

# **Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification**

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## **Summary**

Organizational identification is defined as a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own. While identification is considered important to the organization, it has not been clearly operationalized. The current study tests a proposed model of organizational identification. Self-report data from 297 alumni of an all-male religious college indicate that identification with the alma mater was associated with: (1) the hypothesized organizational antecedents of organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, and (absence of) intraorganizational competition, but not with interorganizational competition, (2) the hypothesized individual antecedents of satisfaction with the organization, tenure as students, and sentimentality, but not with recency of attendance, number of schools attended, or the existence of a mentor, and (3) the hypothesized outcomes of making financial contributions, willingness to advise one's offspring and others to attend the college, and participating in various school functions. The findings provide direction for academic administrators seeking to increase alumni support, as well as for corporate managers concerned about the loyalty of workers in an era of mergers and takeovers.

## **Introduction**

The impact of organizational identification (OID) on the well-being of organizational members and the organization itself has long been recognized (e.g. Brown, 1969; Hall and Schneider, 1972; Rotondi, 1975a; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). The reputed erosion of employee loyalty (Braham, 1987; Marks, 1988) due to corporate takeovers and restructuring has stimulated renewed interest in the concept of OID and provoked exhortations that organizations take member identification seriously (Drucker, 1986; Werther, 1988). Since OID is by definition organization-specific, individuals are argued to suffer an existential loss if an organization with

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which they identify themselves as merged into a new entity (Levinson, 1970; Mercer, in Fisher, 1986). With the much-discussed erosion of the nuclear family, neighborhoods, faith in political institutions and religion, and so forth, this comes at a time when OID often comprises a major component of the individual's sense of self (Farber, 1983; Levinson, 1965).

The current volatility of identification suggests a need for research on this critical construct. Unfortunately, the research to date has yielded only a bewildering array of relationships without coherent theoretical underpinnings (Reichers, 1985; Wiener, 1982). Much of the difficulty is attributable to inconsistent definitions of the construct. Scholars have often confused OID with related constructs such as organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. Further, the work-related wording of existing measures has impaired comparisons across different types of groups and organizations.

In an attempt to resolve this confusion, we recently proposed a reconceptualization of OID based on social identity theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). It was proposed that OID is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual *defines* him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member. OID was distinguished from related constructs, and critical antecedents and consequences of OID were posited.

The purpose of the present paper is to operationalize this conceptualization of OID and provide a partial test of the associated model of antecedents and consequences. Following a brief discussion of OID, the Ashforth and Mael (1989) model is applied to the alumni of a religious college. As expanded upon later, this sample was selected because: (1) the college can be considered a 'holographic organization' (Albert and Whetten, 1985), that is, one where members share a common organization-wide identity and are thus less likely to experience competing demands from, say, department-level or occupational identities, and (2) since alumni constitute a particularly critical source of support for colleges, alumni identification is likely to strongly affect the welfare of their respective alma maters. It should be noted, however, that while the present sample is unique, the model of OID that is evaluated and most of the measures that are utilized remain generic. It should also be noted that, given the cross-sectional design of the study, the causal order of the proposed correlates of OID cannot be assessed.

## **Social identity theory and organizational identification**

According to social identity theory, the self-concept is comprised of a personal identity, encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics such as abilities and interests, and a social identity, encompassing salient group classifications (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various social groups, such as organizational membership, gender, and age cohort. Classification enables individuals to order the social environment and locate themselves and others within it. The theory maintains that individuals define a class according to the prototypical characteristics ascribed to or abstracted from the members (Turner, 1985)<sup>1</sup>.

Social identification, then, is the perception of belongingness to a group classification. The individual perceives him or herself as an actual or symbolic member of the group ('I am a man'; 'I am a fan of the local football team'). Through social identification, he or she perceives him or herself as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group, as sharing a common

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that recent research on social cognition suggests that more complex modes of class definition may actually be used (e.g. Linville, Fischer and Salovey, 1989).

destiny and experiencing its successes and failures (Tolman, 1943). Identification allows the individual to vicariously partake in accomplishments beyond his or her powers (Katz and Kahn, 1978) and can render personally harmful activities worthwhile insofar as they aid the larger self (Staw, 1984). Under this perspective, *organizational* identification is a specific form of social identification where the individual defines him or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization.

Four aspects of this conception of OID are critical to the present study. First, identification is viewed as a perceptual/cognitive construct that is not necessarily associated with any specific behaviors or affective states (Gould, 1975; Turner, 1982). Second, identification is 'relational and comparative' (Tajfel and Turner, 1985, p. 16) as it defines the individual relative to individuals in other categories. The category of male becomes meaningful only in relation to the category of female. Third, given this relational and comparative nature, social identity theory maintains that individuals identify partly to enhance self-esteem (Abrams and Hogg, 1988). Thus, individuals tend to invest more of their self-concept in valued personas and tend to view their social identities positively (Burke and Franzoi, 1988). However, identification can be painful and even debilitating if the group encounters failure (Turner, 1981). Finally, while classifications tend to be categorical (one is male *or* female), the intensity of one's felt identification with a classification is a matter of degree.

### *Organizational identification and related constructs*

Ashforth and Mael (1989) discuss how conventional research on OID has failed to distinguish identification from a host of related constructs. As noted above, identification is defined as a perceptual/cognitive construct. To identify, the individual need only see him or herself as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group; behavior and affect are viewed only as potential antecedents and consequences (Foote, 1951; Gould, 1975; however, see Tajfel, 1978, for a divergent perspective). This distinguishes OID from related constructs such as organizational citizenship behaviors, effort on behalf of the group, loyalty, and satisfaction.

