

The Good, the Bad, and the Ambivalent: Managing Identification among Amway Distributors

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An ethnographic study of distributors for Amway, a network marketing organization, examines the practices and processes involved in managing members' organizational identification. It shows that this organization manages identification by using two types of practices: sensebreaking practices that break down meaning and sensegiving practices that provide meaning. When both sensebreaking and sensegiving practices are successful, members positively identify with the organization. When either sensebreaking or sensegiving practices fail, members deidentify, disidentify, or experience ambivalent identification with the organization. A general model of identification management is posited, and implications for both theory and practice are offered. ●

People say that we brainwash people. That's true. We are talking about brainwashing—to help make you all more positive people!

—A speaker at a meeting of Amway distributors

Although it is common for researchers to praise organizations that promote strong attachments in their members, organizations that are too successful in this regard seem to inspire a mixture of both fascination and fear. In recent years, not-for-profit groups such as the Promise Keepers, Branch Davidians, and the Heaven's Gate cult have captured the public's attention, raising questions about the benefits and costs of groups that can evoke such strong bonds with their members. In for-profit business organizations, such as the one examined here, companies with "strong cultures" (O'Reilly, 1989) have been both praised (Deal and Kennedy, 1982) and criticized (Hochschild, 1983; Kunda, 1992) for their ability to win the minds and hearts of their employees. Despite our mixed feelings toward these organizations, practitioners and researchers cite the necessity for strong cultures and ideologies in modern business organizations (Trice and Beyer, 1993). Some writers in the popular business press, for example, believe that strong values are needed as social control mechanisms as organizations flatten hierarchies and increase spans of control (e.g., Stewart, 1996). Lipnack and Stamps (1997) have argued that strong mission statements are needed to manage work groups that are not co-located (e.g., virtual teams). Strong cultures may also bolster members' loyalty and commitment in an era in which job security no longer serves as the cornerstone of psychological contracts in the workplace (Kanter, 1989). Thus, as organizations change, there seems to be a need to inculcate individuals with organizational values so that they continue to act as organizational members. For the Amway distributors I studied, for example, there is no central business location, and work occurs outside of a traditional organizational context. Amway and similar organizations need a means of managing their workforce without the benefit of daily supervision and traditional deference cues like cubicles and uniforms.

I was initially drawn to study Amway because people seemed either to love or hate it: it seemed both wildly successful and unsuccessful in managing the minds and hearts of its dispersed workforce.¹ As the epigraph suggests, and I later discovered, Amway distributors manage their members by changing how these members think and feel about them-

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My initial contact with Amway occurred when a family member became an Amway distributor. I was intrigued by how uncharacteristically enthusiastic this family member was toward the organization (see Pratt, 2000a, for details about how this family member became my sponsor). Moreover, upon doing a little initial research, I was struck by the fact that individuals tended to have either strong positive or strong negative reactions to this organization.

selves in relation to their organization. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to illuminate the practices and processes that are involved in aligning individual and organizational values. To do this, I drew on a broad body of knowledge on organizational socialization, social influence/conversion, person-organization fit, and commitment. But I drew most heavily on theory in the area of organizational identification (e.g., Cheney, 1983; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994) because this organization attempts to manage fit by managing members' self-concepts. Identification differs from similar constructs, such as commitment and person-organization fit, because of its emphasis on the self-concept and is thus defined here as occurring when "an individual's beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining" (Pratt, 1998: 172). The focus of this paper, therefore, is on identification and how organizations attempt to manage the identification process. Its purpose is not to identify how factors such as personality or other individual differences affect the bond between the individual and the organization. Rather, it is on how organizations attempt, succeed, and fail to change how members view themselves in relation to the organization.

This research departs from most of the extant work on organizational identification in at least three major respects. First, most research focuses on how organizations successfully engender strong ties with members (e.g., Lofland and Stark, 1965; Kanter, 1968; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Cheney, 1983), but an emphasis on practices that lead to positive attachments may be misleading. In their review of identity-transforming organizations, whose goals are the conversion of members' self-concepts, Greil and Rudy (1984) suggested that attempts to transform the identity of members most often fail and that the majority of such attempts result in those members leaving the organization within four months to two years after they enter (see also Zimbardo and Andersen, 1993). Their review of identity-transforming organizations, unfortunately, does not delve into why these organizations fail in their missions. Thus, it is not clear whether the failure to manage members' identification simply involves the absence of those factors that cause identification or whether there are different dynamics involved. This research, therefore, examines in more detail both the successful and unsuccessful outcomes of these identification-management practices.

Second, I examine how successes and failures in different identification management practices lead to different types of identification, not just positive identification. Although other types of identification than a positive one are possible (e.g., Ashforth, 1998; Dukerich, Kramer, and Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999), emphasis in the literatures on commitment, socialization, and conversion of identities focus on identifying tactics that lead to positive attachments (e.g., Lofland and Stark, 1965; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).² Here, however, I look at organizational conditions that lead to positive, negative, ambivalent, and broken identifications.

Third, much extant research has focused only on specific types of practices—be they influence (Cialdini, 1993; Zimbar-

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Although work based on Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) socialization theory does suggest that different socialization practices can lead to either role innovation or role custodianship (e.g., Jones, 1986; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Ashforth and Saks, 1996), the differentiation is not on the positive or negative quality of the attachment but, rather, on how individuals who are positively predisposed to their organization adapt to roles. Moreover, although religious conversion theorists sometimes differentiate between verbal converts, who are converts in name only, and total converts, whose words are backed with deeds, this distinction refers to differences in the degrees of positive attachment (Lofland and Stark, 1965).

do and Andersen, 1993), rhetorical (Cheney, 1983), commitment-inducing (Kanter, 1968), or more general socialization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) practices—that engender a strong bond between individuals and organization, rather than examining how these practices might work together to influence this bond. Thus, despite a considerable body of research on the organizational antecedents of fit (see Kristoff, 1996, for a review), there has been little research on the processes that underlie these tactics (Pratt, 1998). Consequently, many researchers view identification “in fairly static terms as the congruence between fixed attributes and needs of a person and those of an organization” rather than in dynamic, process-oriented terms (Ashforth, 1998: 213). This research, by contrast, goes beyond simply identifying practices that lead to identification and examines the process of how identification occurs. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to build theory by illustrating the practices and processes involved in identification management and by showing how the successes and failures of these practices are associated with a variety of identification types.

DISTRIBUTORS IN A NETWORK MARKETING ORGANIZATION

To obtain a deep understanding of the dynamics of identification, I sought information about both the context that I was studying and the perspectives of multiple constituents within this context. The context for this study comprises individuals who distribute products and services for the Amway Corporation. Amway distributors have been found to exhibit both strong positive and negative relationships with their organization (Butterfield, 1985; Biggart, 1989), and they provided an ideal extreme case from which to build theory about identification management (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). Extreme cases facilitate theory building because the dynamics being examined tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts.

The Amway Corporation, founded by Richard DeVos and Jay Van Andel in 1959, currently earns an estimated \$7 billion in retail sales a year and operates in all 50 states and in approximately 70 other countries and territories around the world. Currently, there are approximately 3 million Amway distributors worldwide. Although the company does not publish demographic statistics, it boasts of having a highly heterogeneous company. The cornerstone of Amway’s philosophy is that “anyone can do it” (be a successful Amway distributor).³ As Dexter Yager (1993: 15–16), the most financially successful Amway distributor in the business today, describes it in the opening chapter of his book:

The Amway Sales and Marketing Plan . . . provides equal opportunity to all people—regardless of background, nationality or other differences—to further their own achievement through personal effort and initiative. It is an opportunity not limited to those who have special skills, education, or large amounts of capital to invest. Success in network marketing is possible wherever there are people in free societies who are willing to commit themselves to conscientiously build their businesses.

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My own experience as a distributor confirmed that many different types of people joined Amway. When attending Amway functions, I noticed considerable variance in race, religion, gender, and career backgrounds, the latter suggesting differences in education and social economic status.

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The Amway Corporation and its distributors constitute a large network marketing organization (NMO), also known as a network direct-selling or multilevel marketing organization. An NMO is a social structure through which a sponsoring organization (e.g., Amway) uses individual members, or "distributors," to sell its products and services face to face, outside of a central business location.⁴ NMOs involve the sponsorship of new members, and distributors are encouraged to sponsor family members, friends, and others as "prospects" or potential recruits (see Biggart, 1989, for a review of NMOs). Distributors who are connected by common sponsorship ties are referred to as a "family tree." Individuals below a distributor, such as the people whom distributors sponsor, comprise a distributor's "downline." People above a distributor, such as a sponsor and a sponsor's sponsors, are part of that distributor's "upline."

NMOs also have predetermined recognition levels (Biggart, 1989). These indicate the volume of sales that a person has attained and serve as a measure of achievement. Direct distributors—those whose sales volumes are high enough that they order products and services from Amway directly, rather than via another distributor—are differentiated based on their sales volume by "gem levels," such as Pearl, Ruby, Emerald, and various Diamond levels. These levels do not indicate a distributor's level of formal authority, but high-achieving individuals are often asked to instruct those of lesser achievement. The more successful members spend considerable amounts of time personally teaching new members how to "build the business," that is, how to sell products and sponsor others. This personal training is augmented by the distributors' "system," which consists of distributor-sanctioned books, tapes, and functions, such as meetings, rallies, and seminars. Taken together, the Amway structure provides a strong financial and social hierarchy without the conventional formal lines of authority found in most organizations of its size.

NMOs are a rapidly growing organizational form. Estimates of total worldwide involvement in network marketing organizations range from over 7 million to over 25 million people. When compared with this population of organizations, Amway's structure and way of operating is similar to other NMOs, such as Mary Kay, Shaklee, and Longaberger (see Biggart, 1989; Pratt and Rosa, 2000). Moreover, as one of the first and most financially successful of the NMOs, Amway is often used as a standard for these types of organizations.

As an NMO, Amway differs from traditional organizations in some respects, including the fact that members (1) are often not co-located, except during Amway functions; (2) often initially pursue a career in Amway on a part-time basis; (3) are required to pay a membership fee of around \$100 and often pay for training materials (e.g., books and tapes); and (4) are not legally employees but act as independent franchises that must follow legal and ethical guidelines set forth by the parent organization (e.g., Pilzer, 1990; Free, 1992; Gage, 1993). As such, distributors are somewhat akin to contingent, contract, and other nontraditional workers who are forging unique relationships with their organizations in terms of

⁴ Amway manufactures many of these products and services, such as its traditional lines of soap and detergents, cosmetics, and vitamins. When the Amway Corporation does not carry a line of products or services, it sometimes acquires them from other companies. In total, distributors have access to over 2,000 manufactures and 6,500 products and services, including those provided by such *Fortune* 500 companies as Sony, Panasonic, Ford, Chrysler, General Motors, and MCI.

where, when, and how often they work (see Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Belous, 1989; Pearce, 1998). Distributors do, however, share many of the same duties performed by others in sales organizations, vying with one another to sell products and services and recruit new salespeople. Moreover, distributors who successfully recruit others must train them in much the same way that many sales managers in traditional organizations do, and they must maintain a balance between active sales accounts and supervising others. Finally, as a sales organization, Amway and other NMOs are sometimes viewed negatively. As Amway co-founder DeVos (1975: 100) noted, "My own particular 'thing' has always been salesmanship. I have been involved in sales all my life, and I am always amazed to see how many people look down their noses at salesmanship as a worthy occupation. So few people have respect for salesmen. . . ." Distributors are warned that non-members may have negative preconceptions about Amway and about sales/distributing. Thus, distributors are similar to others who are engaged in work that is often deemed unpopular by non-members (e.g., Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999).

