responsibility while "on shift," and attempted to set up a plan whereby he could work his way back into honorable standing. William did not comply with this plan, and a proposal for his termination was shortly brought to all-staff meeting. At the all-staff meeting, this proposal was discussed. William was given the opportunity to defend himself, and all members who wished to do so had the opportunity to express their opinions, and in many cases, their strong emotions. After a lengthy discussion, members voted. Several individuals "stood aside," neither supporting the proposal to terminate William nor blocking it. Nobody blocked (vetoed) the proposal, and so William was terminated with two weeks' notice. Tricia, who supported the proposal for his termination, commented:

> *I think towards the end, maybe, like recently, like since he's been fired he's really trying to get the idea of a collective...I think that he really learned something from us firing him. I think that was the best thing we could have done.*

This comment (which begs comparison with parental explanations such as "I did it for your own good" and "I did it because I love you") points up the metaphor of "family," which is frequently invoked by the members of both groups. There is much to suggest, however, that the nature of "family" experienced by members of Copyserve differs from that experienced at Grassroots. Where Copyserve might convey family support through an unwillingness or inability to "set limits" on its members, Grassroots seems to convey a form of family support which, when enacted suggests "we love you enough to say no and to set firm limits." When an individual is unwilling to abide by those limits, the group is willing to resort to termination. Over the past five years, at least six people have been dismissed from Grassroots, while no one has been fired at Copyserve.

Recent discussions at Grassroots about the possibility of installing a time clock to help control lateness echo a similar proposal made at Copyserve two years ago, and while both proposals were handily defeated, their mere existence suggests ongoing disagreements surrounding the most appropriate method for internal control. Copyserve's members have adopted a variety of rules and policies regarding members' use of different machines, while Grassroots' members have traditionally relied more on unwritten, internalized norms of responsibility to the group as a whole as well as to other members to govern individuals' conduct. At least one member of Copyserve feels threatened by the group's efforts at control:

> *The best you can hope for and what you would want is for people to police themselves...It would be everything against what Copyserve is if you try to, it would do too much damage to almost like censor people, to hold them to such strict regulations that would cut off their independence so they could do things, and for them to maybe even blow something off because then, you take outa the equation the whole spontaneity of it...trying to regulate the whole spontaneity of work.*

Ironically, Grassroots members have been recently rewriting their "Spots" policy to add additional formal steps and procedures, in an effort to gain control over certain members who seem to be increasingly immune to the collective's traditional internalized controls.

Decision Making: As previously discussed, decisions in collectivist-democratic organizations are generally taken by group consensus (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979.) The weekly two-hour all-staff meetings held by both Grassroots and Copyserve are venues at which the groups' formal processes of decision-making can be observed. Attendance is required for all members, who are paid their regular hourly wage for the time thus spent. For Grassroots members, attendance at all-staff is seen as critical in order to keep abreast of the group's functioning. When apprised of our research interest in their organization, members consistently recommended that we be sure to attend all-staff meetings and stated that all-staff would be where we would see how Grassroots "really works." By contrast, at Copyserve all-staffs serve as a time and place to recap and disseminate important decisions that have already taken place. To be "in the know" and a decision-maker at Copyserve is connected to being present during numerous work shifts, at which times decisions are reached.

> *Being there for a lot of copy shifts is the most important thing in Copyserve. You could do nothing and be there every day at least four hours a day and you would know everything that goes on in that business, but if you were to go to maybe just a steering meeting or an all-staff meeting you would have no idea of what happens during the week.*

Whereas at Grassroots decisions made at all-staff influence the daily operation and functioning of the business, at Copyserve decisions made during the daily operation of the business are generally recounted during all-staff for the benefit of those not yet aware of the emerging policy. At Grassroots policies tend to be decided upon and flow from the all-staff toward daily operations, while at Copyserve policies tend to emerge as results of individuals' daily experience of trial, error and problem solving. These policies are subsequently "published" at the all-staff.