The frequent confusion between OID and internalization and OID and organizational commitment are particularly problematic (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Regarding the first pair, while identification refers to self in terms of social classifications (I am), internalization refers to the incorporation of values and assumptions within the self as guiding principles (I believe). To be sure, identification and internalization are often closely associated in practice. It remains, however, that an individual may define herself in terms of the organization she works for and yet disagree with or misperceive the prevailing values, or may hold those values and yet not feel a sense of belongingness to the organization.

Regarding the second pair, some theorists equate OID and organizational commitment, while others view OID as a facet of commitment (see Wiener, 1982). The authors of the popular Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) view commitment as a person's: (1) belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, (2) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and (3) desire to maintain membership (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979). This view includes internalization, behavioral intentions, and affect, but not identification as defined here.

Further, while identification is organization-specific, commitment and internalization may not be. The values and goals of the organization may be shared by other organizations such that a member can score high on commitment and internalization without perceiving a shared destiny with *that* particular organization. However, if the member identified with the organization, he or she would necessarily experience some psychic loss if he or she left the organization

(Levinson, 1970). This argument is supported by a recent study of employed business and psychology students (Mael, 1988, in Ashforth and Mael, 1989). A confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the six-item measure of OID utilized in the present study (see Method) was differentiable from the 15-item OCQ, although the correlation between the two measures was high ( $r = 0.69, p \leq 0.001$ ).

Finally, OID should be distinguished from professional and occupational identification. While OID refers to the extent to which the individual defines him or herself in terms of an organization, professional and occupational identification refer to the extent to which one defines him or herself in terms of the work he or she does ('I am a doctor') and the prototypical characteristics ascribed to individuals who do that work (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984). This work, whether it is termed a profession, occupation, or job, may be performed for one organization or many (e.g. a newspaper journalist versus a freelance journalist), and may entail tasks that are more or less specific to one organization or more generic (e.g. developing specialized software versus performing secretarial duties). The upshot is that professional and occupational identifications are not necessarily specific to any one organization. Further, it should be noted that the values, norms, and demands inherent in a professional/occupational identity may conflict with those inherent in an organizational identity<sup>2</sup>.

## Identification and college alumni

The existence of both formal and informal alumni organizations at American educational institutions dates back to the beginning of the 19th Century (Brubacher and Rudy, 1976). For the alumnus, continued affiliation with the alma mater often provides intellectual stimulation, prestige, identity stability, and a vehicle for altruistic or tax-motivated donations (Pickett, 1986). For their part, alumni provide various types of support: financial gifts, recruitment, career advice or job placement for graduates, participation in alumni events, and volunteer support for funds solicitation and organizational events (Ransdell, 1986). It has been said that alumni are the financial backbone of educational organizations (Bakal, 1979) and that 'few constituents are more important to an institution than its alumni' (Ransdell, 1986, p. 378).

However, the attachment of alumni to their alma maters is far from universal (Blakely, 1974). The estimated percentage of alumni who provide financial support ranges from 14 per cent (Bakal, 1979) to fewer than 25 per cent (Reichley, 1977). Further, various surveys suggest that while alumni like their alma maters, most remain apathetic and uninvolved (Reichley, 1977; Spaeth and Greeley, 1970). Yet, surprisingly little is known about the factors which affect alumni attachment and involvement (*cf.* Tompkins, 1986). As Frey (1981) states: '... universities probably know little about their alumni. They presume opinions, beliefs, and preferences, yet they almost never conduct scientific research into the matter ... A review of education and social science journals reveals no studies of alumni opinions' (p. 46). Thus, a study of college alumni would provide not only an excellent means of assessing the validity of the identification model (described below), but would also provide the administrators of colleges and universities with practical guidance for influencing the perceptions and behaviors of a critical constituency.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, research on the relationship between professional/occupational identification and OID has yielded negative, null, and positive associations (e.g. Patchen, 1970; Rotondi, 1975a,b). Ashforth and Mael (1989) offer one means of reconciling these results: a positive association may be maintained to the extent that one is able to *buffer* identity conflicts through such means as defensively avoiding conflicts, dealing with identity demands sequentially, and deferring to the most salient identity.

# Correlates of organizational identification

Although the cross-sectional design of the study does not permit causal testing, the proposed correlates of OID are grouped into antecedents and consequences to enhance conceptual clarity. These correlates are presented in Figure 1.

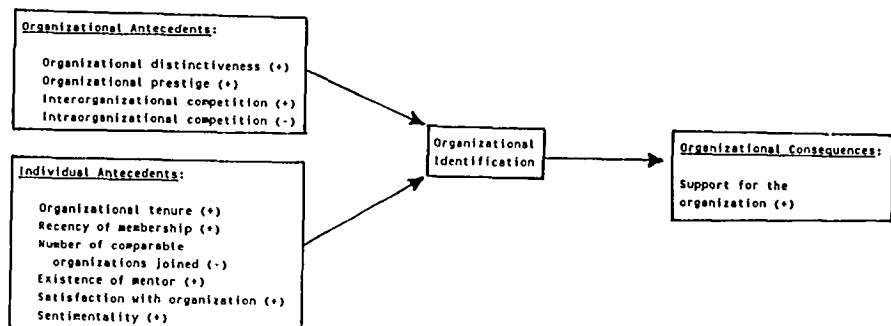


Figure 1. Proposed correlates of organizational identification

## Organizational antecedents

It is hypothesized that identification is related to the perceived *distinctiveness* of the organization's values and practices relative to those of comparable groups (Oakes and Turner, 1986). Distinctiveness differentiates the organization from other organizations and provides a sharper and more salient definition for organizational members. Thus, organizations often attempt to define their identities by finding a distinctive niche (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Clark (1972) describes the historical sagas, unique programs, and socialization practices of several colleges that enabled each college to make 'claims of distinctiveness' (p. 181) and thereby attract a passionate following among faculty, students, and alumni.