METHODS

Data Collection

I used three main data collection strategies: semiovert participant observation, open-ended interviews, and archival data gathering. Multiple techniques allowed me to triangulate findings from different sources to build stronger assertions about interpretations (Jick, 1979; Yin, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Semiovert participant observation. One of the primary sources of data for this analysis was participant observation. Being a participant observer allowed me the opportunity not only to observe distributors but also to actively engage in distributing. Such participation was necessary given that I was studying complex and potentially morally charged processes such as how organizations win (and lose) members' minds and hearts. As Douglas (1976: 28) suggested, "The less concrete the phenomena being studied, the more problematic they are for members of society, and the more they are subject to moral or material interest conflicts, the more the researcher must use natural participation in the group as the basic method to get at the phenomena." Semiovert participation entails joining the organization but letting coworkers know of your dual role as an employee and researcher, and it offers advantages beyond other forms of participant observation (Whyte, 1984). First, working alongside informants as a fellow employee helps gain the trust of coworkers. Second, semiovert observation allows a researcher the opportunity to ask questions that might otherwise seem unusual coming from a typical coworker.⁵

I systematically collected data in this fashion for almost two years, but the most intense period of participant observation occurred over a nine-month period.⁶ During this time, I listened to Amway tapes, read their books, sold their products, and did product ordering and bookkeeping tasks. I also attended various formal functions, such as weekend seminars and daylong workshops, and informal functions, such as

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While it is possible that acknowledging my role as a researcher may have influenced the behavior of distributors, several factors attenuated this effect. First, given the large number of distributors at meetings and rallies, it is unlikely that my presence had much effect on their behaviors. Second, given that I was a distributor for nearly two years, it seems improbable that distributors would systematically alter their behaviors during each of our interactions over that time. Third, there was a general belief among distributors that anyone who really understood Amway could not help but be impressed by it, and members' confidence in the merits of distributing allowed them to be open with me. Someone in my family tree even told me that "God meant more for you than academics." This member felt that once I understood what Amway could provide, I would realize that I could do more good in the world as a distributor than as an instructor. Fourth, people above me in Amway tended to be extremely ends-oriented. They did not care what I did in my spare time, even if it was interviewing Amway members, as long as I was selling products and trying to sponsor people (i.e., building the business).

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Since the first six months of socialization are critical in determining the nature and extent to which members learn key elements of the organization's culture (Butterfield, 1985; Van Maanen, 1975), I ensured that my participation would last at least a half a year. After this initial six months, my time in the field was determined by theoretical saturation and resource constraints.

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casual meetings with upline members. I logged observations in a research journal and checked the validity of the observations with other data sources, such as interviews and archival data.

Open-ended interviews. I used open-ended interviews with informants to gain insights into how individuals viewed their organizational experiences. Following Spradley (1979), I began each interview with broad questions, such as "Can you tell me about what you do as a distributor?" As each interview progressed, I asked for clarification on certain points or terms (e.g., "Could you tell me what you mean by the word 'dream'?"). Once themes began to emerge across interviews, I validated these themes in subsequent interviews.

Because of my initial interest in why Amway either won over or alienated people, the logic of theoretical sampling suggested that I interview current distributors, as well as people who had resisted Amway's practices (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, I conducted interviews and engaged in informal conversations with both distributors and non-distributors. Interviews typically lasted from one to two hours. Interviews with distributors involved discussions with two types of distributors: active and inactive. Distributors viewed members as being active when they consistently bought and sold products, sponsored others, and regularly attended Amway functions. The tenure of active distributors I interviewed ranged from seven and a half months to twenty-two years. Inactive distributors were those who renewed their annual membership in Amway but performed few, if any, distributing activities. Their tenure with Amway ranged from one and a half to seven years. Non-distributors included people who quit Amway (former distributors) and people who were approached and refused to join ("losers"). All former distributors I interviewed left within a year of joining. Although I did not specifically ask for demographic information, most of my informants appeared to be white, and 45 percent were women. Initially, I interviewed active, inactive, and former distributors in my sponsors' family tree, as well as their failed recruits ($N = 15$). To supplement these interviews and to help reach theoretical saturation or information redundancy (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989), I talked with other members and non-members. I interviewed a total of 17 current distributors and 16 non-distributors.

Archival data. I analyzed three sources of archival data to gain a greater insight into Amway's belief system (Hill, 1993). These sources included, but were not limited to, 10 books and booklets, 24 audiocassette tapes, and 137 success stories published in the monthly *Amagram* magazine during my tenure as a distributor. I also gained information from Amway-related websites. Books and booklets provided information about the historical and ideological context of the company. Amway tapes generally serve two purposes for distributors: they instruct distributors on distributing techniques (e.g., how to contact people about Amway), and they provide encouragement and motivation. For this analysis, they were integral sources of information about the techniques used to indoctrinate members. The success stories

provided key information about both the company's and its distributors' aspirations or "dreams." Finally, websites provided additional information on why individuals chose to join or to leave Amway.

Data Analysis

In analyzing data, I employed a theory-building approach that involved moving from a highly personalized account that consisted primarily of thick description to one that was more abstract and analytical and was integrated into current research (Van Maanen, 1979). Following the iterative process recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1984), I traveled back and forth between the data and an emerging structure of theoretical arguments. Initially, I scanned the data (e.g., observations, interviews, tape transcripts, and success stories) for dominant themes. This preliminary form of data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. As themes—such as "the use of family language," "the superiority of distributing relationships," "excitement for 'dreams'"—began to emerge in the data, I noted them and used them to organize new, incoming data in an iterative fashion (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Becker, 1970). I then organized the emerging themes into a coherent framework. After developing, exploring, and evaluating the utility of several alternative frameworks, I arrived at the one that I believed offered a strong contribution to theory without doing undue violence to my experience. It was important that my framework add to theories of organizational behavior, but I did not want my framework to unduly distort the actual experiences of Amway distributors. To help ensure that I accomplished the latter goal, I discussed and modified the framework based on conversations with key informants.

FINDINGS

Although I was initially attracted to Amway distributors because people seemed either to love or to hate them, my experiences with the organization ultimately led to a richer understanding of how members and non-members reacted to Amway and the causes of those reactions. I came to view Amway as an organization that attempts to manage members' identification by managing how they make sense of themselves (i.e., their identities), as well as their relationships with people within and outside of distributing.

Three key findings helped me to model the identification processes among distributors. First, I noticed that simply separating informants into two groups—lovers and haters—failed to capture their full range of reactions toward the organization. In addition to these groups were those who were ambivalent toward Amway and those who did not seem to have any strong connection (positive or negative) to it. Moreover, these reactions seemed to be explained in terms of identification: those who emotionally evaluated the organization—positively, negatively, or both—defined themselves in terms of the organization, while the others did not.

Second, the successes and failures in two organizational practices, "dream building" and "positive programming," seemed to account for the different reactions to the organiza-

tion.⁷ Dream building involves helping distributors to set personal and sales goals, and positive programming involves helping them to surround themselves with uplifting and organizationally supportive people. When looking at informants with different types of identification, a pattern emerged based on whether the distributor had been successfully or unsuccessfully socialized through these practices. The combination of successful dream building and positive programming, for example, was associated with positive identification, whereas successful dream building and unsuccessful positive programming was associated with disidentification. The bulk of the reported findings discuss the relationship among these two socialization practices, the social-psychological (i.e., sensemaking) processes they evoke, and the types of identification found among distributors.

Surprisingly, identification was not based on one's financial success with the organization. I met distributors who had been financially successful, even attaining a high gem-level sales volume before they quit, and several active distributors who loved Amway but who were not financially successful distributors.⁸ Distributors were also often unsure about how much money they were making as a distributor. When asked directly about profits, none of the current or former distributors I interviewed could (or would) give me a clear-cut answer about their net profits and losses. Distributors even disagreed about how they would go about calculating credits and debits. To illustrate, some informants felt that the difference between the wholesale and retail price of products that they bought for personal use should be counted as profit, while others did not think it should. Similarly, some felt that the cost of tapes, books, and functions should be considered a cost to be subtracted from their other profits, while others did not think so. It was surprising that in an organization that valued making a profit, it was difficult for distributors to answer the question, "How much money are you making?" Finally, there was little evidence from the Amway Corporation that distributors were making a lot of money. In fact, the Amway Corporation estimated the average monthly gross income for an active distributor to be only \$65 per month (*Amway Business Review*, 1992). In a different vein, visible demographic variables did not seem to account for differences in identification either. For example, women did not seem to be better represented in some groups of informants (e.g., negative toward Amway) than in others, and there were college-educated informants in each of the groups.⁹

Third, these socialization practices affected members' sensemaking processes. Sensemaking is the attribution of meaning to some target (e.g., events or other social stimuli) via the placement of this target into a mental framework (Starbuck and Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995: 4–5). When dream-building and positive-programming practices were successful, members were motivated to construe their own identities as "embodiments" of the organization (e.g., positively identify). When practices were unsuccessful, they (a) failed to motivate individuals to make sense of their identities in terms of the organization, (b) motivated members to make sense of their identities in opposition to the organization, or (c) moti-

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I found three major practices in Amway: dream building, positive programming, and prospecting. Prospecting involves recruiting distributors. Given that all members were, by definition, successfully recruited, I did not find a relationship between this practice and members' identification.

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This latter observation fits statistics published by the Amway Corporation. For example, the *Amway Business Review* (1992) noted that of the 46 percent of all distributors on record who were found to be active, only 1 percent made enough in sales volume to qualify as a direct distributor. Thus, 99 percent of active distributors were not achieving a high sales volume.

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Of course, individual differences cannot be totally ruled out as an explanatory variable. For example, there may be some relationship between identification and personality type. Because this study was an ethnography, it did not lend itself to the use of personality tests, nor would distributors be amenable to such tests, whose intent—to find profiles of successful and unsuccessful Amway distributors—would go against distributors' shared belief that anyone can build an Amway distributorship.

vated members to make sense of their identities both in harmony with and in opposition to the organization. These sensemaking outcomes were associated with nonexistent and negative and ambivalent identification, respectively. All together, identification types were a product of motivated sensemaking.

Creating the Need for Meaning via Sensebreaking

Dream building and positive programming work together to produce positive identification. The process begins by inducing a sense of seekership in the distributor. In the literature on religious conversion, when an individual defines him- or herself as a religious seeker, he or she is "searching for some satisfactory system of religious meaning to interpret or resolve his [or her] discontent . . ." (Lofland and Stark, 1965: 868). Though seekership is normally seen as a condition that predisposes one toward being successfully converted by a religious organization, I propose that Amway attempts to create a type of nonreligious seekership among its distributors. In this context, seekership is defined as a desire to find meaning that originates from a sense of discontentment about who one is.