We have seen that all-staff meetings serve different organizational purposes at Grassroots and Copyserve. Next, we shall examine the differing ways in which the two collectives enact the processes of the all-staff. All-staff meetings at Grassroots and Copyserve have similar structures. The meeting is led by a member who acts as "facilitator." He or she is assisted by a note-taker, a timekeeper and a "stacker" who maintains a list of members wishing to speak on a particular issue and calls upon them in turn. The format for the all-staff begins with "Opening Words," also known as a "go-around." Each group member is supposed to greet the others, and connect with them by sharing some personal experience, thoughts, and feelings. The all-staff format ends with "Closing Words," another opportunity for each group member to directly address his/her co-members and take their leave. In-between are sandwiched the "business" of the meeting, including committee reports, follow-up on old business, and "discourse," time devoted to members' speaking out about the problems and issues listed on the meeting agenda. Particularly revealing of the differences between Grassroots and Copyserve is the enactment of "Opening Words" and "Closing Words." In the course of our observations at Grassroots, these were always completed, even when the meeting was running extremely late, and the members appeared to be desperate to leave. "Opening Words" was often, although not universally, used by members as an opportunity to connect with one another.

> *My life is in shambles, and this (Grassroots) is the only structure I have.*
>
> *We had to put my dog down this afternoon. I'm sorry I was late for my shift today, but I just couldn't get over it.*

At Copyserve, by contrast, our observations revealed that "Opening Words" and "Closing Words" were frequently omitted altogether, or paid only cursory lip service by the majority of members. During one all-staff meeting, for instance, discussion of business related issues proceeded for more than 30 minutes before one member queried, "We forgot to have go-around, didn't we?"

DISCUSSION

At least two major themes emerge from our research. The first concerns the relationship between *collective identity* and the *self*. The second concerns the relationship between *collective identity* and the enactment of organizational processes.

Understanding the relationship between collective identity and the self is critical for, as we suggested earlier, collective identity is as much an individual level phenomenon as it is a collective phenomenon. The relation of the self to the collective has been of interest to researchers for over a century. Over the past twenty years the question of principal interest has shifted from "How do individuals behave when in groups?" to "How do groups behave within individuals?"(Miller & Prentice, 1994). This shift reflects the efforts of social identity and self-categorization theorists to place the collective inside the heads of individuals rather than somewhere external to them. These theorists contend that the particular social categories with which an individual identifies him or herself have a profound impact on his or her psychological functioning (Miller & Prentice, 1994).

In order to theorize the relationship between the individual self and a collective identity in which that self participates, we must first examine the concept of "self". The self can be viewed as "the concept of the individual as articulated by the indigenous psychology of a particular cultural group...The self embodies what the culture believes is humankind's place in the cosmos: its limits, talents, expectations, and prohibitions." (Cushman, 1990: 599). Thus, the concept of self exists not as a transcultural, transhistorical, unchanging structure, but rather as a local, historicized, fluid social construction. The particular concept of self that was constructed by North Americans in the modern, post-World War II period was characterized as individualistic and self-contained. Geertz's description is quite graphic:

> *The Western conception of the person [is] a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background (Geertz, 1979: 229).*

The consequences of this concept of self for North American individuals of the late 20th century have been significant. The self-contained individualistic self has been described as "empty" of family, community, tradition and shared meaning, experiencing this emptiness as a "chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger" (Cushman, 1990: 600). Evidence of this emptiness and emotional hunger has been detected in many of the "popular" problems of our day, such as low self-esteem, eating disorders, drug abuse, religious "cult" membership and even chronic consumerism. All of these ills can be interpreted as attempts by the individual to "fill up" his/her inner emptiness.

With this particular understanding of the late 20th century North American self, we can resume our discussion of the relationship between individual self and collective identity. It is our view that members of an organization can, given appropriate circumstances and through

particular processes, jointly construct a collective identity which will serve to "fill" their "empty" individual selves -- at least partially -- by creating and providing family, community, tradition, and shared meaning. One of the distinguishing features of the Grassroots collective identity appears to be the extent to which it enables its members to fill the self in this manner. In particular, experience of family, community and rich symbolic traditions make a common contribution to the construction of individual selves within the organization. In contrast, the collective identity at Copyserve provides a considerably wider range of inputs, encouraging greater variability in self-construction. Juxtaposing two Copyserve members' comments is illustrative:

> *I mean Copyserve is me and I'm Copyserve, I mean it's your business, it's my business...it was central to my career here, to my student career.*
>
> *When I walk out the door at the end of my shift, I leave Copyserve behind, I'm just Maureen now.*

In sum, the collective identities constructed by members of Grassroots and Copyserve offer different "ingredients" for the "filling up" of individual selves. Further, there is considerable individual difference in the manner and degree to which collective identity comes to influence the self-construction of members.