A second and related hypothesized antecedent of identification is the perceived *prestige* of the institution (March and Simon, 1958). This follows from the earlier argument that the individual identifies with a group partly to enhance self-esteem. The more prestigious the organization, the greater the potential boost to self-esteem through identification. Cameron and Ulrich (1986) document how the new president of a liberal arts college was able to rekindle support for the institution by gradually transforming its image from one of creeping mediocrity to one of excellence.

Third, OID is argued to be related to perceived *competition* between the focal institution and its contemporaries. During competition, group boundaries are drawn more sharply, values and norms are underscored, and we/they differences are accentuated (Brown and Ross, 1982; Friedkin and Simpson, 1985). These changes make it easier to identify with the organization. Not surprisingly, then, interschool competition has been known to increase school spirit among students (Clark, 1962), and success at such competition has been associated with students' tendency to wear school-identifying apparel (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman and Sloan, 1976).

Also, *intraorganizational competition* is hypothesized to be *negatively* related to OID (Brown, 1969; March and Simon, 1958). Though ingroup favoritism has been demonstrated among internally competitive groups (Dion, 1973), such competition does tend to reduce cohesion (e.g. Blau, 1954) and could trigger a refocusing on the competing individuals or subunits rather than on the organization as a whole.

### *Individual antecedents*

It is hypothesized that the amount of time in which a person is actively involved with an organization is positively associated with identification, though the slope of the association should gradually decrease over time (*cf.* Hall and Schneider, 1972). (Given the present sample of alumni, with their naturally limited college tenure, the association will be approximated by a constant slope). Although previous studies of tenure and work-organization commitment have yielded inconsistent results (Hall and Gould, 1980), this relationship may be attenuated by perceived job mobility and age-tenure covariation. These factors should be less relevant in a school setting, and so a clearer relationship may obtain.

Second, it is argued that the length of time since leaving the school is negatively related to OID. As time passes, the sense of shared destiny and belongingness would be expected to fade somewhat (Spaeth and Greeley, 1970).

The literatures on social identity theory and identification suggest that individuals often retain multiple, loosely coupled identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Thus, a given pair of social identities may not be mutually exclusive. However, it seems likely that when a person has been a member of more than one organization in the *same* social classification, the perceived sense of oneness with any one organization may be blurred and thus attenuated (March and Simon, 1958). It is hypothesized, then, that the number of schools attended is negatively related to identification with a given school. This may explain in part why Spaeth and Greeley (1970) found that the amount of financial contributions to a specific college was inversely related to the number of colleges attended.

Fourth, it is posited that individuals who establish a close, mentor-like relationship with a faculty member will exhibit greater OID (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Ashforth and Mael (1989) discuss how identification with a charismatic manager may be generalized to the organization through the routinization of charisma. Analogously, identification with an organizational member who is seen as exemplifying the organization may promote identification with the organization as a whole (e.g. Stern, 1988). It is further argued that this identification will be stronger for those individuals whose mentor is still alive and still at the school, and those who maintain contact with the mentor.

Fifth, since individuals identify more with valued personas, it is hypothesized that satisfaction with the institution's contributions to the individual's goal accomplishment is associated with OID (Hall and Schneider, 1972). This view of satisfaction follows Bullock's (1952) argument that satisfaction depends on the organization 'contributing suitably to the attainment of one's personal objectives' (p. 7).

The role of personality variables in OID has generally been ignored (Rotondi, 1975b), although individual predispositions to identify appear to exist. Cox (1985), for example, found that faculty and staff who identified strongly with their university also tended to identify strongly with *other* organizations and groups. What is needed are variables that assess the propensity to perceive groups as extensions of one's self.

'Sentimentality' may represent one such variable. Sentimentality is defined as the tendency to retain emotional and/or tangible ties to one's past, and to derive pleasure from discussing

or reliving one's past (Mael, 1988). Sentimentality differs from nostalgia in that the latter is defined as a *preference* for the past and the belief that life in the past was superior (Best and Nelson, 1985; Davis, 1979). It is argued here that a propensity to hold on to memories and memorabilia demonstrates an attachment orientation which would make identification more likely. In a pilot test involving undergraduate students, Mael (1988) found that sentimentality was significantly correlated with college identification.

### *Organizational consequences*

Social identity theory indicates that individuals tend to choose activities congruent with salient aspects of their identities and support the institutions embodying those identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). This suggests that alumni identification with their alma mater will predict such behaviors as making financial contributions to the alma mater, advising offspring and others to attend the alma mater, and participating in alumni and general institutional functions (*cf.* Tompkins, 1986). It should be added that satisfaction with the alma mater may independently predict these behaviors since a sense of gratitude may be sufficient to generate them (Pickett, 1986). This possibility will be examined.

### *Summary of model*

Organizational identification is defined here as the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization where the individual defines him or herself at least partly in terms of their organizational membership. The preceding discussion suggested three major hypotheses.

#### **Hypothesis 1**

The identification of alumni with their alma mater is related to the following organizational antecedents: (a) organizational distinctiveness, (b) organizational prestige, (c) interorganizational competition, and (d) intraorganizational competition (negatively).

#### **Hypothesis 2**

The identification of alumni with their alma mater is related to the following individual antecedents: (a) tenure with the organization, (b) recency of attendance, (c) number of schools attended (negatively), (d) the existence of a mentor-like relationship with a faculty member (especially if the mentor is still alive, at the school, and has ongoing contact with the alumnus), (e) satisfaction with the organization, and (f) sentimentality.

#### **Hypothesis 3**

The identification of alumni with their alma mater is related to the following organizational consequences: (a) making financial contributions, (b) willingness to advise one's offspring and others to attend the school, and (c) participating in various organizational functions.

Further, note that the model implies that OID at least partially mediates the impact of the hypothesized antecedents on the hypothesized consequences. This relationship will be directly assessed.