Amway distributors create this sense of seekership in new members through a process of sensebreaking. Whereas sensemaking involves the creation of meaning (Weick, 1995), sensebreaking involves the destruction or breaking down of meaning. Additionally, just as sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, sensebreaking involves a fundamental questioning of who one is when one's sense of self is challenged. Sensebreaking is similar to but more specific than other terms used in describing human change, such as dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1957) or unfreezing (Lewin, 1958; Schein, 1987) in that the main purpose of sensebreaking is to disrupt an individual's sense of self to create a meaning void that must be filled. A primary sensebreaking practice in Amway is dream building. Dream building creates a meaning void by (1) linking one's sense of self to possessions, (2) creating motivational drives by comparing current and ideal identities, and (3) perpetuating these motivational drives.

Linking one's sense of self to possessions. Sensebreaking via dream building occurs as one's current sense of self becomes devalued as one becomes impregnated with new, ideal selves. This process begins by linking a distributor's sense of self with his or her possessions. According to James (1890), possessions may include anything that can be associated with someone and can be represented physically, such as a flashy sports car, a beautiful daughter, or a public service award. These possessions can serve as extensions of one's self-concept (Prelinger, 1959; McCarthy, 1984; Belk, 1988). As Maccoby (1980: 252) noted, "the self can be extended beyond a notion of 'me' to include 'my': The self is not just a physical entity bounded by skin, it is a psychological construct in which the concept of *me* and the concept of *my* are blended."

Within Amway, self and object are first linked in dream building through a "needs analysis" in which distributors are taught to identify their dreams. One's dream would be the

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answer to the question, “What do you want so much that you would do almost anything to get it?” A distributor’s dreams are conscious representations of those things that he or she wants to achieve or to have in his or her life. They are “your vision of the future for yourself and those you love” (Yager, 1993: 448). The most common Amway dreams center around lifestyle issues. One should attain enough money to be financially independent (have financial “freedom”), to accumulate possessions, to go on vacation, and so on. Lifestyle dreams appeared in 100 percent of the Amway success stories that I content analyzed. These dreams are central, because attaining financial freedom is key to achieving other dreams, such as being a good family member (found in 86 percent of the success stories) and helping others (found in 29 percent of the stories). Thus, physical possessions (e.g., wealth) were seen as a means of attaining nonmaterial desires (e.g., helping others). Illustrations of each of these major dream types can be found in table 1.

Learning how to identify one’s dreams can occur in a variety of ways but most often involves modeling the dreams of the most successful Amway distributors in one’s family tree (e.g., upline Diamonds). Exposure to such dreams can be relatively passive, as members read and listen to stories of dream achievement in Amway tapes, books, and magazines and watch slide shows and videos at Amway functions that vividly display indicators of their upline’s wealth and achieve-

Table 1

Dream Categories, Examples, and Illustrations from Data	
Dream categories & types	Illustrations from data
Lifestyle	
Material wealth / possessions	"I would like to own my own home. [It should have] about 55 rooms and 100 acres, and you know, some kind of stables." (Excerpt from dream building session)
Freedom (No J.O.B.)	"The best part, really, absolutely, without hesitation is doing what you want to do every day. How many of you can get excited about that concept? [<i>Crowd claps and cheers.</i>] Eat breakfast with your children. Have lunch when you're hungry. Take a nap in the middle of the day. Do whatever you want to do. I go out on the swingset with my little girl and we sing our favorite song, 'I love you, you love me'." (Excerpt from tape, <i>This Is Where You Don't Need an Ad Pack</i>)
Family	
"Traditional" American family	"My wife is pretty burned out in her job and yet she does not want to retire from her job until I am able to . . . my daughter wants to have swimming lessons. She's 2 1/2 years old and our life does not really afford the time to have swimming lessons with both of us working. That's something we'll be much better able to do when we have more time to share with our children and our children aren't in day care five days a week." (Excerpt from an interview with a distributor)
Helping	
Business opportunity	"Michael, do you really want to help people? If so, you can help more people by showing them this business than you can from teaching. God meant more for you than academia." (Excerpt from my field journal: my upline distributor is instructing me on why I should be a distributor)
Altruism	"I want to own my own foster home for women who have Alzheimer's disease and do my research about the environment in that foster home so that this, our Amway business, would support that and if it [the home] didn't make money, it doesn't matter because it will just be an altruistic service to society." (Excerpt from an interview with a distributor)

ment. At some functions, dreams are represented more directly as successful distributors, wearing their finest clothes and jewelry, are on display in reserved seating in front of an audience of less successful distributors. Dreams can also be learned more actively in intense dream-building sessions between upline and downline distributors. These sessions may involve talking about the dreams of successful distributors who are similar in some way to the downline distributor, such as those with a similar career background. They may also involve taking a downline distributor on a type of shopping spree in which dreams are identified and shaped. The appendix describes such a session with my sponsor, Zack, and our upline Emerald distributor, Mark.¹⁰

This identifying and teaching of dreams is similar to a mass customization process in which goods are produced on an assembly line but are made to fit an individual's needs. For example, a jeweler may have ten stone settings, ten different types of gems, and ten styles of bands. With these thirty elements the jeweler can create 1,000 unique combinations of rings that can be tailored to each customer. Similarly, upline distributors have a number of dream categories and types at their disposal. As in mass customization, the set of categories is finite. To illustrate, given that some people outside of Amway are negative toward distributing, upline distributors do not support dreams of societal status, specifically those involving positive recognition by non-members. As an Emerald distributor noted to a group of my prospects during an Amway meeting and dream-building session, "I'm not real big on status . . . there's a lot of people out there who look good, smell good, and are broke. They have status but they have no money and they have no power but they like to act like they do. I don't have any status." Moreover, family trees may emphasize certain dreams over others (e.g., buying diamond jewelry). Despite these restrictions, distributors can pick and choose from a wide variety of acceptable dreams (see table 1). Once an upline member communicates the range of these dreams, the upline and downline distributor can work together to craft a unique dream for each distributor.

By mass customizing dreams, Amway creates three conditions that have been found to be conducive to incorporating objects into the self: choice, familiarity, and emotion (Prelinger, 1959; McCarthy, 1984; Belk, 1988). By allowing members to pick dreams that are familiar to them, distributors get very excited and enthusiastic about them. The excitement they feel toward their dreams has many names, including "the burn," "getting the fever," and "getting the bug." I noted in my research journal how easy it was to get caught up in one's dreams:

The excitement of dreams is almost inescapable. I vividly remember getting caught up in them even though I also thought that they were foolish or "too good to be true." One of my "dreams" as a distributor regarded personal freedom. . . . Thinking about this dream really got me excited as I thought about all of the myriad possibilities that such a life could offer: to be able to work as much or as little as I wanted; to be able to dictate what courses I taught and to have the funding to do whatever research I felt was important; to

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I refer to all informants by pseudonyms to protect their identities. I use my own name, however, when warranted.

be able to do more community volunteer work; to be able to travel at a moment's notice to see family or to vacation anywhere in the world; and to just be able take the day off when I felt like it, etc. . . . The pull of these dreams is both simple and powerful: how could you not be enthusiastic about what you want most in life?

Creating motivational drives for meaning via identity deficits. Once incorporated into a distributor's sense of self, possessions trigger a variety of dynamics within the distributor. One such dynamic is a comparison between ideal and actual selves. Unlike most treatments of extended selves that are concerned with objects or relationships that a person currently possesses, dreams refer to possessions that one has not yet attained. These hoped-for possessions serve as positive possible or ideal selves, representing an individual's key hopes or fantasies (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Problems can arise when a person comes to compare his or her current self with his or her newly formed ideal self. By reminding an individual of what one *can have* (e.g., a new car, a better family) and/or what one *can become* (e.g., wealthy), ideal selves also remind one of what one currently does *not have* and therefore what one *is not*. Incorporation of these ideal possessions into one's identity thus serves to challenge one's current sense of self. It creates a type of identity deficit or a misfit between who one is and who one wants to become. Such deficits are especially potent when people are in a state of crisis or are not happy with their current identities.

Distinctions between current and ideal selves are further strengthened when a distributor refers to his or her current self as being in a "comfort zone" (a.k.a. "the rut"), or being satisfied with what he or she currently has in life. To be in one's comfort zone is to be a "loser" because it does not involve striving for dreams. Distributors are aware that getting out of one's comfort zone demands change. A common saying in Amway is "the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting something different to happen." Thus, distributors are told that accepting what they currently have is not good enough. To be a winner means that one needs to change to achieve one's dreams.

In identity language, a negative valence is attached to one's current self (i.e., one's comfort zone), and a positive valence is attached to one's ideal self (i.e., one's dream). This deficit between current and ideal selves creates a motivational dynamic: individuals are driven to lessen the difference between ideal and current conceptualizations of self (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The motivational aspects of identity deficits have been implied at both the individual (Pratt and Dutton, 2000) and organizational (Reger et al., 1994) level. Pratt and Dutton (2000) found that such a discrepancy was integral in determining the social issues with which organizational members identified. Reger et al. (1994) similarly suggested that the incongruity between current and ideal organizational identity acts as a catalyst for motivating organizational change.¹¹

This motivational drive may also be explained in terms of sensemaking. When sensebreaking via dream building is successful, one's sense of self is challenged. The tension that

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This motivational drive may also be explained in terms of goal setting: one's ideal self may serve as a motivating goal. Work in goal-setting theory suggests that individuals work best when goals are specific, difficult, and there is goal commitment (Locke and Latham, 1990; see Ambrose and Kulik, 1999, for a review). Goal commitment is enhanced when goals are self-set. Thus, Amway's dream building is motivating from a goal-setting perspective as it provides specific, difficult, and self-set goals. What Amway adds to our understanding of this process, however, is that goals linked to one's sense of self are highly motivating. If goals are linked to one's sense of self, then we can go beyond simply explaining *which* goals are motivating (e.g., difficult ones) and explain *why* they are motivating.

comes from challenging one's current sense of self with one's ideal future self breaks apart the taken-for-granted nature of one's life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Because it challenges the notion of who we are, we are driven to regain our self-esteem and to create a sense of consistency among past and present selves (Erez and Earley, 1993; Weick, 1995: 23). This drive draws one's attention toward new cues about the self that must be reconciled with one's past experiences in order to fit these discrepant cues about the self into a meaningful framework (Louis, 1980; Starbuck and Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995).

Enacting and perpetuating the motivational drive for meaning. The management of identification is a cyclical process. Thus, it does not end when an individual identifies with the organization. Similarly, dream building does not end with achieving dreams. Once distributors stop reaching for dreams, they become trapped in their comfort zones. As a distributor described it to me, "In life you are constantly in motion. You can either be moving forwards or backwards. Being in your comfort zone is moving backwards. It is like owning a house and not doing anything to it—in three years, your house will fall apart." As a result, distributors are always encouraged to build new dreams once old ones have been attained. As DeVos (1993: 191) tells distributors, "When a dream comes true always replace it with a bigger dream. And those big dreams will keep you alive and excited for the rest of your life." Similarly, a Diamond distributor said at a rally, "Keep climbing, never reach your peak!" Thus, one must always avoid being a loser by continually adopting new dreams.

