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FORMAL DINING AT CAMBRIDGE COLLEGES: LINKING RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MAINTENANCE

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We examine the role of rituals in institutional maintenance. Through an in-depth, qualitative study of formal dining at the University of Cambridge, we explore how the performance of these rituals contributes to the maintenance of the British class system. We find that rituals are important for institutional maintenance because they have a powerful bearing on participants beyond the confines of the rituals themselves. Our analysis also suggests that institutions are refracted through context and individual experience at a micro level, and indicates a more fragmented and less strategic conception of institutional maintenance than is portrayed in recent work.

Institutional theorists have typically focused on the diffusion and legitimation of field-level institutions (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Strang & Meyer, 1993).[1] More recently, they have examined how new institutions are created (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004) and established ones altered (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). One area in which institutional theory remains relatively silent is the question of how institutions are maintained. Indeed, as Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) and Zilber (2009) have pointed out, institutional theorists have long taken for granted the process by which meaning is perpetuated over time.

For institutions to persist, meaning systems must be transmitted and norms communicated in plausible and authentic ways so as to be readily accepted and practiced (Tolbert, 1988). This communication and transmission serve to calibrate behavior and maintain coherence in an institutional order, thereby avoiding institutional erosion and drift. The assumption in most accounts of this process is that institutions are self-reproducing, requiring minimal "agency" (the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices [Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008]). However, "relatively few institutions have such powerful reproductive mechanisms that no ongoing maintenance is necessary" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 229), and most require sustained institutional work to preserve them. From this perspective, institutional maintenance is not simply a process of replication, but rather one of translation, negotiation, and enactment (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

In this article, we seek to explore the process through which institutions are maintained. To do so, we believe it is necessary to pay attention to the more micro interactions that organizational life entails, because as Collins (2004) emphasized, it is only at the micro level that the effects of institutions can be "directly" observed. This concern for microdynamics was present in earlier institutional work but has since almost disappeared, with most discussion now focused at a macro level (Barley, 2008).

In particular, we are interested in a crucial yet overlooked mechanism that reproduces as well as reinforces a given institutional order: organizational rituals. Although some institutional theorists have acknowledged the central role that rituals play in the creation and transmission of meaning (e.g., Friedland & Alford, 1991; Meyer & Scott, 1983), few have considered their institutional effects or how they connect

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[1] We define a field as "a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field" (Scott, 1995: 56). We define institutions as more-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to a variety of social practices and sustain a particular type of social order.

with broader social and cultural processes. We think this is surprising, given the substantial literature in anthropology and sociology on the role of rituals in a variety of settings (e.g., Alexander, 2004; Douglas, 1975; Durkheim, 1912/1995; McLaren, 1999; Schechner, 1994; Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1908/1960).

Our specific focus is on how organizational rituals at a micro level support the maintenance of institutions at a macro level. Our study is motivated by three research questions: First, how are institutions maintained? Second, how do microlevel dynamics contribute to institutional maintenance? Finally, what is the role of rituals in this process?

Drawing upon Bourdieu's (1984) conception of class, the institution whose maintenance we concern ourselves with is the British class system. The ritual that forms the focus of our analysis is college dining (popularly known as "Formal Hall") at the University of Cambridge. Based on interviews with Fellows,[2] students, college staff, and alumni as well as participant observations of the ritual itself, our analysis reveals that college dining plays an important role in cultivating a set of skills and behaviors that contribute to the maintenance of the institution of class in the United Kingdom.

Specifically, we find that Cambridge dining rituals are performances that legitimate the concept of social stratification through the repeated enactment of roles and boundaries. The performance masks any conflict that may be present under the surface, giving the impression of a sophisticated social order that participants want to be associated with. Next, we find that college dining rituals lead to the transformation of participants' identities and senses of self, and their perceptions of their images in the eyes of others. The repeated performance of the rituals affirms these values and influences participants' perceived place, present and future, in society. Finally, we find that college dining rituals facilitate an actual shift in participants' social standing post-Cambridge. In particular, the norms, values, and practices celebrated in the ritual are taken away by participants who help reproduce them in other settings and at other times to gain entry to, and flourish in, an elite professional-managerial class that dominates many aspects of the British establishment.

In developing our arguments, we make three contributions. First, we highlight the role of organizational rituals in the maintenance of institutions. In doing so, we show that the capacity of rituals to socialize participants is rooted in their *performativity*, or their production of the very social order whose values are embodied in the rituals. Crucially, we also show that rituals have a powerful bearing on the behavior of participants that goes beyond the confines of the rituals themselves. From this perspective, rituals are carriers of cultural material that influences the way in which actors experience the social world at different times and in different places. Thus it is the transtemporal and transspatial nature of the effects of rituals that underpin their capacity to maintain institutions.

Second, we show that although agency is indeed required to maintain institutions, it is usually exercised in local contexts and in micro situations, where the link to institutions at a macro level is not immediately obvious to individual actors. The implication is that institutions are situated, interpreted, and reinforced locally, suggesting a more fragmented and less strategic conception of institutional maintenance than is often portrayed in the literature.

Finally, we contribute to ritual studies in important ways. We study a type of organizational ritual (having both secular and sacred dimensions) that has received comparatively little research attention. In doing so, we shed light on the macro consequences of ritual performance and the mechanisms through which organizational rituals become implicated in wider institutional orders. We also highlight the contribution of institutional theory's highly developed vocabulary and set of conceptual tools for ritual studies scholars who may wish to further explore the intersection of culture and institutions.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Institutional Maintenance

Our conception of institutions is rooted in the work of the early symbolic interactionists (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) as well as that of recent institutional theorists (e.g., Greenwood et al., 2008). Thus, for us, institutions are collective social forms that consistently reflect as well as pattern action but that vary in scope and intensity (Barley, 2008). And they manifest as "more or less taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange" (Greenwood et al., 2008: 4–5). Institutions are therefore malleable yet firm, somewhat illusory yet recognizable, and fleeting as well as permanent. On an everyday basis, they are maintained through social interaction.