Finally, it should be noted that — owing partly to the nature of the sample — the model presented here differs somewhat from the more general model presented in Ashforth and Mael (1989). Specifically: (1) rather than focus on the salience of the outgroup, the present study focuses on 'a special case of this principle' (p. 25), namely interorganizational competition, (2) the present study does not include 'factors traditionally associated with group formation'

(p. 25) (e.g. interaction, similarity, liking) or its consequences (e.g. cohesion, internalization of values, altruism), and (3) the present study includes *individual* antecedents of OID, a factor not considered in Ashforth and Mael.

## Method

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample was drawn from an all-male college in the northeastern United States. The college belongs to a clearly defined, though unofficial conference of comparable denominational institutions. The mission of the college is to provide a religious education. The values, norms and demands inherent in academic departments, student associations, and other subunits, tend to reinforce this mission and the culture of the school. Thus, the institution conforms to Albert and Whetten's (1985) conception of a 'holographic organization' (i.e. where organizational members across subunits share a common identity) rather than an 'idiographic organization' (i.e. where members display subunit-specific identities).

Approximately 700 alumni were randomly selected from a total alumni body of approximately 2000. The institution follows the century-old convention of including as alumni all who attended the institution (Rudolph, 1962), regardless of whether they received degrees.

Questionnaires were mailed from the college's alumni office, and a follow-up postcard was mailed one month later. A total of 297 usable questionnaires was received, for a 42 per cent response rate. Conversations with alumni indicated that not all questionnaires arrived at their destination, and that some alumni were away at school or overseas during the survey period. Thus, the response rate is underestimated somewhat. According to the alumni director, the demographic profile of the sample regarding age and current geographical location is comparable to that of the total alumni population. However, as the college does not keep records on alumni marital status, current employment, and other demographic characteristics, it was not possible to statistically assess possible sampling bias.

The respondents' mean tenure at the school was 6.1 years. Current ages ranged from 20 to 67 years, with 35 per cent under the age of 30, and 82 per cent under 40. Ninety per cent were married, and 82 per cent were employed full-time. Respondents attended as many as nine conference schools, although the mean was 2.6.

### *Measures*

#### **Organizational identification**

Identification was measured by a six-item scale (see Appendix I). Mael (1988) reports a coefficient alpha of 0.81 in a sample of employed business and psychology students, and Ashforth (1990) reports a figure of 0.83 in a sample of managers from a variety of organizations and hierarchical levels. Utilizing only the first five items of the scale, Mael (1989) reports a coefficient alpha ranging from 0.83 to 0.84 in two samples of U.S. Army squad members, and from 0.87 to 0.89 in two samples of squad leaders.

#### **Hypothesized antecedents**

Perceived organizational distinctiveness was measured by a 15-item scale developed for this study. The items describe various attitudes, values, and practices which may vary among the colleges in the conference (e.g. attitude toward secular knowledge, communal involvement,



manner of dressing). As the items are specific to certain non-secular educational institutions, the scale is not presented in Appendix I.

Perceived organizational prestige, defined as the degree to which the institution is well regarded both in absolute and comparative terms, was assessed by an eight-item scale (see Appendix I). Coefficient alpha was 0.79 in Mael's (1988) study.

Perceived interorganizational competition was measured by a seven-item scale developed for the study. The scale focuses on perceived rivalry and social comparisons (see Appendix I). It should be noted that the conference schools competed on the basis of academic standing but not sports.

Perceived intraorganizational competition was assessed by an eight-item scale adapted from Mael (1986) (see Appendix I). Mael (1988) reports a coefficient alpha of 0.79.

Satisfaction with the alma mater's contribution to fulfillment of student objectives was measured by a 15-item scale adapted from Spaeth and Greeley (1970). Given Spaeth and Greeley's finding that alumni of religious institutions place more emphasis than alumni of secular institutions on personal and social development and less on career training, our version of their scale includes additional items tapping personality and social development and fewer items tapping career training.

Sentimentality was measured by a seven-item scale (see Appendix I). Coefficient alpha was 0.73 in Mael's (1988) study.

Single items assessed length of time in the school, number of conference institutions attended, and number of years since leaving the institution.

Respondents indicated if they had had a close, mentor-like relationship with a faculty member at the institution, and if so: (1) was the mentor still living and (2) still at the institution, and (3) how frequent was the current contact with the mentor (i.e. at least once a week/at least once every two months/a few times a year/about once a year/almost never). The high intercorrelation among these three items (from  $r=0.82$  to  $r=0.97$ ) supported the use of a single composite variable (e.g. 1=no mentor while at school, 7=mentor is no longer living but was spoken with a few times a year, 14=mentor is still at school and is spoken with at least once a week).

### Hypothesized consequences

Respondents were asked about their ranking of financial contributions (1=the school is my highest priority, 5=do not contribute at all). While some studies have used the actual amount of alumni contributions as indicative of attachment, this measure is questionable (Tompkins, 1986). First, contributions are heavily affected by income, which tends to be related to age and career stage. Second, due to the institution's religious nature, many otherwise devoted alumni have limited means. Similarly, the use of *frequency* of donations is confounded by differing preferences towards lump-sum versus staggered contributions.

Single items assessed the respondent's willingness to advise their son to attend the alma mater and their willingness to recruit others. Finally, single items assessed participation in the following organizational functions: reading the alumni magazine, listening to alumni tapes (i.e. selected addresses by senior faculty), attending the annual college banquet, attending the annual graduate school dinner (given the limited means of many alumni, the last two items were deemed appropriate only for respondents living in the same area as the college), regularly attending an alumni study hall, and regularly attending special lectures (the final two items were designed specifically for the large number of alumni living in metropolitan New York).

The means, standard deviations, and reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) for all variables in the study are presented in Table 1. The correlation matrix for all variables appears in Table 2.