In my own experience, dreams of successful distributors often evolved over time from lifestyle and family-oriented dreams to dreams of helping others. As these dreams evolved, they became more abstract, more difficult, and took longer to fulfill. They also involved helping larger and larger numbers of people, such as "saving" the United States and the world through selling Amway. As one distributor noted, "As long as there is Amway, America is safe for generations to come" (excerpt from tape, *I Think Mark Twain Said It Best*). In a talk he gave, an Emerald distributor expressed a similar sentiment:

I've got a very important issue . . . remember, guys, we ain't talking about soap. We ain't talking about Amway. I'm talking about his future. I'm talking about the future of America . . . I'm talking about the future of people. And I don't care how you cut it. . . . Take the guys in the revolution. What did they do? Little groups of people sat around and made plans. They talked about how it was going to be. They talked about how they were going to form things in the right direction. . . . We are like people in the revolution. They're fighting a group of people who's bigger than they are. They're fighting a people who are off base in their morality—in the way they view things. And they're fighting for a purpose. And I said, "What are we doing?" It ain't cars. It ain't grins. It ain't houses. Although it is. But you see, that is what it's all about. And that's where we sometimes gotta draw strength.

The upshot of this continuous dream building cycle was twofold. First, as distributors spent more and more time

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achieving dreams, more of their lives (e.g., the social, business, and spiritual aspects) became intertwined with their identity as distributors (e.g., behavioral commitment—Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977). Second, constant dream building ensured that members were constantly seeking self-validation and thus were in a constant state of seekership.

Seekership in Distributors

Successful sensebreaking (dream-building) practices lead to seekership: a sense of identity-related discontentment that results in a drive to finding meaning. Thus, distributors who were seeking used dreams to represent their ideal selves and their current dissatisfactions, were motivated to change their current selves, and were always creating new ideal selves or dreams to keep from settling for what they currently had. When sensebreaking worked, distributors highly identified with their dreams. As the quotes provided in table 1 suggest, dreams were personalized. For each distributor, dreams were represented by their homes, their spouses and children, and their aspirations for helping others. As such, dreams reflected various aspects of these distributors' identities (e.g., self as spouse and parent). These dreams also represented members' current dissatisfactions with their own lives, such as the distributor in table 1 who wanted swimming lessons for his daughter. Distributors engaged in seeking were not only dissatisfied, they were also motivated to change who they were and to "break out of their comfort zones." As one highly successful distributor explained, "To grow you have to be willing to get out of your comfort zone and give more than the average person would. We decided we'd postpone TV and early bedtimes. I'm a fanatical basketball player, and I was invited to play in a league two nights a week. But I postponed all that" (excerpt from a story in the *Amagram*, July 1993: 5). Finally, seekers used their dreams or ideal selves as constant motivators. One can never be too satisfied. Thus, Executive Diamond Bob Howard noted, "Night after night, I'm out by choice, showing the Plan and helping downline distributors realize their potential . . ." (excerpt from the *Amagram*, April 1993: 7). Even the highly successful Dexter Yager "still builds the business today, starting anew all the time" (excerpt from tape, *Perfecting Your Contacting*).

Fulfilling the Need for Meaning via Sensegiving

Seekership leads to a search for meaning about one's self. Weick (1995) argued that this search involves looking for other people to help one make sense of one's self. Seekership needs may be met by sensegiving, which involves "attempting to influence the sensemaking process . . . toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). Among distributors, sensegiving practices take the form of positive programming, a process whereby the distributor is taught to fill his or her mind with things that are "uplifting and edifying." The logic behind positive programming is that a mind exposed to positive people and materials will be more positive. A mind exposed to negative influences will be more negative—as with computers, "garbage in, garbage out." Among distributors, creating this

"positive program" occurs by establishing a set of relationships that are supportive and nourishing, while avoiding relationships that can be harmful. Positive programming begins with establishing a mentoring relationship with an upline distributor. In this relationship, distributors learn which relationships are positive and should be sought out and which are negative and should be avoided. Positive relationships then become a source of meaning about who one is and who one should become. Sensegiving via positive programming thus involves three interrelated steps: (1) establishing a relationship with a mentor, (2) creating relationship barriers via revaluing, and (3) enacting and perpetuating relationship barriers.

Establishing a relationship with a mentor. The first step in positive programming is to find a mentor who will help one become more positive (DeVos, 1993). Amway distributors, especially those in one's upline, are held to be ideal mentors. Their unique qualifications to be mentors are implicit in DeVos's (1993) description of upline mentors:

Picture yourself pregnant with a dream. The mentor stands over you and helps you relax and breathe during the painful contractions while your dream is in labor. The mentor assists the dream down the birth canal and out into the light of day. The mentor holds your dream up by its heels and spans it to life. Then the mentor places that newborn dream into your arms, smiles, and walks away to assist another dreamer in labor.

This excerpt from DeVos is filled with warm, personal, and powerful imagery. Upline mentors are not like investors who only help you gain monetary assets, rather, they are like midwives helping you give birth and life to your own dreams. Their work is familial and is done with love. Thus, throughout Amway functions and tapes, advice about making money is interwoven with expressions of care and concern. For example, at Amway functions, upline distributors almost always end talks with words such as "we love you." Moreover, handshakes, hugs, and other gestures of affection are often evident during rallies and seminars, some of which are referred to as "family reunions." These sentiments are also expressed in Amway sayings. Distributors often note that "people get into Amway for the money and stay in it for the people" and if you "build a friendship, you build a directship." Similarly, both the economic and loving aspects of the distributing relationship are captured in the Amway phrase, "you go into business for yourself, not by yourself." As one distributor quoted in a success story explained, "You go into business for yourself, but not by yourself. There is a whole line of sponsorship that gives you all of the support you need. . . . I was having a difficult time going through a divorce, and I'd be a disaster now if it weren't for my upline. . . . Try getting that kind of support in the dog-eat-dog news business [her former occupation]" (*Amagram*, June 1993: 16).

Strong mentor-protégé relationships develop when upline members model the ideal Amway relationship and demonstrate both economic and emotional support (Bandura, 1962). Economic support comes with teaching downline distributors

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the skills needed to build an Amway business (e.g., how to sponsor and sell products). New members are told to learn these skills via "duplication": they are to "blindly obey" the advice of upline members. To increase new members' commitment to their mentors' advice, however, they are given the choice whether to engage in such blind obedience. Emotional support is shown as upline distributors engage in a multitude of acts that show downline distributors that they genuinely care about them. For example, distributors' success stories, told at functions or in the *Amagram*, give numerous accounts of upline distributors going above and beyond being simply business partners. In one success story, a distributor talked at length about how his upline helped him to get off drugs and to "change his life." Similarly, married distributors spoke tearfully at one function of how their sponsors gave them a frozen turkey when they were in need of food. Even though their sponsors gave them the turkey under the pretense that "it wouldn't fit into their freezer," the distributors said, "they knew we really needed it."

When upline members enact the relationship standard, very strong bonds form. As one upline distributor I interviewed described the relationships with the downline members in his Amway family tree, "One of the biggest things in this business is that I can count on probably about 100 people in my group that would do just about anything for me. Not that I abuse that. It's not like a Branch Davidian type thing. We have a great relationship with those people, and you know, that's one of the intangibles." These upline-downline bonds can be so positive and attractive to downline distributors that downline members are often motivated to be successful in the business so that they can "walk the beaches of the world" or vacation with their upline friends. One distributor interviewed talked about qualifying for Pearl so he could golf with his upline: "Gary and Gloria and all of their Pearls, Emeralds, and Diamonds were in Bermuda last week and the only way you can qualify for that trip is to be a Pearl. So, I'm mad and they go on a golf trip every spring and I'm mad because I like to play golf and I want to be with them because I like them, they have heart."

The importance of having a mentor is found in several theories of individual change (e.g., Schein, 1987). Sarbin and Adler (1970), for example, noted that the role of teacher was common in all of the conversion systems they reviewed. Mentors in Amway are key in educating and disseminating information. They help guide members in deciding which books to read, which tapes to buy, and how to use the Amway system to learn the most about the business. They are even helpful in providing advice in other areas, such as marriage, parenting, and religion (Pratt, 2000b). All these suggestions help distributors understand "who they are" and "who they should be" in organizational terms (e.g., be a better distributor to be a better spouse). In addition to providing information, however, upline mentors are also critical in helping to insulate members from the negative opinions of non-members. They help members avoid the negative influences of one's employer and non-supportive family and friends by cre-

ating relationship barriers between the distributor and these negative non-members.

Creating relationship barriers via revaluing. Positive programming creates relationship barriers by comparing ideal Amway relationships with members' other current relationships. Given that both money and love characterize distributor relationships, all other relationships are compared with that standard—and found wanting. For example, distributing relationships are promoted as being better than relationships with people at work, especially those with one's boss. If you work for someone else, you have a job or a J.O.B., "a Jack-ass Of a Boss." Working for someone else in a corporation is always seen as being bad because "when you work for someone else, you will never get paid what you're worth." The rationale is that corporations can never fully compensate their employees for what they are worth because they need to make a profit.¹² By implication, people in most organizations do not have any genuine concern for you. This characterization of traditional work relationships as being without love is common. The following excerpt from an interview typifies thinking about working for others:

Do most people who train people teach them everything they know, every trick of the trade? No. In corporate America today if someone knows what you know, what's the possibility? What can they do? They can replace you, they can get ahead of you. They can get the promotion, all right. . . . what I find is this, if person A is training person B and they don't teach them everything that they know. Then person B trains person C but he teaches him less. Why? Because he's protecting himself. Now person C teaches person D. Poor person D can't even find his way to work because he's not getting all the information.

Because there is no love in corporate boss-subordinate relationships, distributors should not look to their boss to help fulfill their own dreams. The boss is only concerned that they fulfill the needs of the organization. These relationships, therefore, should be minimized or avoided. Similarly, a distributor should also avoid spending time with friends and family who do not support the distributor in his or her business. Friends who do not join or buy products from a distributor are seen as not being "true friends" because they are not supportive of his or her business. One distributor talked about not being the best man in his friend's wedding because the friend deliberately scheduled his wedding at the same time as an Amway event. Distributors are also reminded that "although your parents or family may not like that you are distributors, they are not the ones who are paying your bills." Family, in this case, refers to those outside of one's immediate family, never one's wife or children. "Married singles," Amway distributors with non-supportive spouses, are taught to keep trying to convince their spouses to join them in their distributorships. Because of the devastating effect that friends and family can have when they do not support a downline distributor, DeVos (1975: 32) cautions people to be wary of those who are trying to "steal your dreams" and leave you discouraged:

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Upline distributors also note that starting your own non-Amway business is not as good as Amway because you have to put a lot of money into it (e.g., buying a McDonald's franchise), and there is no one to help you or who is interested in your success (i.e., provides you with emotional support). Thus, no other business arrangement provides what one will find in a distributing relationship.

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Why do so many people let their dreams die un-lived? The biggest reason, I suppose, is the negative, cynical attitudes of other people. Those other people are not enemies—they are friends, even family members. Our enemies never bother us greatly. . . . But our friends—if they are naysayers, constantly punching holes in our dreams with a cynical smile here, a putdown there, a constant stream of negative vibrations—our friends can kill us!

Despite their potential for harm, distributors are still encouraged to approach friends and family (and even strangers) to invite them to join the Amway business. But such contact should be minimized if these prospects are not supportive of the distributor's choice to build an Amway business—at least until they "wise up" and change their minds about Amway distributing!¹³

The relationship barriers created through positive programming facilitated members' encapsulation, typically defined as the process whereby group members are kept separate from non-members (Greil and Rudy, 1984; Lofland, 1978; Pratt, 2000b). According to Greil and Rudy (1984), encapsulation can be physical, when the group physically separates its members from outsiders; social, whereby a member's life is structured so that meeting outsiders is unlikely (e.g., imposing high time demands) and/or a member's family or friends are brought into the organization; or ideological, wherein an organization's belief system buffers a member from external threats or attacks. Encapsulation of distributors was primarily social and ideological.