Institutional maintenance—the "supporting, repairing, and recreating" of institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 230)—is essential for the coherence and stability of meaning systems and social structures

[2] In capitalizing "Fellow," "Master," and some other terms and titles here, we follow usage in our research setting.

over time. Yet, as noted above, the processes through which institutions are maintained "remains a relatively understudied phenomenon" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 234). This is not to say that it has been ignored altogether, as early institutional theorists developed a number of particularly salient insights. For example, Douglas posited that actors have innate pattern-making tendencies and seek to construct "a stable world in which objects have recognizable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence" (1966: 45). For Douglas, then, actors' intrinsic propensity to build shared schematic representations constitutes the central mechanism through which institutions are maintained.

In a similar vein, Berger and Luckmann (1966) contended that, by continually communicating and interacting with others, actors build "typificatory schemes" for categorization and "sensemaking" purposes. They also highlighted the integral role of power dynamics in this process. Specifically, Berger and Luckmann argued that institutions are maintained when dominant actors monopolize a particular "symbol system" and are able to impose a set of schemata in a given society (1966). From this perspective, institutional reproduction is underpinned by power inequalities and relies on the capacity of elite actors to exert authority and eliminate rival symbolic orders.

"New" institutional theorists have built on these insights, emphasizing that institutional reproduction requires agency and intended action. For example, Zucker (1988) argued that although social systems may appear remarkably stable, they are at the same time fraught with entropy. Indeed, without "continuous action to maintain existing order," institutions would simply decay into cultural artifacts (Zucker, 1988: 26). Developing these ideas further, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) noted that there exist very few institutions not requiring some form of ongoing maintenance. Synthesizing recent empirical work (e.g., Angus, 1993; Holm, 1995; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991; Townley, 1997, 2002; Zilber, 2002), they identified several types of institutional work involved in the maintenance of institutions; some focus on compliance and are regulative in nature, and others tap into the symbolic aspects of institutional maintenance. In another important contribution, Zilber (2009) adopted a multilevel narrative approach to examine the symbolic aspects of institutional maintenance and to explore the forms of institutional work involved in the portability of stories.

Beyond institutional theory, a number of prominent social scientists have developed arguments about the reproduction of social orders with the potential to shed light on the process of institutional maintenance. For example, Durkheim's (1897/1951) comparison of suicide rates within Protestant and Catholic communities showed how group cohesion can have a profound effect on the maintenance of social dynamics. His arguments parallel Weber's (1904–05/1978) ideas about the differences between societies characterized by "instrumental rationality" versus "communicative rationality" and Toennies's (1887/1957) work on *gemeinschaft* (community) versus *gesellschaft* (society).

At a more micro level, socialization processes play a key role in the maintenance of social orders. Goffman's (1959) ideas about locally produced interaction orders in which the intrinsic need for actors to reaffirm the "self" in their relations with others governs behaviors are an important reference point for this literature. Similarly, Trice and Beyer (1993) emphasized that socialization facilitates cultural continuity by allowing actors to internalize social expectations and to learn what constitutes appropriate and effective behavior in different circumstances and settings. Interestingly, however, culture researchers have also pointed to potentially negative effects that may be associated with socialization. Van Maanen and Schein, for example, suggested that socialization can hinder individual and organizational effectiveness "since certain cultural forms may persist long after they have ceased to be of individual value" (1979: 212–213).

Taken together, this body of work sheds significant light on the way in which social order in general, and systems of meaning in particular, are maintained. It is interesting to note, however, that the literature has tended to prioritize either micro- or macrolevel processes. Building on the insights outlined above, our aim in this study was to consider how a particular kind of microlevel event—organizational rituals—can influence the maintenance of society-level institutions. We turn now to the rituals literature.

Ritual and Performance

Institutional theorists have occasionally acknowledged the central role that rituals play in the construction of meaning. For example, Friedland and Alford argued that the "routines of each institution are connected to rituals which define the order of the world and one's position within it" (1991: 250), Meyer and Scott (1983) pointed to the importance of ritual in determining the rules, beliefs, and relational networks that constitute the social environment, and Suchman (1995) drew attention to the legitimating role of rituals. It is notable, however, that the micro processes inherent in rituals are largely glossed over in institutional research. Conceptually, this is problematic because it implies that rituals merely reflect dominant insti-

tutional orders, a position that is undermined by a substantial body of work in sociology and anthropology showing the political and contested nature of rituals, as well as their capacity to create, alter, and maintain cultural practices (Bell, 1992).

Outside of institutional theory, however, academic interest in rituals has increased. Much ritual research has focused on religious settings and/or rites of passage in "primitive" or preindustrial societies (Geertz, 1957; Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1908/1960). More recently, ritologists (students of ritual) have begun to turn their attention to secular events in industrial societies. This initiative has precipitated an intriguing body of work on contemporary rituals in a range of contexts as diverse as music (Anand & Watson, 2004), schooling (McLaren, 1999), organizational succession (Gephart, 1998), and even family meals (Douglas, 1975).

Interestingly, the growth of ritual studies happened at a time when the relevance of many rituals and traditions in Western societies was being questioned and new ones were emerging (Giddens, 1999). Indeed, ritologists have forcefully challenged the assumption that rituals represent historical anachronisms, asserting that they continue to play a pivotal role in contemporary social life (McLaren, 1999).

This increased focus on ritual has not led to any consensus on the precise meaning of the term (Snoek, 2006). However, Kunda (2006) noted that despite the fragmented nature of the literature, most ritologists see ritual as a mechanism that connects actors with broader social and cultural practices. From this perspective, rituals are "collectively produced, structured, and dramatic occasions that create a 'frame,' a shared definition of the situation within which participants are expected to express and confirm sanctioned ways of experiencing social reality" (Kunda, 2006: 93).