Table 1. Research measures

Measure	Items	Mean	S.D.	Alpha
Organizational identification*	6	3.46	0.82	0.87
Independent variables				
Organizational distinctiveness*	15	3.21	0.50	0.78
Organizational prestige*	8	3.51	0.58	0.77
Interorganizational competition*	7	3.49	0.63	0.75
Intraorganizational competition*	8	2.72	0.65	0.82
Tenure (years at school)	1	6.12	3.65	—
Number of years since leaving	1	12.12	8.79	—
Number of schools attended	1	2.58	1.22	—
Mentor relationship†	1	8.41	5.66	—
Satisfaction with school*	15	3.28	0.72	0.91
Sentimentality*	7	3.66	0.60	0.72
Dependent variables				
Ranking of contributions*	1	3.58	0.89	—
Willingness to advise son to attend school*	1	3.43	0.98	—
Willingness to advise others to attend school*	1	3.71	0.87	—
Reads alumni magazine*	1	4.42	0.88	—
Listens to alumni tapes*	1	3.15	1.41	—
Attends college banquet*,‡	1	3.61	1.55	—
Attends graduate school dinner*,‡	1	4.17	1.36	—
Attends alumni study hall*,§	1	1.82	1.05	—
Attends special lectures*,§	1	2.70	1.31	—

\* Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

† Measured on a 14-point Likert-type scale.

‡ Restricted to participants residing in the same area as the college ( $n = 82$ ).

§ Restricted to participants residing in New York City ( $n = 96$ ).

## Results

### *Organizational identification and the hypothesized antecedents*

As shown in Table 2, three of the four hypothesized organizational antecedents and four of the six individual antecedents were significantly correlated with OID. To assess the unique contribution of each antecedent to identification, the latter was regressed on all 10 antecedents. The results are presented in Table 3. As shown, in support of hypothesis 1, three of the four organizational antecedents remained significant: organizational distinctiveness ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), organizational prestige ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), and intraorganizational competition ( $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Interorganizational competition (hypothesis 1c) did not significantly predict OID. Hypothesis 2 received somewhat less support, as three of the six individual antecedents remained significant: tenure ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), satisfaction with the school ( $\beta = 0.33$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), and sentimentality ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). The three individual antecedents that did not significantly predict OID were number of years since leaving (hypothesis 2b), number of schools attended (hypothesis 2c), and mentor relationship (hypothesis 2d). Collectively, the antecedents accounted for 35 per cent of the variance in OID.

### *Organizational identification and the hypothesized consequences*

As Table 2 indicates, OID was statistically significantly correlated with all nine indicators of the hypothesized outcomes: ranking of financial contributions (hypothesis 3a), willingness to

Table 2. Correlations between variables studied

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
1. Organizational identification																				
2. Organizational distinctiveness	17*																			
3. Organizational prestige	32†	-23†																		
4. Interorganizational competition	-04	18*	-22†																	
5. Intraorganizational competition	-15*	07	-14‡	39†																
6. Tenure	14‡	15*	-18*	00	03															
7. Number of years since leaving	-09	-16*	19†	-04	-11‡	-21†														
8. Number of schools attended	02	-02	-08	-01	09	-32†	-03													
9. Mentor relationship	21†	15*	00	-04	-01	13‡	-23†	11‡												
10. Satisfaction with school	51†	21†	30†	-11‡	-18*	23†	-09	02	40†											
11. Sentimentality	29†	04	23†	18*	-03	-03	-07	10‡	15*	28†										
12. Ranking of contributions	38†	10	16*	-08	-05	25†	-08	-17*	24†	32†	04									
13. Willingness to advise son to attend school	43†	08	47†	-06	-15*	01	05	-02	10	33†	10‡	25†								
14. Willingness to advise others to attend school	39†	10	42†	-10‡	-19*	-08	07	00	10	33†	16*	25†	62†							
15. Reads alumni magazine	23†	05	08	-05	-09	14*	-02	-08	16*	22†	14*	15*	10	13‡						
16. Listens to alumni tapes	33†	-03	10‡	-21†	-17*	16*	09	02	19*	31†	14*	21†	08	15*	33†					
17. Attends college banquet	31*	08	27‡	-24*	-18‡	17	07	-14	22‡	23‡	-01	56†	28*	30*	-04	09				
18. Attends graduate school dinner	29*	11	19‡	-05	-16	47†	-12	-24‡	38†	35*	-03	48†	09	12	14	32*	38†			
19. Attends alumni study hall	32†	-09	12	-22‡	-20‡	09	-11	-03	-02	11	-02	10	09	11	03	22‡				
20. Attends special lectures	40†	02	17‡	-10	-15	01	-11	02	20‡	07	20‡	02	16	20‡	-03	30*				54†

All decimals are omitted.

‡ $p \leq 0.05$ .

\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

† $p \leq 0.001$ .

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Table 3. Results of regression analysis of organizational identification on the hypothesized antecedents

Hypothesized antecedents	Organizational identification
Organizational distinctiveness	0.13*
Organizational prestige	0.26‡
Interorganizational competition	0.10
Intraorganizational competition	- 0.12*
Tenure	0.12*
Number of years since leaving	0.05
Number of schools attended	- 0.02
Mentor relationship	0.01
Satisfaction with school	0.33‡
Sentimentality	0.15†
$R^2$	0.35
Adjusted $R^2$	0.33
$F$	12.54‡
$df$	10,228

Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Probability values are based on one-tailed  $t$ -tests.

\* $p \leq 0.05$ .

† $p \leq 0.01$ .