Social encapsulation follows directly from the creation of strong in-group bonds as members come to spend increasing amounts of time in the presence of like-minded others (i.e., other distributors) at functions or in meetings with upline members. Social encapsulation can also occur by successfully sponsoring others. Converting family and friends to the values of distributing helps to guarantee that the distributor will receive social support for building the business. Moreover, even if one sponsors strangers, spending time teaching new members how to become distributors helps ensure that a significant portion of the sponsor's time is being spent with individuals who are friendly to Amway. In contrast, ideological encapsulation provides protection by buffering members from individuals who do *not* join or who otherwise attack the distributor (Greil and Rudy, 1984). Rejection by recruits can be explained by invoking the Amway relationship standard: these people fail to meet the standard because they do not love you and/or wish to help you out economically. Thus, when a distributor's sibling tells him or her that he or she is "wasting time" as a distributor, the distributor can look to the relationship standard and ultimately dismiss this opinion because its source—the sibling—does not provide economic support for the distributor. Moreover, once a person is identified as a non-supporter, ideological encapsulation guides the distributor to minimize contact with him or her, as well as with other sources of "negativity."

Encapsulation facilitates member sensemaking by insulating distributors from potentially negative sources of information. As Weick (1995) noted, sensemaking is a social activity (see also Louis, 1980). By creating strong mentor-protégé bonds

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This way of creating relationship barriers is akin to creating strong in-group/out-group dynamics (Kramer, 1993), but unlike the dynamics described in some theories, such as social identity theory, in-group and out-group categories among distributors need to remain more permeable to outside members (cf. Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Individuals in the out-group who show the slightest interest in distributing can quickly be shifted to the in-group. By contrast, members who stray—perhaps stop selling or sponsoring others—are not immediately relegated to out-group status. Rather, they may be retained as "in-group" members for a long time before finally being cast out. Finally, some individuals, such as negative spouses, are treated as somewhere in between the in-group and out-group. The in-group/out-group dynamics created via positive programming and relationship revaluing are thus slightly more fluid than those posited by other theories.

and negatively revaluing relationships with non-members, positive programming helps ensure that members will come to resolve any identity-related discontent (seekership) through conversations with upline distributors. These upline distributors act as sensegivers who ultimately help members to view themselves in organizational terms (e.g., losers and dreamers), rather than in non-organizational terms.

Enacting and perpetuating relationship barriers. As with dream building, distributors were given the opportunity to enact positive programming. This occurred, in part, through the act of distributing as the distributor quickly discovered which relationships were “positive” and which were “negative.” Distributors were often encouraged to try to sponsor family members and friends first before attempting to sponsor strangers. This allowed them to learn firsthand whether family and friends really loved them and wanted to support them economically. As one distributor told me in a conversation, approaching family and friends can lead to uncomfortable realizations: “The first few months of this business are the most difficult because family and friends shit all over you.” But distributors were not the only ones negatively influenced by these interactions. Family and friends who are approached often see the distributor as taking advantage of their existing relationships for economic gain. Several non-members talked to me about avoiding distributor friends and family for this reason. Thus, distributors came to avoid non-members, and non-members avoided distributors.

In addition to providing encapsulation, the enactment of these relationship barriers via positive programming influenced sensemaking in two other ways. First, enactment of the positive programming involved choice, and behaviors freely chosen are highly committing (Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977). Commitment, in turn, can provide a powerful context for sensemaking as “diverse cognitions become organized into those that support the [committed] action, those that oppose it, and those that are irrelevant to it” (Weick, 1995: 159). In other words, the more I behave as a distributor, the more I start to think of myself as one. Second, promoting an ideal relationship standard could lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. If members seek to sponsor family or friends into Amway, *any* action these non-members might take can serve to strengthen members’ beliefs that Amway relationships are better than others. If family and friends join, this action provides implicit support for distributing and for the upline distributor who encouraged the sponsoring of these individuals: “My upline must be right because my family and friends agree with him/her.” If family or friends refuse to join, the upline distributor is again right because he or she could predict that some family and friends would not fit the relationship standard. In either case, one’s Amway relationships come to be viewed as positive, and non-members are viewed as negative.¹⁴ When seen in conjunction with sensebreaking, the perpetuation of sensegiving helps ensure that members seek validation of their identities from Amway distributors only.

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This practice can also be said to produce highly stable relationships, using Heider’s (1958) balance theory. On the one hand, if a prospect (a family member or friend) joins, then the “triad” of distributor, upline, and prospect are all positive. On the other, if the prospect does not join, the relationship triad is still stable: the relationship between the new member and upline is positive, but the other relationships are negative. These stable relationships may serve to strengthen the sensemaking context created by Amway distributors.

Encapsulated Sensemaking in Distributors

When positive programming was successful, members engaged in encapsulated sensemaking in which they worked with other members (e.g., their mentors) to construct the frameworks that they used to understand particular people, events, or other social stimuli. When sensemaking was not encapsulated, members sought out non-members to facilitate their meaning construction. Among distributors, the process of encapsulated sensemaking involved members forming very strong bonds with their upline members, eschewing negative relationships, and seeing upline members as a key source of sensemaking.

Like those in strong mentor-protégé relationships, people who engaged in encapsulated sensemaking tended to have secure relationships with their upline (Kram, 1983; Hunt and Michael, 1983). According to many distributors, establishing this bond is key to staying active in the business. As one distributor I interviewed noted, "The people that stay active are the ones who can maintain a good personal relationship with their upline. Because this is a tough business, and if you don't have a good relationship with these people, you won't make it for the most part." Oftentimes, relationships between upline and downline distributors were so intense that downline distributors would describe their relationship with their upline in parental terms (Hunt and Michael, 1983). As one distributor commented of her upline distributors, "I think, in a way, they [upline distributors] are like surrogate parents succeeding where your own parents have failed."¹⁵ Similarly, Bill Britt, a very successful Amway distributor, refers to his style of mentoring as "father power" (DeVos, 1993).

Unlike other distributors, encapsulated distributors talked in detail about their negative reactions to people such as bosses or even friends who did not help them "fulfill" their dreams. In a conversation I recorded in my fieldnotes, a distributor talked about how he now saw his boss as a J.O.B.:

At dinner, I had asked Ken how his week was. He said "It was great! I had a fight with my boss this weekend!" [This statement surprised me.] He told everyone at the table how his boss wanted to implement a plan that he disagreed with and that he took a strong stance in opposing her. He told her to her face, "I don't agree. You might want to consider replacing me with someone who does." He also said that he and his boss had always gotten along well. However, NOW he realized what they meant in Amway about having a "Jackass Of a Boss."

Other encapsulated distributors echoed these negative evaluations of their bosses. In addition, negative sentiments were also extended to one's (former) friends. One distributor I interviewed talked about how the Amway business helped her to see that her friends were not true friends because they could not support her choice of making money as a distributor: "We've had people around here that know we are distributors now and they avoid us. We know that. It's just real cold that people don't even care, people that we thought were friends won't even let us show them the plan. So it's quite a learning experience about people."

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Upline distributors, in turn, often framed their relationships with downline members as involving work with one's "children."

Finally, members who engaged in encapsulated sensemaking viewed their upline as critical sources of meaning in their lives. Among distributors who engaged in this type of sensemaking, information from upline members—and other sources of Amway information (e.g., tapes, books, functions)—was highly valued. A distributor I interviewed noted the importance of her upline as a source of information after she failed to heed their advice about how to prospect one's friends:

[Being unrealistically positive in a sales attempt] is the kind of thing your upline warns you NOT to do, but you do it anyway because *[getting louder]*, THEY DON'T KNOW YOUR FRIENDS. But they DO know your friends *[she laughs nervously]*. . . . They [upline and people on tapes] say that you're going to want to get into the business to hang around the people that are in the business and it's true. EVERYTHING they say is true. It is really disgusting *[smiling]*.

Creating Positive Identification

When both sensebreaking and sensegiving were successful, members exhibited positive identification with their organization. As a result of successful sensebreaking, distributors were dissatisfied with who they were. Because of successful sensegiving, distributors worked with upline mentors to resolve their discontent. The need for sensemaking, therefore, was both triggered and fulfilled by Amway. Not surprisingly, these distributors made sense of their individual-organizational relationship in a way that favored the organization. Moreover, they viewed themselves as embodiments of the organization and became "zealots" who enthusiastically proselytized the Amway lifestyle (Butterfield, 1985; Biggart, 1989).

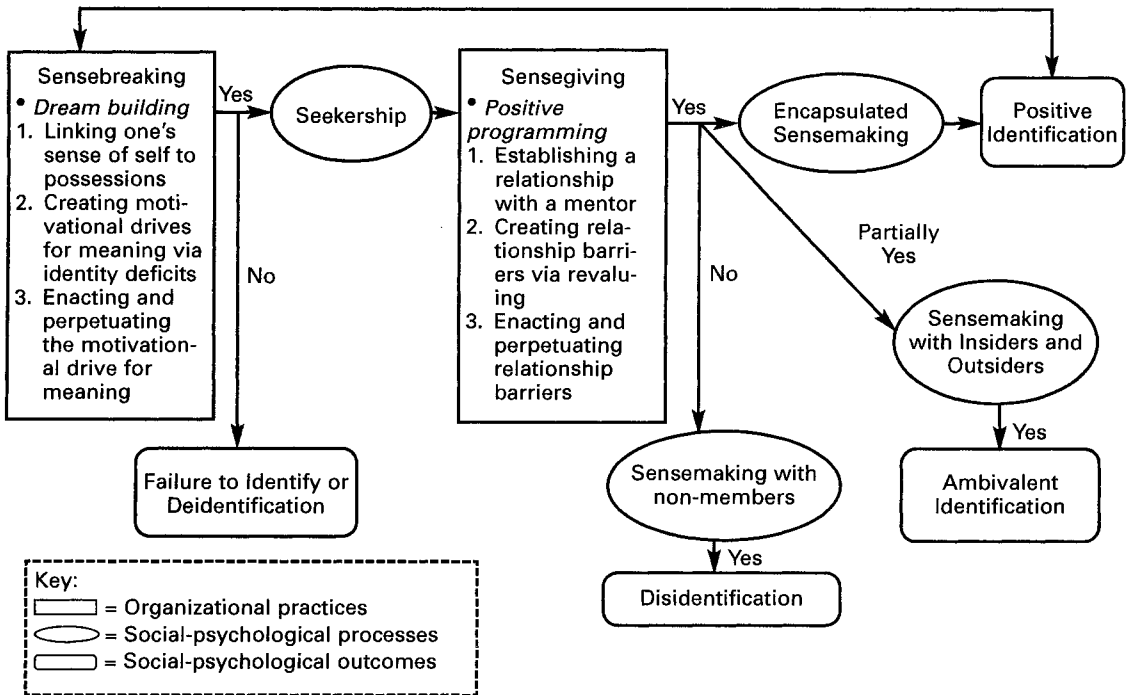
When distributors positively identified with Amway, they were more likely to continue to engage in sensebreaking activities, such as dream building. The result was an identification that was continuously enacted and reenacted. Thus, even highly successful distributors never "rested on their laurels." In individual change terms, members' sense of self never had the opportunity to adequately "refreeze" as new dreams continually challenged the self (Lewin, 1958; Schein, 1987). Such identification took on a highly energetic quality, which is why members with positive identification, which best characterized active distributors, were described as "getting the fever" or as "having the burn." The quality of this type of identification with Amway is eloquently described in the following interview excerpt with an inactive distributor:

It's kind of like they [people who totally believe in Amway] are mad with this bug in them. . . . I think that's what I see in their eyes, I told you earlier that people that have given it, they've given it [their Amway dreams] their heart, their eyes are like *[pause]* there's this intensity when you talk to them that there's just no question at all that there's another way to live.