To understand the process through which rituals transmit meaning, ritologists have drawn heavily on the metaphor of performance (e.g., Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1986). A cultural performance "is a social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation" (Alexander, 2004: 529). Although rituals may be more or less dramatic, all are scripted, involve stylized behavior, and draw upon established and, occasionally, recently invented cultural material. Moreover, by providing specific roles, a performance allows participants to instill a degree of distance between their selves and their actions (Schechner, 1985): through participants' enactment of particular roles, the meaning embodied in the performance is expressed and experienced more vividly. Rituals also have a temporal order and are often performed in a particular place, drawing additional meaning from the location in which they take place (Schechner, 1994).

Considered as performances, rituals are "episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication" in which participants (actors and observers) develop shared understandings about the plausibility, validity, and authenticity of the performances (Alexander, 2004: 527). When participants consider a performance to be effective (i.e., plausible, valid, and authentic), a ritual binds them by intensifying their emotional connection to one another. The result may be that participants enter a "liminoid" (Turner, 1986) or transitory space that operates beyond their "normal" selves. It is when they create such spaces for participants—where there is a mutual appreciation of intention and content—that rituals achieve their effect and affect (Alexander, 2004). In this way, the performance of rituals allows participants to share meaning across multiple iterations of similar events.

It is important to note, however, that the transmission of meaning via ritual performance is not straightforward. Rituals offer opportunities for powerful actors to legitimate their authority through symbolic means, to promote ideological positions, and to manipulate social relations within particular communities (Kertzer, 1988). Van Maanen and Kunda went so far as to suggest that rituals constitute "mechanisms through which certain organizational members influence how other members are to think and feel" (1989: 49). As such, rituals are often sites of contestation and resistance. However, as Kunda (2006) pointed out, rituals are not always effective; some rituals have minimal transformative power and fail to convey any semblance of meaning to participants (Goody, 1977).

The subjective nature of ritual experience reinforces the complexity inherent in ritual analysis. Turner (1967) used the term "multivocality" to convey the ambiguity of ritual symbolism; each symbol has a "fan" or "spectrum" of referents, which means that it is open to a range of possible interpretations in a given social drama. As a consequence, rituals are liable to have "multiple, complex, ambiguous and changing layers of meaning that are only partly articulated, understood, or acknowledged by participants" (Kunda, 2006: 94) in a given performance. The upshot is that rituals involve both action and enactment; they are sites of material and symbolic mediation through which meaning is negotiated and constructed rather than simply reflected (McLaren, 1999).

But how do the systems of meaning constructed through ritual performance affect societal institutions? We suggest that rituals constitute an important mechanism through which institutions are maintained. As noted, institutional theorists have tended to overlook the concept of institutional maintenance

in general and the microdynamics of ritual interactions in particular. Ritologists have examined the ways in which rituals influence and are influenced by societal processes, yet they have focused mainly on religious ceremonies and/or rites of passage in preliterate cultures; the relationship between rituals and broader social patterns remains poorly understood in the context of secular events located in industrial societies. In our study, we sought to examine this relationship by considering how formal dining at the colleges of the University of Cambridge supports the British class system. In doing so, our aim was to explore how cultural codes enacted at a micro level can contribute to the reproduction of macrolevel institutions. We now turn to a description of our data and empirical context.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The British Class System and the University of Cambridge

Traditionally, the British as a nation have been highly "class-conscious." This consciousness of one's "station" in society is powerfully and widely depicted in their nonacademic literature, for example in novels by Evelyn Waugh and E. M. Forster. In the media, too, elitism and class are long-running themes that attract much attention. Today, a class system not only exists in Britain, but is also "one of the most important aspects of modern British history no less than of modern British life" (Cannadine, 1998: 16). Yet given that Britain, like all developed countries, has undergone huge societal and political upheavals and was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, why does class appear to manifest itself more visibly here than elsewhere in Europe and in North America?

Part of the reason this question is so difficult to answer is that class is more than simply one's position in the system of production (Bourdieu, 1984; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Weininger, 2005). Many consider other, noneconomic, factors to determine entry into the upper strata of a given class system. These factors, which include ancestry, title, accent, education, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing, and style of life, help actors categorize others as members of particular classes (Bourdieu, 1984). In turn, this categorization influences how these individuals are themselves evaluated.

The relative stability of the British class system is at least partially due to continued deference for those possessing particular forms of attributes such as those mentioned above. The concept of a social pecking order, in which the monarch sits at the very top, is widely accepted in Britain. Thus, although Britain's social hierarchy may represent an unequal system, it does not appear to require the use of force for its continued existence. People seem to learn their place in society in a subtle manner and with comparatively little conflict.

Many different types of institutions collectively support a class system, including the family, the state, the media, the professions, the monarchy, the military, the church, and the judiciary (Marshall, Rose, Newby, & Vogler, 1988). One type of institution that has received considerable attention as a mechanism through which class dynamics are transmitted from one generation to the next are educational institutions (Freire, 1973; Lareau, 1987; McLaren, 1999). Much of this work, however, has focused on schools rather than universities per se.

Our focus in this study is another type of educational institution—the university—which also plays an important role in the class system in the U.K. and elsewhere (Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2003). In the British context, two universities, Cambridge and Oxford, are especially closely associated with social class. These universities are the oldest in the English-speaking world and remain two of the most prestigious. They share many of the same traditions and rituals, with the term "Oxbridge" commonly used to refer to both. Indeed, in the media and in popular conception, the two are often treated as a single entity (e.g., Bolton, 2009; Cadwalladr, 2008; Deslandes, 2005).[3]

Cambridge and Oxford have traditionally been overwhelmingly dominated by white, male students from privileged social backgrounds, and until relatively recently, explicitly favored these groups in their selection processes (Deslandes, 2005; Soares, 1999). However, selection practices have changed markedly in recent decades. Indeed, more than 50 percent of current Cambridge students are women, more than 50 percent are state school educated, and "nonwhite" students made up 15 percent of the 2008 intake (Bolton, 2009).