‡ $p \leq 0.001$ .

advise one's son to attend the college and willingness to advise others to attend (hypothesis 3b), and the six indicators of participation in organizational functions (hypothesis 3c). However, in order to determine the *unique* contribution of identification to each of the outcome variables, a series of multiple regressions was performed. Each outcome variable was regressed on OID as well as the 10 hypothesized antecedents of OID. As Table 4 shows, the overall multivariate equations were significant for all outcome variables except two of the indicators of participation: attendance at the college banquet and the study hall. The standardized regression coefficients provided fairly strong support for the remaining outcome variables of hypothesis 3. Consistent with hypothesis 3a, OID significantly predicted the ranking of contributions ( $\beta = 0.30, p \leq 0.001$ ). Consistent with hypothesis 3b, OID predicted the willingness to advise one's son to attend the school ( $\beta = 0.22, p \leq 0.01$ ) and willingness to advise others to attend ( $\beta = 0.23, p \leq 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 3c received less support as OID predicted listening to alumni tapes ( $\beta = 0.29, p \leq 0.001$ ) and attendance at special lectures ( $\beta = 0.33, p \leq 0.05$ ), but did not predict the reading of the alumni magazine and attendance at the school dinner. It should be noted that no other antecedent variable — including satisfaction with the alma mater — was as strongly and consistently related to the outcome variables.

### Identification as a mediator

The analysis recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to assess the mediating role of OID. First, based on the standardized regression coefficients of Tables 3 and 4, we selected those hypothesized antecedents ( $n=6$ ) and hypothesized outcomes ( $n=7$ ) that were significantly associated with identification. Second, each outcome variable was regressed on the set of antecedents (generating  $6 \times 7 = 42$  coefficients). Third, each outcome variable was regressed on the set of antecedents *plus* identification. If OID is indeed a mediator, then the number of significant coefficients generated by the second step should be reduced by the third step. In fact, of the 12 significant coefficients generated, only five remained after the third step. This

Table 4. Results of regression analysis involving hypothesized consequences

Independent variables	Dependent variables								
	Ranking of contributions	Willingness to advise son to attend	Willingness to advise others to attend	Reads alumni magazine	Listens to alumni tapes	Attends college banquet	Attends graduate school dinner	Attends alumni study hall	Attends special lectures
Organizational identification	0.30‡	0.22†	0.23‡	0.08	0.29‡	0.24	0.16	0.43	0.33*
Organizational distinctiveness	0.01	0.02	0.09	-0.02	-0.05	0.09	-0.02	-0.14	0.10
Organizational prestige	0.11	0.38‡	0.35‡	0.01	-0.08	0.23	0.08	-0.08	0.16
Interorganizational competition	-0.10	0.15‡	0.06	0.07	-0.24‡	-0.23	0.15	-0.12	-0.06
Intraorganizational competition	0.07	-0.12	-0.12	-0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.19	-0.12	-0.12
Tenure	0.12	-0.02	-0.09	0.09	0.17*	0.18	0.36‡	0.06	0.22
Number of years since leaving	0.00	0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.18†	-0.02	0.15	0.15	0.12
Number of schools attended	0.11	-0.05	-0.01	0.07	-0.06	0.00	0.21	0.06	-0.13
Mentor relationship	0.20†	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.10	0.15	0.30†	-0.04	0.17
Satisfaction with school	0.04	0.16*	0.14	0.12	0.03	-0.12	0.04	-0.06	-0.36*
Sentimentality	-0.09	-0.09	-0.03	0.06	0.07	-0.08	-0.23*	-0.11	0.18
$R^2$	0.26	0.33	0.34	0.08	0.24	0.25	0.49	0.21	0.30
Adjusted $R^2$	0.22	0.30	0.31	0.04	0.20	0.10	0.39	0.07	0.18
$F$	7.07†	9.42‡	10.63‡	1.81*	6.24‡	1.70	5.02‡	1.52	2.44†
$df$	11,226	11,210	11,224	11,226	11,221	11,57	11,57	11,61	11,62

Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Probability values are based on two-tailed  $t$ -tests since no specific hypotheses were advanced linking the independent variables (other than identification and satisfaction) to the dependent variables.

\* $p \leq 0.05$ .

† $p \leq 0.01$ .

‡ $p \leq 0.001$ .

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decrease suggests that OID is acting as a partial mediator. However, given the design of the study, the decrease may also reflect redundancy between the antecedent variables and OID.

## Discussion

The results provide general support for the reformulated model of organizational identification. A measure of OID was devised based on Ashforth and Mael's (1989) conception of identification as the definition of self in terms of one's group membership(s). Consistent with hypothesis 1, this measure was associated with the following organizational antecedents of identification among the alumni of a religious college: organizational distinctiveness (hypothesis 1a), organizational prestige (hypothesis 1b), and intraorganizational competition (negatively) (hypothesis 1d). Consistent with hypothesis 2, the measure was also associated with the following individual antecedents of OID: tenure (hypothesis 2a), satisfaction with the organization (hypothesis 2c), and sentimentality (hypothesis 2f). Consistent with hypothesis 3, the measure was further associated — with the antecedents of identification controlled — with the following aspects of support for the institution: ranking of financial contributions (hypothesis 3a), willingness to advise one's son to attend the institution and willingness to advise others to attend (hypothesis 3b), and two indicators of participation in institutional functions (listening to alumni tapes and attendance at special lectures) (hypothesis 3c). OID had significant zero-order correlations with the four remaining indicators of participation. Finally, the results suggest that OID at least partially mediates the impact of the antecedents on the outcomes.

### *A second look at several hypothesized antecedents*

Contrary to hypothesis 1c, perceived interorganizational competition did not predict identification. This may be attributable to the alumni's perceptions of the school. The negative correlations between interorganizational competition and organizational prestige ( $r = -0.22, p \leq 0.001$ ) and satisfaction ( $r = -0.11, p \leq 0.05$ ) suggest that the alma mater fell short when compared with the academic standing of its rivals. Thus, the expected identification-enhancing effects of competition may have been muted. When the effects of prestige and satisfaction were partialled out, interorganizational competition was significantly — albeit weakly — associated with OID ( $r = 0.15, p \leq 0.01$ ), suggesting that this association may be moderated by perceptions of the organization's relative standing. This is consistent with recent experimental research by Sachdev and Bourhis (1987).