Figure 1, which depicts a model of the identification management process of Amway distributors, shows how successful and continuous reenactment of sensebreaking and sensegiving can lead to positive identification.

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Figure 1. Explaining different types of identification among Amway distributors via the success and failure of sensebreaking and sensegiving practices.



When Sensebreaking and/or Sensegiving Fail

Most identity transforming organizations fail in their attempts to manage the identifications of their members (Greil and Rudy, 1984). If the practices I described always worked for Amway distributors, they would not have a high turnover rate. While Amway does not publish turnover rates, estimates place it from 40 percent to almost 100 percent annually (Biggart, 1989). Finally, the explanation of identification to this point does not explain why some distributors, particularly inactive distributors, stay with the organization despite not wanting to sponsor others or to sell products. Figure 1 shows how failures in either sensebreaking or in sensegiving may account for the range of identifications found among inactive and former distributors.

Nonexistent or broken identifications. Figure 1 indicates that when sensebreaking fails, members are likely to break their identification and thus deidentify. Interviews with non-members suggest that the primary reason for their lack of identification was that they either never had (e.g., those who never joined Amway) or had stopped feeling "uncomfortable" with their current lives and thus no longer wanted to pursue their dreams. As one former distributor noted, "I guess in the beginning we were excited for the sense of starting your own business, financial independence, those types of things—and I guess we kind of lost interest." As a result, there was no need for members to "make sense" of inadequate current selves. These people were also not motivated to change themselves or to abandon their current identities. As one distributor who did not renew explained, she did not want to change her life now that it was going well: "I've just gotten to the point in my current job where I can

work not too much overtime and get my stuff in. I like my job." As a result, she didn't want to spend time going to meetings, selling products, and so on. These distributors perceived their time in Amway as a period of their lives when they "tried something new and didn't like it." As one former distributor noted, "It [being a distributor] just wasn't my thing."

Not surprisingly, these people were not motivated to seek out upline distributors for advice, nor did they form any strong bonds with the distributors. Some even had slightly negative views of their upline. As one distributor who ultimately left Amway noted in an interview, he became increasingly distant with his upline sponsors as he continued distributing: "I don't like the fact that the people in the business revered whatever their Diamond said and their word was law. I wasn't comfortable with the fact that everybody around them basically was worshipping these people [successful upline distributors], taking their word at face value. Again, like I said, I just didn't really agree with that philosophy." While his reaction to his upline was slightly negative, it does not convey the deep sense of betrayal and anger that typified individuals who ultimately disidentified with Amway.

Disidentification. As figure 1 indicates, when sensegiving failed, or when the bonds formed between upline and downline distributor did not lead to encapsulated sensemaking, individuals either came to disidentify with Amway or remained ambivalently attached to it. Disidentification occurs when members "maintain a sense of self-distinctiveness through perceptions and feelings of disconnection" with an organization (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 1997: 3). Unlike disidentification in which there is no connection with the organization, disidentification occurs when one identifies oneself in opposition to the organization. Distributors become "anti-Amway" rather than simply severing their connection.

As figure 1 shows, members who disidentified with the organization did undergo the sensebreaking of dream building. As a result, they were excited by their dreams and knew that they had to change themselves to achieve their dreams (i.e., they created an ideal identity and knew that they had to change their current identities). One former distributor, who talked to me about what initially attracted him to Amway, said, "I was very impressed with the guy's organization. He had a big beautiful home. It had a basement and in his basement he had built shelves, a whole wall of shelves and had a few desks there with a computer . . . but I didn't have any of the things that he had so maybe that's what initially attracted me to it." He also knew that achieving dreams was difficult. When talking about his dreams of becoming a lawyer, he used a logic similar to that used in dream building: he had a dream and was willing to work to achieve it, no matter what obstacles he encountered: "It's my dream [to practice law]. I'm not gonna let them [critics] get to me, just because they were unhappy that day. . . . There's a price to pay for everything, whether it's practicing law or selling Amway—you gotta work hard at it."

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Distributors who disidentified with Amway had, at best, distant or infrequent interactions with their upline. At worst, distributors expressed annoyance or even deep-seated anger toward their upline. Mentoring relationships can be volatile because they mix instrumental and social relationships; hence negative relationships between mentors and protégés are common (Kram, 1983; Hunt and Michael, 1983). The aforementioned distributor, for example, blamed his upline for his disenchantment with Amway. Although he had sold products successfully for other companies, he felt his upline didn't recognize his potential, and as he said, "they didn't know how, outside of just telling me to go to another meeting, to excite me." Another former distributor was more disapproving about his relationship with his upline. In describing to me how his sponsor got him into Amway, he recalled:

I was put in an awkward [and painful] situation. The guy is giving me a sales rap and everyone around are like saying positive things and a slide show is going on—I'm obviously being sold. I've been taken there in somebody's car who would prefer to take me home with a box of this stuff—there is immense social pressure on me. And I am young and I'm squirming and I do have money . . . and it was only \$120, so it seemed like the easiest way out of a difficult situation. . . . I felt humiliated. . . . It could almost be viewed as a torture session.

Because Amway *did* succeed in its sensebreaking practices, seekership was triggered as the formation of ideal identities caused distributors to reevaluate their lives. But because sensegiving failed, they did not attempt to find meaning with other distributors; rather, they sought out non-members. In the accounts I gathered, these distributors' "confidants" were decidedly negative toward Amway. Consequently, these former members tended to make sense of the organization in an unfavorable light. To illustrate, disidentified distributors reinterpreted the Amway relationship standard that good relationships provide both emotional and economic support to mean "upline members are being nice to me so that they can make money for themselves." Thus, these former distributors tended to feel used and manipulated. To keep a positive sense of self, they often came to identify themselves in opposition to Amway. Some former distributors even organized their own website, the Internet Society of Ex-Amway Distributors with Web Pages, to display public messages such as the following:

For your own Family's sake, please take this to heart: Is Amway truly representative of an authentic Christian owned and run Business? . . . Is this the kind of company that anyone should favorably promote to others? Extreme Caution is Advised: This kind of conduct may obviously reflect very poorly on you! Promoting Amway may quickly come back to take a big bite out of your personal credibility! . . . Be a "Real Man," as is often stated in Amway Circles, GET OUT—AND STAY AWAY from getting yourself and your loved ones sullied by association with the likes of these folks.
(<http://www.getfacts.com/amway/stories/index.html>)

Ambivalent identification. For some distributors, mostly inactive ones, the quality of their identification was ambivalent, torn by contradictory thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Freud, 1950; Merton, 1976; Weigert and Franks, 1989).

Members with ambivalent attachments alternatively move toward, away, or against their organizations (Smelser, 1998; Pratt and Doucet, 2000). Some ambivalent distributors renewed their Amway membership (moved toward) but did not sell products or sponsor others (moved away). One inactive distributor I interviewed felt like he was struggling:

Yeah, the struggle I guess is I always feel like I need to start this thing and I don't . . . and it's only because of me. I mean there's nobody saying, oh you can't do it, you shouldn't, everybody says it works and I just don't quite understand yet 'cause I want to, there are times when I want to. There are other times when I just flow with things. That might be part of why I'm still in it. Yeah, yeah, it's a good idea . . . [but sometimes] I get confused with all that so I just put it off, I just don't deal with it for a few months.

Such ambivalence can be explained by a successful sense-breaking but only a partially successful sensegiving. To begin, as with those who either positively or negatively identified with Amway, ambivalent distributors were attracted to dreams and created images of their ideal selves. As one ambivalent distributor noted, "My dreams are to feel good you know . . . I definitely want security. I don't want to have to get screwed at work . . . you know what I mean. I don't want to have to have a job where people can control if I work or not." Moreover, they developed strong bonds with their upline mentors. As one inactive distributor described to me his relationship with his sponsor:

. . . he wants me to learn, he wants me to listen to tapes and read books and to ask questions and to go to functions. . . . the most amazing thing about all this is [that] I have not been the model Amway person by any standard. I've blown off a function once, I said I'd go and I didn't. And you know, I don't come with my lists, I don't sponsor people, I don't use consistently, and the thing that is really amazing is that there's this unconditional support you know. . . . It's kind of cool. I like him. He calls me cousin.

These relationships, however, were not enough to encapsulate members totally. Ambivalent distributors did not cut themselves off from their non-member relationships. In fact, to maintain these relationships, distributors sometimes hid their involvement in Amway. Some were embarrassed by Amway's negative reputation, even when the basis for the reputation was false, as in the following story a distributor told me:

Yeah, well, I got a bunch of really nice things from the Christmas catalog so I had them delivered to work so I was showing off the big Christmas wreath cuz it was really cool and someone said, "Wow, that's really nice, where did you get that?" And I said, "In an Amway catalog." And he said, "Amway? They're Nazis right?" I said, "Ha ha. [pause] What?" He said, "They're Nazis, it stands for the American Way that was started, the head people of that are Nazis." I said, "Oh, okay. I have nothing to do with Amway, nope, nope."

Others hid their involvement so as not to alienate their friends and family. One distributor I interviewed who lost a friend after recruiting him noted, "It seems to bother people . . . they like run from it. So I find that I get people that I don't care too much if they run—you know but people that I like, but I don't know them. They're not part of my daily life. So

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like the people that I call are the people that I don't see a lot of. People I know through friends." Ambivalent distributors often agonized over the possibility of damaging their relationships with non-members by "using their friendships (or family relationships) in order to make a profit." The net result was that ambivalent distributors did form strong bonds with upline members, but they did not go the next step and eschew "negative relationships." As a result, they were exposed to negative information about Amway from significant, non-Amway, others.¹⁶

In sensemaking terms, ambivalent distributors engaged in seekership behaviors, but they went to both positive members and to negative non-members to obtain advice and enlightenment. The net result was that they were pulled in two different directions: their need to achieve dreams and maintain their close bonds with upline members helped to create a positive identification with the organization, but the "anti-Amway" advice of non-members created disidentification as well. As a result, these members were of "two minds" and expressed their ambivalence behaviorally: they often would sporadically become active in their distributing and then nearly stop altogether for an extended period of time.

A MODEL OF MANAGING IDENTIFICATION

To this point, I have attempted to explain the identification of current and former Amway distributors as a product of motivated sensemaking. Sensemaking is motivated because in each case in which an identification was formed (positive, disidentification, or ambivalent), Amway used sensebreaking tactics to create a meaning void or seekership within distributors. As their sense of self was challenged by Amway, distributors were motivated to redefine themselves and determine whether their connection with Amway was good, bad, or ambivalent.