Despite these very significant changes in the backgrounds of students, Cambridge and Oxford remain synonymous with elitism in Britain. One manifestation of this elitism is the extent to which alumni of the two universities continue to dominate prestigious jobs. For example, the Sutton Trust found that Cambridge and Oxford graduates account for 81 percent of

[3] Our study is focused on Cambridge. However, we use "Oxbridge" where (1) our informants invoked it and (2) our analysis refers to the widely perceived division between students and graduates of Cambridge and Oxford and those of other universities.

the British judiciary, 82 percent of barristers, 45 percent of "leading" journalists, and 34 percent of senior politicians (Cadwalladr, 2008). And in February 2009, the government minister for higher education "bemoaned the fact that Oxbridge graduates are 15 times more likely to get jobs with City law firms than those from other universities" (Sugden, 2009).

Thus, although the social backgrounds of the student body have changed quite radically over the past 50 years, the basic function of the University of Cambridge—to prepare students for a life in the upper echelons of British society—essentially remains the same. One explanation is that Cambridge (along with Oxford) attracts the most able students and faculty, and so it is unremarkable that their graduates should be more successful than those of other British universities. An alternative explanation, one that we find more convincing, is that they provide an environment in which students learn the norms, values, and behaviors that are legitimate and appropriate in the upper stratum of British society, which facilitates their entry to it. In other words, Cambridge plays a central role in the production of a professional-managerial class that dominates the senior positions in commerce, the professions, the media, and the arts in Britain. Support for our position can be found in the sociological literature, which has suggested that the class system owes its longevity to a widely enacted, grassroots-level system of localized, microlevel ceremonies and rituals in a range of settings (Cannadine, 1998). The processes through which these microlevel rituals support the broader institution of class are, however, far from clear. To explore this issue, we study a particular ritual at the University of Cambridge: college dining. In the following section, we explain why we chose to study this ritual and describe the nature of the ritual itself.

Dining Rituals at Cambridge

> For two hours the silver dishes came, announced by the swish of the doors in the Screens as the waiters scurried to and fro, bowed down by the weight of the food and their sense of occasion. . . . The clatter of knives and forks, the clink of glasses, the rustle of napkins and the shuffling feet of the College servants dimmed the present. Outside the Hall the winter wind swept through the streets of Cambridge. Inside all was warmth and conviviality.
>
> Sharpe (1974: 1)

The research site we chose for this study is the University of Cambridge (henceforth, "Cambridge"). Founded in 1209, Cambridge comprises 31 colleges and over 150 departments, faculties, schools, and other institutions. A college is where students live, eat, and socialize. It is also the place where students receive small group-teaching sessions known as "supervisions." Each college is an independent institution with its own property and income and brings together staff and students from many different disciplines. The colleges appoint their own staff and are responsible for selecting students, in accordance with university regulations. The teaching of students is shared between the colleges and university departments. Degrees are awarded by the university.

Cambridge was an excellent research site for several reasons. Being one of the world's oldest and most traditional universities, it provides an ideal setting in which to study organizational rituals and their relationship to wider social dynamics. Students come to Cambridge not only for its excellence but also because of its illustrious legacy. Moreover, Cambridge constitutes a very significant breeding ground for the British elite. As noted above, Cambridge graduates are disproportionately represented in senior positions in the U.K. establishment, and their socialization during their university days therefore takes on a special significance.

Once students are admitted to Cambridge, they participate in numerous rituals. For example, joining one's college tends to be a highly ceremonial affair, involving elaborate costumes, lavish dinners, and ceremonies in the Chapel. Graduation is a similarly elaborate ceremony, conducted almost entirely in Latin and again involving medieval customs, religious symbolism, and meticulous attention to attire and conduct.

A set of rituals that students experience daily at Cambridge revolves around dining. Although the various dining rituals vary slightly across the 31 colleges, they all involve members eating together, mostly in formal attire and gowns. Students typically sit at long refectory tables for dinner several nights a week. At the far end of the hall, usually on a raised platform above where the students are seated, is the High Table, where the Master and Fellows of the college sit. Figure 1 shows a typical Cambridge dining hall.

During dinner, a team of servers supervised by either the Fellow's Butler or the Hall Manager waits on those sitting at the High Table. The "low tables" also have a dedicated team of serving staff, often supervised by a "Manciple" (a steward). Participants enjoy a multicourse dinner, which can last up to two hours. Dining rituals consume not only substantial monetary resources but also time and effort on the part of all college members. The opulence reflected in these rituals makes them an obvious target for critics (e.g., Walker, 2003).

FIGURE 1
Formal Hall and the High Table

We now turn to the major actors who participate in these rituals. First, there is the Master, who is the head of the college. The Master generally commands the respect of the Fellowship as well as the students. He/she presides over the High Table. Fellows are academics who may or may not be affiliated with departments. Their duties include the supervision and pastoral care of the students. Students are junior members of the college. The college serves as a home for them, allowing them to live, learn, eat, play, and generally fraternize with other students from various disciplines. Students usually engage in several extracurricular activities inside the college, ranging from associations for sports (in particular, rowing) to drinking (e.g., wine appreciation). Finally, there is the college dining staff. During Formal Hall, the dining staff's duty is to serve the Fellows and the students as well as impose order should any student appear to be deviating from established custom. In contrast to the Fellows and students, who are sitting and consuming, the staff is mobile and serving. The staff mainly eats in the "buttery," a separate cafeteria.

Cambridge thus presents a context in which particular rituals have persisted over centuries, defying functionalist explanations and influencing university life in important ways. Intuitively, one would imagine that they somehow mediate participants' experience of Cambridge and offer particular meaning to the various identities that are constructed around them. Given the career trajectory of many Cambridge graduates and their role in the upper strata of British society, it also seems plausible that these rituals have a bearing on the class system as a whole. However, the relationship between dining rituals at the micro level and the institution of social class at the macro level is a complex one. It is this relationship that forms the focus of our study.