The second major theme that has emerged from our research concerns the relationship between collective identity and the enactment of organizational processes. Specifically, it appears that the enactment of organizational processes exerts a strong influence on the nature of collective identities created and sustained. The salience of independence in the work environment of Copyserve stands in contrast to the salience of interdependence in the work environment of Grassroots. The pervasiveness of independence can be seen at Copyserve in the selection process, control processes, and in the nature of the work itself. Independence is sought by new members as a means to display their newfound competence to other members. Control, decision-making, and authority can be seen to reside in those individuals who have "taken on the most". Finally, the reliance on technology inherent in work at Copyserve serves to encourage independence. Whether one is designing a new flyer, or making 10,000 copies, the end product reflects the interaction of a singular individual with a machine. In addition, the work requires people to "think on their feet", a process which leads to the development of policies and procedures which may differ significantly from shift to shift. The salience of independence throughout Copyserve is evident in the overwhelming task focus apparent in their daily operations.

In contrast, Grassroots' collective identity is tied very closely to the notion of interdependence. This interdependence seems to flow from those same processes of selection, control, and the nature of work, which contribute to the independence so prevalent at Copyserve. The "breaking bread" conclusion to new-hire training and the "opening words/closing words" rituals provide stark contrasts to the individual level training regime and cursory and inconsistent "go-around" which characterize Copyserve's all-staff meetings. At Grassroots, individuals are selected and evaluated largely on the basis of their ability to work well as team members. The washing, cooking, serving, and cleaning that take place consistently every day provide a work context, which, while requiring a certain level of independence with respect to task accomplishment, demands a high degree of interdependence. Further, the monotony and physical exertion inherent in their repetitious tasks are balanced in their experience by their feelings of warmth and connectedness to the group.

In sum, interdependence is as valued among the members of Grassroots as independence is among members of Copyserve. These divergent values are revealed through the ways in which the members of the two organizations enact the organizational processes we have described, and have had a significant impact on the construction of substantially different collective identities.

CONCLUSION

How, then, do we see the relationship between collective identity and the self as it is manifested in these two organizations? Organizational theorists' exploration of this relationship defines two polar extremes. At one pole are those theorists who see organizations as reified and ahistorical entities, crucibles of personality and performance where organizational members are molded, where the relationship between the organization and the individual is a unidirectional process of shaping and aligning. This positivistic, functionalist view informs a large section of traditional organizational scholarship, and indeed, many of the Human Resource practices of organizations.

At the other pole is the pure phenomenological perspective, which posits a near-solipsistic view of organizations as entities that exist purely in the minds of their constituents, where "collective identity" might be conceptualized as an ephemeral conjunction among individuals' experiences and interpretations.

Our examination of Grassroots and Copyserve, however, leads us to theorize a far more dynamic relationship. While the two organizations share a variety of structural characteristics, resources and constraints on their operations, their significant differences in terms of technology and their members' enactment of organizational processes have contributed toward the development of unique "collective identities". What we observe are organizations that manifest complex and dynamic identities, identities that are being constantly renegotiated in the course of a dialectic exchange among the group and its members. This dialectic contributes towards the creation of identities, both individual and collective.

What then, is the fundamental contribution of this research to issues of organizational identity and learning? We believe that our exploration into collective identity provides two points for reflection. First, by investigating collective identity through a study of two apparently similar organizations, we were able to recognize and report on those issues of identity that emerged by contrast. In the positivistic language of mainstream organizational scholarship, our research design allowed us to "control" for a number of "variables" leaving us free to notice and then theorize the differences between the two organizations' collective identities. This investigation led us to appreciate the reciprocal and dynamic nature of the relationship between collective identity and the self.

The second point of reflection flows from the *negotiated* nature of organizational identity and its linkages with older individual subjectivities that have been influential in shaping the organization. Any radical attempt at "reshaping" organizational identity is bound to encounter this heritage of the organizational past.

The study of identity and identification in organizations continues to be an important element of organizational studies. With our study, we have made a simultaneous analysis of processes of identification *with* organizations and *in* organizations (see Lok & Willmott 2014, to note the importance of this simultaneity). In doing so, we have hopefully advanced the study of the dynamics of organizational identification, through the interplay of collective and contrasting

identities. It is our belief that organizational identity is shaped primarily through these dynamic interactions of inside and outside forces.

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