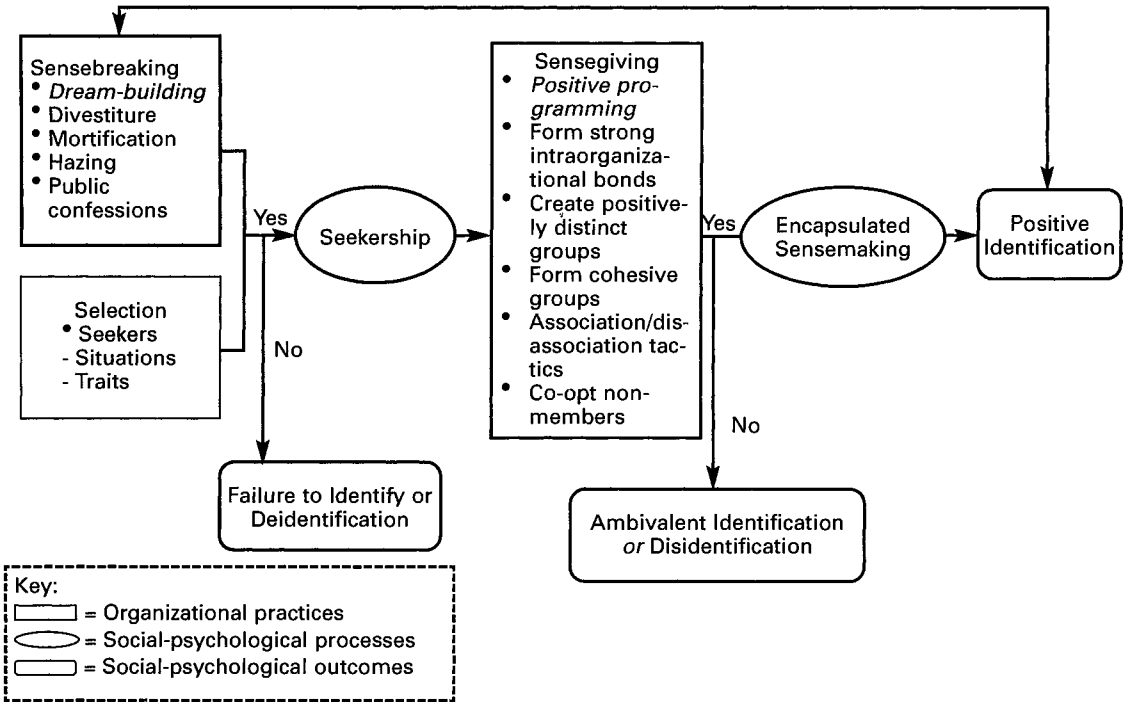
Amway manages the identification of its members by creating seekership and encapsulated sensemaking in its members via dream building and positive programming. Building from these insights, figure 2 offers a preliminary model of identification management by managing sensemaking.

As figure 2 suggests, if members are not seeking, then they will either fail to identify or will ultimately deidentify with the organization. But there may be other means than dream building for inducing seekership in members. To begin, organizations can engage in a wide variety of sensebreaking practices. While not posited as sensebreaking practices per se, practices identified in theories of socialization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979), commitment (Kanter, 1968), social influence (Cialdini, 1993; Zimbardo and Andersen, 1993), and identity conversion (Greil and Rudy, 1983) may be viewed as contributing to sensebreaking because of their effects on members' self-evaluations. For example, divestiture socialization tactics, identity mortification, hazing, and public confessions of unworthiness involve the invalidation of the self, typically by comparing one's current self against a valued group identity. In Amway, distributors used their own ideal selves as standards of comparisons. These tactics begin to blur,

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I found it difficult to maintain my enthusiasm about Amway when I had to meet with my more critical academic colleagues. As a result, I found myself ignoring my academic colleagues during the most intense nine-month period of data collection. The pull between my life as an academic and a distributor was somewhat painful (see Pratt, 2000a, for details).

Figure 2. A model of managing identification by managing sensemaking.



however, as sensegiving occurs, and the standard for one's ideal self becomes increasingly influenced by other distributors.

In addition, organizations may foster seekership through selection. Some individuals may have predispositions toward seekership. Lofland and Stark (1965) suggested that religious seekers are predisposed toward finding meaning in life through religion. By extension, there may also be organizational seekers, predisposed to seek meaning through the organizations that employ them. Such a predisposition may result from dissatisfaction with one's current situation, or there may be some dispositional influence that makes a person more likely to be seeking, such as the strength of one's growth needs. If so, then selection may facilitate the management of identification within organizations. But unlike relatively static models of person-organization fit in which one is hiring based on individual-organization value congruence, "fitting" in this situation is an ongoing and dynamic process of sensebreaking, meaning seeking, sensegiving, and sensemaking. Thus, individuals may "fit" at some points in time but not at others (e.g., transition from positive identification to ambivalent and then back again).

There are also a variety of ways that organizations can promote encapsulated sensemaking among members. Approaches similar to "sensegiving," shown in figure 2, have been suggested in other literatures. Theories of identity conversion (e.g., Lofland and Stark, 1965; Lofland, 1978; Greil and Rudy, 1984), mentoring (e.g., Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1983), and organizational commitment (e.g., Kanter, 1968; Sheldon, 1971; Buchanan, 1974) each note the importance of managing intragroup relationships in developing

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strong bonds between individuals and organizations. Theories of social identity (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1985; Hogg, 1996) and organizational identification (e.g., Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994) further suggest the need for establishing strong boundaries between in-group and out-group. Taken together, these literatures suggest different means for developing relationships that facilitate member sensemaking. Of course, this model may offer slightly different interpretations for why these practices are effective in fostering identification. For example, social identity theory suggests that organizations that are attractive or prestigious are more likely to foster identification than those that are not because they enhance an individual's sense of self-esteem. But given the importance of groups in sensemaking, such organizations also have the advantage of broadening their boundaries by increasing the potential number of positive sensegivers to seeking members. In Amway, one reason why non-members are eschewed is because they are likely to say negative things about the organization. Prestigious organizations, however, may have "groupies," non-members who feel positively toward the organization and wish to emulate it (Pratt, 1998). For these organizations, the need to create strong in-group/out-group barriers may be less critical because non-members have been co-opted by the organization and serve sensegiving roles.

Figure 2 suggests several propositions for research. To begin, it predicts that organizations that successfully induce seeker-ship and encapsulated sensemaking are likely to foster positive identifications. Moreover, once positively identified, members are more likely to comply with organizational demands and be amenable to further sensebreaking and sensegiving practices. Figure 2 also proposes that this cycle of identification can be broken. If sensebreaking fails, identifications will dissolve. If sensegiving totally or partially fails, members' identification will transform into either disidentification or ambivalent identification, respectively. Thus, managing identification is an ongoing task.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to our understanding of identification dynamics in organizations in at least four ways. First, it moves beyond simply positing identification practices to understanding how these practices might work together in generating processes that can lead to multiple forms of identification. As shown in figure 2, dream building and positive programming—the practices used in Amway—achieve similar end states as those posited by other theories. But these other theories do not discuss how such practices may work together to produce member identification. This research, by contrast, suggests that to understand managing identification and its consequences, one must look at a combination of tactics. On the one hand, organizations that emphasize only sensebreaking practices may alienate workers. Here, identification may fail as members seek meaning about the organization through negative non-members. On the other, organizations that use only sensegiving practices may find that members are not amenable to adopting organizational beliefs.

Here, identification fails because there is no motivation to identify—one is satisfied with one's current sense of self.

Second, and similarly, this research links identification with motivation and sensemaking in new ways. Recent work has begun to link motivation and identification. To illustrate, social identity theorists have suggested that social identification is motivated by self-esteem needs (see Deux et al. 1999, for a review and critique). Brewer (1991) has further argued that individuals are motivated to adopt social identities that help them achieve a balance between needs for inclusion and differentiation (see also Brewer and Pickett, 1999). Recently, organizational scholars have suggested that individuals may identify with organizations to satisfy a wide range of needs, such as safety, belonging, or identification needs (Glynn, 1998; Pratt, 1998). This is similar to the approach taken by Deux et al. (1999), who offered seven distinct motivations for identification (e.g., romantic involvement, self-understanding, collective self-esteem). Research presented here extends this work by revealing an additional motivator for identification: a need to create meaning when one is confronted with a disparity between one's current and ideal selves. As such, it seems consonant with Hogg and colleagues' general assertion that social identification may fulfill a need for uncertainty reduction (Hogg and Abrams, 1993; Hogg and Mullin, 1999). Moreover, this study illustrates the reciprocal nature of identity and motivation: the content of one's current and ideal identities provides the motivational drive to change one's current identity (via identification).

There has also been some theoretical work linking one's identity to sensemaking: one's identity has been seen as the lens through which one makes sense of the world (e.g., Weick, 1995; Ashforth and Mael, 1996). Yet the relationship between identity and sensemaking may be more complex. The case of Amway distributors shows that identification, which involves identity change, is itself a product of sensemaking. Identification among distributors has many of the elements of Weick's (1995) depiction of sensemaking: it is grounded in identity construction, enactive, social, ongoing, plausible, and retrospective. Identification involves talking to and acting with other people (e.g., members or non-members) to make sense of one's self in light of one's organization. The end result of identification, a social identity, may therefore be both a residue of and a lens for human sensemaking. The connection to sensemaking also reveals a recognized but often underexamined aspect of identification: the development of interpersonal relationships. Forming an identification with an organization is about more than creating a link with an abstract organization, it is also about making sense of the self through one's relationship with members, non-members, or both.

Third, this study is the first to show how organizational practices can lead to a wide range of identifications. Much of the research on individual-organizational attachment discusses positive attachments. Though this research does not presume that positive attachments are always good for the individual or organization (e.g., Randall, 1987; Ashforth and Mael, 1989, 1996; Ibarra, 1999), it still often equates the terms

"committed" and "identified" with people who feel excitement or enthusiasm toward their workplace. Research in identification has recently suggested that members can have other than positive identification states. To illustrate, Elsbach and Bhattacharya's (1997) study of the National Rifle Association illustrates that individuals may actively disassociate with an organization (see also Dukerich, Kramer, and Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999). Similarly, theory has suggested that individual-organizational attachments can be conflicted (Dukerich, Kramer, and Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Pratt and Doucet, 2000) and can be broken (Ashforth, 1998) but has not suggested the practices and processes that might lead to these various identification states.

Moreover, previous research suggests that one way to differentiate among different identification states is not just one's cognitive orientation toward an organization but also one's emotional evaluation of it. Tajfel (1982: 24) referred to the "value and emotional significance" of group membership as being central to the formation of social identities, and Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined identification as a feeling of oneness with the organization. Despite this recognition, there has been little theoretical and empirical work on examining the emotional quality of organizational identification (Harquail, 1998); rather, identification continues to be conceptualized as being a primarily cognitive construct (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994). In the study presented here, emotional evaluations distinguish among identification types. Disidentification, for example, was associated with a negative emotional evaluation, and ambivalent identification with both positive and negative evaluations. Thus, while identification has cognitive aspects to it, this research suggests that identifications are infused with emotions as well.