METHODS

Data Sources

To answer our research question about how the enactment of microlevel dining rituals at Cambridge helps to perpetuate the macrolevel phenomenon of social class, we selected a grounded, interpretive approach. Such an approach allowed us to build our understanding of the properly contextualized experiences of those involved in the dining ritual, rather than imposing a particular framework upon them. Moreover, it permitted the voices of marginal as well as central actors to be heard. This approach led us to collect different types of qualitative data from diverse sources.

Archives, popular press, and fiction. To develop an understanding of the origins of the Cambridge colleges, we collected historical documents from various Cambridge libraries. Articles in the popular press and books, both nonfictional and fictional, were important sources of background information too. Although these data were not extensively used, they helped us to appreciate the context in which dining rituals are enacted.

Interviews and observations. We interviewed 57 informants who were participating, or had previously participated, in college dining rituals. The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes. Because of excellent access to the research site, we were able to conduct interviews with all the categories of participants in these ceremonies. These included Fellows of different colleges, students, staff, alumni, and Masters. Table 1 summarizes interviewees' categories and colleges.

Sometimes interviewees would suggest other people that they thought we should talk to, rendering our theoretical sampling technique both deliberate and emergent. Our interview protocol contained questions about our informants' roles in college, their experiences of college dining rituals, and their interpretations of these experiences. These interviews were supplemented by 29 instances of participant observation. Specifically, we participated in various dining rituals at a number of colleges, noticing the type of food provided, the setting, the ambiance, the physical layout of the tables, conversations, any policing by Fellows or staff, interactions between staff, Fellows, and students, and students' attitude to the High Table and to their surroundings. Field notes were written down immediately after each event. Throughout the data collection, we sought to constantly share and discuss the interviews and participant observations that formed the basis of our data. This sharing process allowed us to continuously hone our interviewing techniques and develop new directions for inquiry.

TABLE 1
Interview and Participant Observation Data

Colleges	Type of Interviewee (Number of Interviews)	Type of Participant Observation (Total Number of Observations)
Clare College	Student (1)	Attended dinner (1)
Churchill College	Fellow (1)	Attended dinner (2)
Darwin College	Fellow; student (2)	Attended dinner (1)
Downing College	Fellow; fellow steward; students (5)	Attended dinner (2)
		Attended meeting of wine appreciation society (2)
Gonville and Caius College	Fellow; student (2)	Attended dinner (1)
Girton College	Fellow; student (2)	Attended dinner (2)
Hughes Hall	Student; fellow (2)	Attended dinner (2)
King's College	Fellow; staff; student (3); alumnus (1)	Attended dinner (2)
Magdalene College	Fellow; student (2)	Attended dinner (2)
Pembroke College	Fellow; student; student (3)	Attended dinner (1)
Queens' College	Fellow; student (1)	Attended dinner (1)
St Catherine's College	Fellow; staff (2)	Attended dinner (1)
Sidney Sussex College	Fellow; senior tutor; Fellow; staff (4); alumnus (1)	Attended dinner (4)
St John's College	Fellows; students; staff (6); alumnus (1)	Attended dinner (1)
Trinity College	Students (2); alumnus (1)	Attended dinner (1)
Corpus Christie College	Fellow; student (2)	
Jesus College	Fellows; students (4); alumnus (1)	Attended dinner (2)
Homerton College	Fellow (1)	
St Edmund's College	Fellow; Fellow; student; student (4)	Attended dinner (1)
Newnham College	Student (1)	
All colleges above	Masters (2)	

Data Analysis

Our analysis followed established techniques and procedures for naturalistic inquiry and grounded-theory building (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001) and consisted of a series of steps. We employed NVivo 2.0, a relatively user-friendly, qualitative research software that greatly facilitates the analysis of qualitative data.

In the *first step* of the analysis, interview transcripts, entered as text files in NVivo, were coded on the basis of "in vivo" words. These comprised phrases, terms, or descriptions offered by participants, all revolving around the microdynamics of dining rituals. Such descriptions included, among several others, comments on lighting or other artifacts that had seemed meaningful to participants, narrations of politically incorrect behavior or of idiosyncrasies, stories of faux pas at High Table, and expressions of appreciation or disdain for Formal Hall. These formed our first-order codes. We then swapped our coded files and reread each interview, coding for more in vivo words. We constantly compared coded documents and discussed possible conceptual patterns. During this step,

NVivo facilitated the organization of all the codes that emerged from the data. In total, we had 397 coded passages at the end of this process.

The *second step* of the analysis involved looking for codes across interviews that could be collapsed into higher-level nodes. For example, comments on lighting or artifacts could be grouped into a node labeled "stage-setting." In this second step, we always tried to retain the language used by informants. The higher-level, or "tree nodes," were then refined through triangulation of sources (interviews, participant observations, etc.) to produce a set of first-order categories. Examples of first-order categories include "script," "symbols and space," and "defiance."

The *third step* of our analysis involved looking for links among first-order categories so that we could collapse these into theoretically distinct clusters, or second-order themes. This was a recursive rather than a linear process; we moved iteratively between our first- order categories and the emerging patterns in our data until adequate conceptual themes emerged (Eisenhardt, 1989). For example, categories containing instances in which students talked about reassessing their positions in society or acquiring new traits were collapsed into a theme labeled "identity." The second-order themes included "social drama," "roles and boundaries," "conflict and control," "identity," "image," "demystification of the elite," "cultural knowledge," and "social networks."

The *fourth step* of the analysis involved organizing the second-order themes into the overarching dimensions that eventually underpinned our theorizing. Three dimensions emerged strongly here. The first theme was the issue of performance as a mechanism for assimilating participants into particular values and patterns of behavior; the second dimension emphasized the individual transformation of the participants; finally, the third theme emphasized an actual shift in participants' social positions.