OID was also not significantly associated with the individual antecedents of recency of membership (hypothesis 2b) and the number of colleges attended (hypothesis 2c). This suggests that identification may be relatively robust, withstanding erosion through time and exposure to other educational contexts. Interestingly, a one-way ANOVA revealed that individuals tended to identify more with the college the *later* it fell in the sequence of colleges attended ( $F=4.47, df=2,164, p \leq 0.05$ ; where 1=this school was the first attended, 2=in the middle [i.e. neither first nor last], 3=last attended<sup>3</sup>). More specifically, Scheffe's test revealed that individuals identified more with the college when it was the last attended rather than the first. This suggests a recency effect (where recent colleges are more salient) and/or improved person-organization fit (presumably through refined choice).

Finally, contrary to hypothesis 2d, while a mentor relationship was significantly correlated with OID ( $r = 0.21, p \leq 0.001$ ), partialling out the effect of satisfaction reduced this relationship

<sup>3</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this possibility.

to nonsignificance. Perhaps a mentor-like relationship facilitates the attainment of identification with personal objectives, and this satisfaction mediates the generalization of the relationship with the mentor to the organization as a whole (*cf.* Hunt and Michael, 1983).

Given the speculative nature of these qualifications to the model, it is obviously important that the study be replicated and extended.

### *Implications for theory and practice*

Although the study focused on a unique sample, the findings may have broad implications. For one, the findings clarify how the recent spate of corporate takeovers, mergers, and restructuring may have partially eroded member loyalty.

It appears likely that the major antecedents of OID are adversely affected by these activities: takeovers and mergers often foment intraorganizational competition between organizational partners and undermine the distinctiveness of 'junior' partners (as through the loss of such symbols as a company name and logo) and possibly their prestige as well, and restructuring often severs mentor relationships and reduces the average tenure in the organization and satisfaction with the organization. It is not surprising, then, that numerous observers have linked this recent turbulence with increasing employee wariness, disillusionment, and self-centeredness (e.g. Braham, 1987; DeMeuse, 1987).

At the same time, these findings offer some promise for organizations. They indicate that individuals who identify with the organization are apt to support the organization in various ways, and that identification can be encouraged through various means. Essentially, the model of OID presented here is consistent with the growing literature on symbolic management and transformational leadership (e.g. Bass, 1985; Griffin, Skivington and Moorhead, 1987). This literature suggests that 'through the manipulation of symbols such as traditions, myths, metaphors, rituals, sagas, heroes, and physical setting, management can make the individual's membership salient and provide compelling images of what the . . . organization represents' (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 28). Research and reviews by Albert and Whetten (1985), Cameron and Ulrich (1986), Chaffee (1984), Clark (1972), Rosen (1985), Stern (1988), and others illustrate: (1) how managers can foster and highlight a distinctive organizational identity, organizational prestige, and interorganizational competition<sup>4</sup>, and reduce intraorganizational competition, and (2) how these practices can invigorate member support for the organization. It should be noted, however, that such practices may be less efficacious and harder to enact in idiographic organizations.

The present sample of college alumni provide a specific example of how perceptions of organizational prestige, distinctiveness, and competitive excellence may be symbolically managed. In general, symbolic management can be directed towards increasing the *salience* of the institution *as an institution*, complete with a unique and compelling mission and a reputation for fulfilling that mission. Clark's (1962, 1972) research indicates that highly-regarded schools are often steeped in rich lore and traditions which glorify their uniqueness and excellence, and an edited volume by Steeples (1986) chronicles how the creation and promulgation of clear and distinctive identities facilitated the revival of eight diverse colleges. More specifically, organizational distinctiveness, prestige, and competitive excellence can be enhanced by recruiting prominent faculty

<sup>4</sup> We speculated earlier, however, that the relationship between interorganizational competition and identification is moderated by one's perception of the relative standing of the focal organization. This suggests that when unfavorable comparisons will likely result, competition should not be encouraged — *unless* negative outcomes can be rationalized to save face ('We did well considering our school is one-third the size') or another basis for comparison can be found ('They may have won, but we played more fairly') (*cf.* Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

(e.g. Nobel laureates, community leaders), naming buildings and local sites after prominent individuals, publicizing the accomplishments of past and present faculty and alumni and the triumphs of varsity teams, creating a specialized curriculum and pedagogical orientation, maintaining high admission standards and placement success, establishing school colors and songs, erecting statues and monuments, extolling the geographic region where the school is located, and so forth. Similarly, intraorganizational unity can be enhanced by emphasizing external threats (e.g. rival schools, government cutbacks) or superordinate goals (e.g. fundraising), and institutionalizing rituals that celebrate the organization's identity, such as orientation festivities, initiation rites, pep rallies, homecoming parades, graduation ceremonies, local traditions, and anniversary celebrations. For large and heterogeneous schools, such practices may be complemented by similar practices at the level of the individual faculty or college.

Such symbolic practices are especially important in educational institutions given that the period of schooling represents a transitional time for many students in which their identity is still emerging (Chickering, 1969; Turner, 1975) and given the problematic nature of alumni support noted earlier. As this study illustrates, schools which are held to be 'identity anchors' by their alumni are apt to gain critical support.

### *Implications for future research*

The study raises a number of issues for future research, in addition to those noted above. First, the present study has several limitations that should be addressed. While we have suggested a causal sequence from antecedents to identification to consequences, this is of course untestable in a cross-sectional design. Indeed, we have previously argued (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) that there is a feedback loop from identification to the antecedents such that as one begins to identify with a group, the values and practices of the group become more salient and are seen as distinctive. Future research should utilize a within-subjects longitudinal approach to capture the *dynamics* of identification over time. Additionally, such a study should include the factors discussed by Ashforth and Mael (1989), but omitted from the present study, that are traditionally associated with group formation and its consequences.