Fourth, this study implies that the process of identification is dynamic. Most treatments of identification are relatively static (Ashforth, 1998) and focus on identification rather than identifying (Pratt, 1998). This study suggests that identification is not a one-time, all-or-nothing process whereby an individual comes to match his or her values with an organization. Rather, individuals can change identification states. While not discussed in detail here, distributors sometimes changed how they identified with the organization: some moving from deidentification back to positive identification, some moving from positive identification to ambivalent identification, and so on. Similarly, positive identification can vary in magnitude. I have suggested that dreams of distributors evolve from lifestyle dreams to ones that are more abstract and far-reaching and may include elements of one's family and spiritual lives (Pratt, 2000b). Drawing on the concept of multiplex bonds from network theory (Granovetter, 1982; Brass, 1992), this suggests that as more facets of one's identity (e.g., business, family, and religion) become bound up in an organization, one's identification becomes deeper. Thus, even positive identifications can grow and change. Taken together, these findings resonate with Ashforth's (1998: 213) suggestion that "identity is a perpetual work in progress."

Practical Contributions

Amway, with its network sales force of part-time and full-time distributors, is not alone in its desire to manage members' identifications. Cheney (1991) noted that the management of members' identification is the critical management issue for the next century. In part, this is because the nature of organizations is transforming. Traditional organizational arrangements in which members spend most of their time in their offices are changing with such business trends as telecommuting and virtual offices. Spans of control are also broadening, and thus there are decreasing amounts of managerial control over each worker. Finally, the psychological contract has changed as well. Members no longer feel the same degree of loyalty to organizations they once did because of the lack of job security. Taken together, these trends can be potentially disastrous for organizations: they are losing supervisory control at the same time that their members are feeling less and less loyalty to the company. Thus, we are seeing a resurgence in questions about what organizations are and how we should relate to them. For distributors, the organization is a community bound by a strong system of values and beliefs, and membership involves the incorporation of those values and beliefs into one's self. To manage members and membership in this type of organization, distributors create a strong sensemaking context to replace traditional bricks and mortar.

The identification-management practices described here further practical knowledge by giving us a new model to interpret existing organizational practices, as well as suggesting new avenues for managerial action. First, this research may cause us to better understand why certain groups, such as professionals, socialize members the way that they do. The model I propose may explain how the harsh socialization of doctors works to produce physicians who strongly identify with their profession (e.g., Marion, 1991). In medical school, aspiring doctors are "beaten down" and are shown how little they know about medicine through a variety of very difficult exams and incessant questioning on hospital rounds. Such a process continues in medical residency programs as new doctors are made to realize the limits of their physical and mental resources. At the same time, ideal selves are offered to them as physical symbols (e.g., being allowed to wear longer white lab coats as one progresses through residency) or as aspirations (e.g., helping other people). Such practices seem to be a form of sensebreaking. This training process is accompanied by ever-increasing demands on the physicians' time—be it for studying in medical school or taking care of patients during residency. Surgeons, in particular, have been known to work up to 140 hours a week during their internship year. During this time, physicians form close bonds with senior role models. Taken together, these practices help to encapsulate members and contribute to professional sensegiving. This cycle of sensebreaking and sensegiving does not necessarily stop here. If a physician wants to work at an academic institution, then tenure hurdles act as periodic reminders that one must continually assess the value of one's current self. Moreover, committee and teaching obligations serve to further encapsulate such professionals. Per-

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haps lessons from Amway distributors can shed new light on why this and other professional socialization practices (e.g., of lawyers and academics) have the effects, intended or not, that they do.

Second, understanding seekership and encapsulated sense-making may be integral to organizations that are similar to Amway on some key dimension. Understanding the role of seekership may be critical to organizations in which members are part-time or contingent workers by providing members with some motivation to identify with the organization. Similarly, seekership seems critical in organizations in which membership is voluntary, such as religious, self-help, or social-movement organizations (Kanter, 1968; Greil and Rudy, 1984). For these organizations, whose mission is to provide purpose in their members' lives, it may periodically be necessary to re-create within them the need for meaning. Seekership may also be important in professions and professional organizations that need to motivate members toward continuous improvement during long periods of socialization. As noted, physicians during their residencies are often made to feel inadequate, despite having attained medical degrees, so that they will be willing to undergo yet more training and continue to hone their skills.

In a similar vein, some organizations or work groups can benefit from a better understanding of encapsulated sensemaking. In organizations with geographically dispersed workforces (e.g., sales organizations, virtual teams), fostering encapsulated sensemaking via practices such as positive programming may allow members to retain a sense of common purpose despite having infrequent face-to-face meetings. Similarly, organizations that suffer from poor reputations or groups engaged in "dirty work" (Hughes, 1951; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999), in which individuals may come to feel stigmatized due to physical, social, or moral aspects of their jobs, may also seek to foster encapsulated sensemaking by protecting organizational members from the negative evaluation of others. Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) insistence that dirty-work occupations create strong cultures and use tactics that redefine their work (e.g., selective social comparisons) fits the notion of sensegiving and encapsulated sensemaking as described here.

Finally, organizations need to weigh the costs and benefits of managing identification in the manner illustrated in this study. Although attaining strong, positive identifications may facilitate organizational functioning, one must be cautious about the dark side of such identification, such as a lack of organizational flexibility, individual vulnerability (especially if the organization's reputation fails), distrust and paranoia, overdependence on and overconformity to organizational dictates, antisocial, unethical, immoral, and even tyrannical behaviors on behalf of both leaders and followers, decreased creativity and risk taking, burnout, and the loss of an independent sense of self (Ashforth and Mael, 1996; Dukerich, Kramer, and Parks, 1998; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith, 1995; Kramer and Wei, 1999). Moreover, organizations may also incur labor-related costs, given the high turnover these practices can induce. Thus, such

practices may be best utilized when the organization has a large labor pool.

For individuals, the concern is that such organizations take advantage of individuals by bending their wills to that of the organization. But not all individual outcomes of these practices are negative. Many active distributors seemed genuinely happy with their choice to become distributors. For them, Amway provided a strong sense of purpose and community by uniting parts of their lives that had been segmented by modern society (e.g., work, family, and religion). Thus, what to an outsider may seem like shameful manipulation seemed only logical to an insider. Why wouldn't you want to pursue your dreams in the company of other, happy, like-minded people? In fact, many distributors pitied (and even condescended to) non-distributors who had not had the opportunity or the insight to take advantage of the Amway opportunity.

Some caution must be exercised in using a highly context-dependent ethnography to generalize to other organizations and social groups. First, the strength of ethnographic work is in providing specific and detailed information, not generalizations. Second, the context differs from other organizations: Amway distributors are a nontraditional, dispersed work force. Third, ethnographies examine extreme cases. As an NMO, Amway consists primarily of ideology and social relationships. This simplicity in its structure helped make the identification management processes more observable and apparent. Identity management in other organizations, however, may be more subtle, more difficult to detect, or simply different. By noting Amway's similarities to other NMOs (Biggart, 1989) and to emerging work relationships with contingent workers (e.g., Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Pearce, 1998), I have attempted to link Amway's practices with that of other organizations. Moreover, by linking Amway's tactics to existing theory in a model of identification management (see figure 2), I have tried to show how other organizations achieve similar ends (e.g., sensebreaking) through different means (e.g., public testimonials).

As organizations continue to change and scholars and practitioners continue to advocate for strong cultures to deal with this change, it is perhaps time to revisit the classic question of how the self relates to the collective and whether and how the collective should manage this relationship. Whether the reader's purpose is to encourage or change organizations that try to win the minds and hearts of their members, perhaps it is best to understand first the psychological process that these organizations evoke. Only then can we duplicate, or find substitutes for, what these organizations provide for their members.

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APPENDIX: Dream Building with My Sponsor and Our Upline Emerald (Excerpt from field journal)

[After lunch in the city], we began "dream building." Dream building involves looking for things (e.g., material things) that will motivate you. I told Mark yesterday that I was interested in suits. So, we stopped by a clothing store. It was interesting to see Mark take control and get an employee to show me some suits. He suggested colors of suits that he thought would look good on me, such as olive and other green colors. After trying on a few suits, he encouraged me to try on "what I liked." As I did so, he commented on things he liked on me, as well as on what he was not as thrilled about (I can't remember him being really negative about anything—he either said something good or nothing). He suggested that I go into more clothing stores in the future to dream build.

We then got into the car and went into the mall. I suggested stopping at Herman's (sports store) as they were going out of business. Mark works out often, as do I. I looked around and finally found a few things to buy. I should note that I wanted to get a pair of athletic-style shorts. At the counter, we found that they were \$10 more than what we had thought. Mark said that they were much cheaper by his home and that he would pick me up a pair.

We then went into a leather goods store where I found an incredibly nice looking leather jacket [it ended up being one of only things I liked all day]. I should note that Mark originally suggested that I look at the jacket, and he also expressed an interest in it. It was not on sale then, so Mark asked a sales clerk to call me when it was going to be on sale—so that I could call him. He asked me if that was fine. I said it was. He was hoping that he could send me the money when it went on sale so I could buy it for him. I left my phone number with the sales clerk. . . .

We then went into another jewelry store. Mark had asked me in the car if I was interested in men's jewelry and I said "no." He said that everyone who starts the business says the same thing, but that I might get to like them, as he had. In the store, Mark had me look at diamond rings (single stones and multiple stones). Mark looked at some also. Not much happened here except that Mark stumped the man behind the counter with "expert" questions—such as the composition of the black molding on the ring. Mark demonstrated his knowledge of jewelry while at this and other stores (e.g., asking questions about diamond fittings, asking to see a "loop," telling us to

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ask for .94 karat diamonds instead of a full karat because they are much cheaper but are not smaller to the eye, etc.). . . .

After hitting a few more clothing stores with little success, we went to yet another jewelry store. I acted quite a bit more confident at this store. (Mark commented that it was obvious that Zack and I knew nothing about jewelry, but that we should "fake it." Mark later said that I did much better in this latest jewelry store because I walked right in and asked to see some diamond rings. I did not, however, know specifically what I wanted and Mark said that people who know what they want are treated well.)

We then went to a cookie store (Mark was getting hungry). He bought 2 and could get the 3rd for free or cheaply, so he asked me if I wanted one. After buying it he said jokingly, "here you go son." I responded [also joking], "thanks, dad." . . .

By this time, I was pretty wiped out and we decided to leave. We stopped at a retail clothing store on the way back. I took charge and asked to see some jackets. Mark and Zack also looked at suits this time. Once again, Mark commented on what he liked and asked the salesperson to show me a double-breasted suit. While showing me the suits, Mark said something to the effect that I would be rich soon otherwise he's wasting his time here. The salesperson seemed to get interested and jokingly said that I could see anything I wanted. Mark saw some suits, too, but told the salesperson that he would not be buying any as he had his own tailor. The salesperson was getting reeled in. Mark then began prospecting the salesperson. . . .

We then headed back to my place. On the way, I asked Mark if he wanted to stop by the boot store. He said he would like that. Mark had said earlier how much he liked cowboy boots and had asked me if there were any boot stores in the area. I stopped at a store on State Street. Mark knew that I was not interested in cowboy boots and he told me that Olivia (his wife) got angry when he takes people dream-building and then goes looking for things he likes (in this case the boots). He said that it was important to do your own dream building when you take folks around because it teaches *them* to dream build. Most people don't know what they want, so you help teach them by dream building yourself.