In addition to carrying out these steps, we relied on two techniques to help ensure the trustworthiness of our data. First, having multiple authors allowed us to independently assess each others' coding and the assignment of codes to categories. We discussed codes and categorization until agreement was strong. Wherever there was disagreement, categories were modified. Distinguishing between first-order categories and second-order themes allowed the development of a clear theoretical argument.

Second, we carried out "member checks" (Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007) with informants to help ensure that our interpretive scheme made sense to those who experienced college dining daily. In this respect, we were very fortunate to be so close to our research site.

Figure 2 illustrates our final data structure, showing the categories and themes from which we developed our findings and the relationships between them. Additional supporting evidence for our findings is shown in Table 2 and is keyed to Figure 2. This table contains representative first-order data, which underpin the second-order themes.

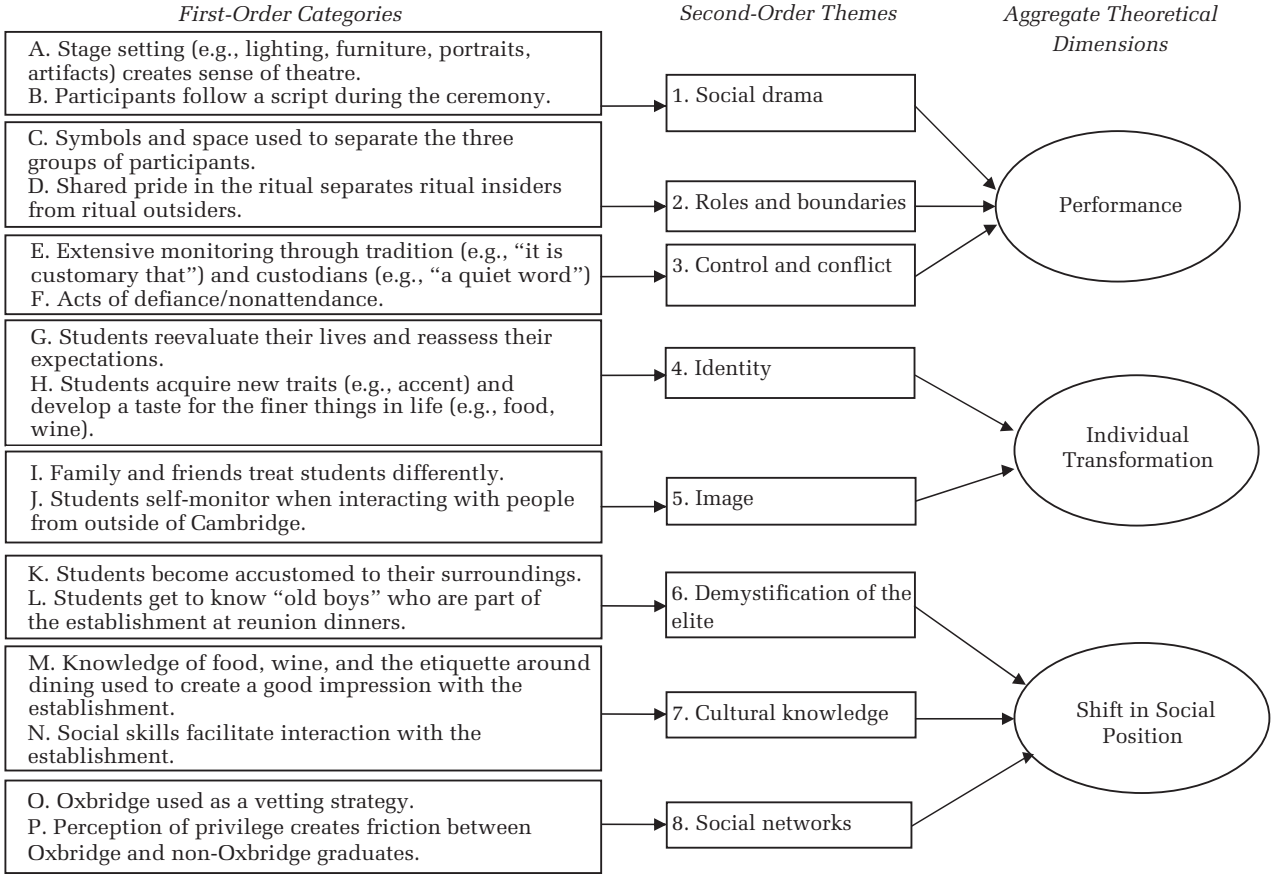
FINDINGS

Before we began our field research, our knowledge of rituals at Cambridge was largely based on popular accounts, anecdotal evidence, and casual conversations with college members. Our impression was that the various rituals enacted at Cambridge were relics or hangovers from the past, expensive and extravagant undertakings that served no other purpose than to keep alive an artificial sense of grandeur among the participants.

However, when we combined the analysis of our interview and secondary data with our own observations of dining at Cambridge, a new understanding began to take shape, one that no single informant appeared to appreciate in its entirety or that any individual observation captured for us. Specifically, we found that dining rituals serve as powerful devices for socializing new generations of actors who, when they leave Cambridge, go on to reproduce various aspects of the British class system. Institutional maintenance involves the following process:

First and foremost, it rests on the repeated enactment of an elaborate performance. This performance creates a kind of social drama that seduces college members into conforming to the norms and values of the ritual. The performance also demarcates roles and boundaries, which legitimates the idea that individuals belong to different classes and controls behavior while masking conflict and undermining resistance. Next, the ritual transforms the individual identities of participants and changes their image in the eyes of others, which in turn alters their expectations about what they can achieve and their perceptions of their place in the social order. Finally, the ritual supports participants' entry into an elite professional-managerial class by demystifying the upper echelons of the class system, providing cultural knowledge about how to behave and interact with members of the establishment, and enabling access to one of the most powerful social networks in the U.K., one that appears to exhibit strongly preferential treatment of its members and is often treated with suspicion by outsiders. Below, we describe our findings in greater detail.