A further limitation is the reliance on self-report measures. Self-reports may not correspond to actual experiences and are susceptible to common method variance. (Note, however, that it *is* perceptions that are of interest since it is perceptions that spark identification). While the inclusion of cognitive/perceptual, behavioral, affective, and demographic variables likely reduced priming and response consistency somewhat, the issue remains problematic.

Second, the identification model lends itself to several extensions. While the model specifies the benefits to the organization from member identification, it does not specify the benefits to the individual members. One possibility is that perceiving the organization as an extension of the self is inherently adaptive and healthy. Wallach and Wallach (1983) cite a number of philosophers and psychotherapists who have championed an 'extended self' perspective and claim that it can provide relief from depression and anomie, and Ashforth and Mael (1989) allude to a linkage between OID and members' search for meaning, connectedness, empowerment, and immortality. Future research should examine the predisposing desires and psychological outcomes of identification. The inclusion of sentimentality in the present study provides a promising start in this direction. Given our current era of turbulence and organizational restructuring, such desires may well assume increasing significance.

The model implies that identification has a positive, linear association with desirable outcomes. However, evidence of resistance to change, the 'anti-social actions of committed organizational participants' (Schwartz, 1987, p. 327), ethnocentrism and bigotry (Turner, 1985), decreased



creativity (Rontondi, 1975b), and the pathologies of overly dependent organizational members (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984), speak to the darker side of OID. Future research should investigate the contingencies and processes that affect the functional versus dysfunctional outcomes of identification.

Third, the identification model was applied to a fairly unique institutional setting: that of the college. Future research should ascertain the generalizability of the reformulated model by applying it to varying organizational contexts, including both holographic and idiographic organizations, and to past and present organizational members. For example, as noted, Mael (1988, 1989) has recently applied the current measure of OID to employed college students *vis-à-vis* their employers and to U.S. Army personnel *vis-à-vis* the Army, and Ashforth (1990) has applied it to a diverse sample of managers *vis-à-vis* their employers. It is hoped that further applications of the identification model will be facilitated by the generic nature of the measures of OID and several of the hypothesized antecedents presented in Appendix I.

Finally, while we have focused on the concept of identification, the concept of *alumni* might also have important implications for a variety of organizations. For example, Gannon (1971) has shown that former employees are among the best sources of recruits for work organizations. In their current positions, former employees may also act as goodwill ambassadors to other organizations, disseminate their former employer's views, values, and practices, and provide an important external source of information. It should be determined whether identification with the former employer fosters continued proactive behaviors on behalf of that employer. This would provide organizations with a basis for assessing the value of maintaining contact with former employees (e.g. through newsletters, reunions), and whether the concepts of 'alma mater' and 'alumni' are as appropriate to the workplace as they are to academia.

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## Appendix I

With the exception of sentimentality, all the variables below are measured with items specific to an educational organization. However, these variables can be modified for use in other organizations. For example, the terms student, alumni, instructor, school, and conference can be replaced with employee, employees, manager, organization, and industry.

### *Organizational identification*

[1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree]

- 1 When someone criticizes (name of school), it feels like a personal insult.
- 2 I am very interested in what others think about (name of school).
- 3 When I talk about this school, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.
- 4 This school's successes are my successes.
- 5 When someone praises this school, it feels like a personal compliment.
- 6 If a story in the media criticized the school, I would feel embarrassed.

### *Perceived organizational prestige*

[1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree]

- 1 People in my community think highly of (name of school).
- 2 It is considered prestigious in the religious community to be an alumnus of (name of school).
- 3 (Name of school) is considered one of the best (conference schools).
- 4 People from other (conference schools) look down at (name of school). (R)
- 5 Alumni of all (conference schools) would be proud to have their children attend (name of school).
- 6 (Name of school) does not have a good reputation in my community. (R)
- 7 A person seeking to advance his career in (conference academia) should downplay his association with (name of school). (R)
- 8 When other (conference schools) are recruiting new students, they would not want students from (name of school). (R)

### *Perceived interorganizational competition*

[1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree]

- 1 There is a rivalry between the (conference schools).
- 2 Each (conference school) tries to stress its superiority over the other schools.
- 3 Students are constantly comparing and rating the (conference schools).
- 4 Students at (name of school) often measure the school against the other (conference schools).
- 5 Each (conference school) points to reasons why it is the best (conference school).
- 6 Each (conference school) tries to demonstrate that it has the most illustrious alumni.
- 7 The (conference schools) do not see themselves as competitors. (R)

### *Perceived intraorganizational competition*

Given the necessarily retrospective assessment of this variable in the present study, all items are phrased in the past tense. However, applications of the measure to *current* organizational members should utilize the present tense.

[1 = Strong agree; 5 = Strongly disagree]

- 1 People at (name of school) felt left out unless they competed with each other.
- 2 The competition at (name of school) was intense.
- 3 Classmates at (name of school) did not compete with each other. (R)
- 4 The system at (name of school) made people try to be better than everyone else.
- 5 Students at (name of school) found it painful when others were getting ahead.
- 6 Students at (name of school) would try to find out how their peers were being evaluated.
- 7 The instructors at (name of school) did not foster competition between the students. (R)
- 8 Students at (name of school) tried to outdo each other at impressing their instructors.

### *Sentimentality*

[1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree]

- 1 I like to reminisce about my youth.
- 2 I am a sentimental person.
- 3 I have no desire to save mementos from the past. (R)
- 4 I like to save souvenirs or other reminders of interesting places or events.
- 5 I enjoy conversations in which we recall events from the past.
- 6 Anniversaries of special events are not important to me. (R)
- 7 I am moved emotionally when recalling scenes from my youth.