FIGURE 2
Data Structure



College Dining Rituals as Performance

Ostensibly, the purpose of dining rituals at Cambridge colleges is simply to dine, and indeed a few of our informants did see it that way. However, the nature of the rituals themselves raises questions about what is actually being accomplished during these elaborate ceremonies. Our analysis suggests that the complex ensemble of symbols, structures, language, and actions constitutes a performance with a number of elements: the creation of a social drama, the delineation of roles and boundaries, and the exercise of control. Collectively, these elements underpin the performance and shape the behaviors of participants during the ritual.

Social drama. Dining at Cambridge is a formal activity in which the participants arrive in their formal attire ready to play their part in a ceremony that has been enacted for centuries. The setting and the ambiance are carefully controlled, with dim lighting. In some colleges, modern amenities such as electricity are foregone in favor of candlelight. Candles produce long, flickering shadows on the walls that reach up to the high, ornate ceilings. Impressive oil portraits of past Masters and other illustrious members of the college adorn the walls, reminding everyone of those who partook in this ritual before them.

The initial reaction of many of those unaccustomed to dining at Cambridge is astonishment and wonder: the hundreds of candles, elaborate presentation, imposing architecture, use of Latin and medieval customs, and highly skilled team of hovering waiters all combine to provide an impressive spectacle. The stories, portraits, and artifacts, such as the silver and dishes, become "sacred objects" (Durkheim, 1912/1995) that are used as props to impress and entertain guests. Our observations suggested that these objects produce "a mutual focus of attention" (Collins, 2004: 47) that promotes a sense of togetherness and allows emotional energy to be shared among participants.

Many aspects of the ritual are scripted. For example, at most colleges dinner begins when the Butler sounds a gong. At this point, the students fall silent and everyone stands for Grace, said invariably in Latin by the Master, or in his/her absence, by whoever is the senior Fellow. The Butler again sounds a gong to signal the end of the dinner, at which point Fellows go to another room for coffee and after-dinner

TABLE 2
Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Data

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Representative Data
Overarching dimension: Performance	
1. Social drama	
A. Stage setting (e.g. lighting, furniture, portraits, artifacts) creates sense of theatre	A1. "It was absolutely overwhelming." (undergraduate student describing her first experience of formal dining at her college) A2. "All those portraits on the wall, and the ambiance. I mean, it's something that, you know, a normal student could never have experienced." (undergraduate student describing her first experience of formal dining at her college)
B. Participants follow a script during the ceremony	B1. The Master (or senior-most Fellow present) always says Grace in Latin. (observation journal, entry 22) B2. "I am not supposed to talk to the Fellows during dinner, even if I know them personally." (interview with college Butler)
2. Roles and boundaries	
C. Symbols and space used to separate the three groups of participants	C1. Fellows are not allowed to eat at the students' table (observation journal, entry 13) C2. "Our job is to be invisible during the service, to melt into the background." (interview with college Butler)
D. Shared pride in the ritual separates ritual insiders from ritual outsiders	D1. "Yeah, exactly. I mean, it (college dining) just gives you a very strong sense of belonging and that place being home." (interview with student) D2. "Because it (college dining) is something so unique—you only have it in Cambridge and Oxford—you get to live in these amazing buildings and eat in this fantastic environment while people outside, they're going to eat this horrible food in their canteen or something. That's why we call it the 'Cambridge bubble.'" (interview with student)
3. Control and conflict	
E. Extensive monitoring through traditions ("e.g. it is customary that" and custodians (e.g. "a quiet word")	E1. "The college can't require you to do anything other than your 60 hours of teaching or 80 hours of teaching a year. You have no contractual obligations other than your teaching, so it does mean that everything else comes under the heading of customary." (college Fellow explaining there is no obligation to dine) E2. "It is actually considered bad form to arrange to meet, to speak to someone specifically over lunch, you save that for coffee afterwards. At lunch itself, you sit down at the first available space with whomsoever is sitting there. My first time, I arranged to meet somebody and sat down and somebody came and had a quiet word with me." (college Fellow explaining how custom dictates what is allowed)
F. Acts of defiance/nonattendance	F1. "When I suggested that students should not be allowed more than two glasses of wine at dinner, there were howls of protest from my colleagues, who did not wish to abridge the liberties they had themselves enjoyed as students at Cambridge." (college dean explaining an episode where students had gotten drunk and misbehaved towards staff) F2. "What I notice here is that when you do something, like, not raise your glass to the Queen or whatever, it will be reduced to a charming eccentricity, and because Dons are expected to be eccentric, the system actually is resilient, neatly co-opting any such gestures." (interview with college Fellow)
Overarching dimension: Individual transformation	
4. Identity	
G. Students reevaluate their lives and reassess their expectations	G1. "It is a grand thing to feed where so many great men have fed before; to reflect that their Hall formed part of their daily life, and that the attendant associations possibly had great influence on their after career; and from the latter, because it is equally grand to think that I may have a future archbishop on my right and a lord chancellor on my left." (Cambridge alumnus, quoted in Deslandes [2005: 21])

TABLE 2
Continued

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Representative Data
	G2. "I don't blame them for feeling that way. They have never seen anything like this before. Many of them have not been to a formal dinner in their lives! But by the end of the three years most of this feeling of inadequacy is gone. All those who came with doubts, I think those doubts are gone." (undergraduate student explaining how students from less privileged backgrounds found formal dining intimidating to begin with)
H. Students acquire new traits and develop a taste for the finer things in life.	H1. "I guess it all starts feeling normal by the middle of your second year (halfway point). In the first year, we all needed a reason to go, but by the second year it was like the most normal thing to dress up, wear your gown and go to this three-course formal dinner in that amazing hall with candlelight." (interview with undergraduate student) H2. "You are taught a civil way of eating. I guess I shouldn't say civil but you know what I mean." (interview with undergraduate student)
5. Image	
I. Family and friends treat students differently	I1. "When you go home it's quite strange because you get treated differently. People think you're some sort of genius or something and that you're really privileged because you go to these beautiful colleges and get all this amazing wine and food and everything." (interview with alumnus) I2. "I noticed very early on that having gone to Cambridge means that people react differently to you. Often not in a good way. They think you're a toff or whatever. Is that to do with dining rituals? Not just that, but yes, I think that dining is part of it because when people think of Cambridge they usually think of Formal Hall." (interview with alumnus)
J. Students self-monitor when interacting with people from outside Cambridge	J1. "My friends who did not go to Oxbridge are really smart, but I might find that with certain ones of them, there would be things that I wouldn't talk about because either it wouldn't interest them or I would be afraid that they would think I was being, you know, too academic or whatever. And they always make fun of me for using the little acronyms in Cambridge like JCR." (graduating undergraduate student) J2. "Sometimes I try not to say to people that I went to Cambridge, because sometimes they get weird with you. They have this Harry Potter image in their heads. Not just dining, but the whole idea of the place." (interview with alumnus)
Overarching dimension: Shift in social position	
6. Demystification of the elite	
K. Students become relaxed in their college surroundings	K1. "Seeing all this privilege up close, being served three-course meals each night, certainly makes you a lot more confident." (interview with student). K2. "I remember that I used to get quite nervous when I went to Formal Hall, just because I wasn't used to all the ceremony. But after a while you get used to it very quickly, and the great thing about it is that it's actually very easy to follow. You just watch what everyone else is doing." (interview with alumnus)
L. Students get to know "old-boys" who are part of establishment	L1. "Dining societies are a fantastic way to network." (interview with alumnus) L2. "We have all these old boys' nights. You know the recurring joke in the St Trinian's films where the old girls come back and are much more wild than the current students? Well it's kind of like that. They (the former students) are totally into the whole thing (dining) and are getting totally pissed (drunk), even though they're like, bankers and everything." (interview with student)
7. Cultural knowledge	
M. Knowledge of food, wine and the etiquette around dining used to create a good impression with the establishment	M1. "I certainly know a lot more about wines than I did when I came here." (interview with undergraduate) M2. In our college, if a student wishes to ask for more wine at the High Table, he or she must ask in an ancient language." (interview with Fellow)

TABLE 2
Continued

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Representative Data
N. Social skills facilitate interaction with the establishment	N1. "The advantage of sitting next to people who are all reading different subjects is that it gives you tremendous confidence that you can carry on an intelligent conversation with just about anyone." (interview with undergraduate student)
	N2. "When I went for job interviews I was a lot less scared than I would have been if I hadn't of gone to Cambridge and had to engage in intellectual conversations with a bunch of Dons." (interview with alumnus)
8. Social networks	
O. Oxbridge used as a vetting strategy	O1. "I'm involved in graduate recruitment (in an international management consulting firm) and I would say that 30–40 percent of the people that we take on are Oxbridge grads. That's not because we favor them, but I do think that I find it easier to interview them because I can relate to what they have done at college. . . . Yes dining might come up in the interview." (interview with alumnus)
	O2. "The moniker of Oxford or Cambridge man, or woman . . . has provided students and former students alike with an identifiable and privileged cultural stamp that has served a vital role in demarcating and cementing their status in British society." (Deslandes, 2005: xi)
P. Perception of privilege creates friction between Oxbridge and non-Oxbridge graduates	P1. One of the authors got a sense of the friction that dining and other rituals create between Oxbridge and non-Oxbridge graduates firsthand while at a social event in London: When the author was asked by a fellow guest what he did for a living, and he replied that he taught at Cambridge, the guest—who worked for the BBC—made it quite clear that she was very upset at the dominance of Oxbridge graduates in her employing organization, and she complained that they "talked in code" about college life, including college dining. (observation journal, entry 28)
	P2. "I started by playing a word-association game. If I say Oxford or Cambridge to you, what's the first word that comes into your head? I asked. The answers were: rich, elite, boat race, ancient, crusty, bow-ties, boring, posh, snobby and exclusive." (Richard Morrison, writing about his visit to a Comprehensive School, the *Times,* December 3, 2008)

liqueurs. Students are usually required to rise when Fellows enter or leave the room.

Even elements of conversation appeared scripted: on one occasion we learned about the college's "resident ghost," which takes the form of an elderly man dressed in black attire and who "is often seen walking around the Fellow's Garden." On another occasion we were told about, and then shown, the "resident skeleton," which is kept in a wooden case at the bottom of a staircase near the dining hall. At both times, we had the strong impression that these stories were routinely told to guests who dined at the college.

At the most formal dinners, the script can become quite intricate. For example, at one dinner we attended we were told about the "Loving Cup"—a grand silver tankard that is passed around the dining hall. We later learned that this tradition dates back to the murder of Edward the Martyr in 978: Asked by his stepmother to drink from a two-handled cup, this king was unable to defend himself as he was stabbed to death by his stepmother's guards, which allowed her biological son to assume the throne. Before imbibing, each guest bows to the person sitting next to him or her, who covers the cup with his or her right hand (the dagger hand) while the other neighbor faces in the other direction in order to protect the drinker from attack.

Together, the impressive stage setting and the intricate script produce a kind of social drama (Turner, 1974), a performance rife with medieval ambiance. The result is that participants are seduced by the spectacle and want to participate, conform, and feel part of it. The sense of drama also makes participants feel "special" and marks their experience as different from those of members of other universities. One of our informants, an undergraduate student, noted that

> Cambridge wouldn't be the same without formal halls and that kind of thing. Otherwise, you could just be at generic institution and they are all the same, but that's what sets as us apart, I think.

Roles and boundaries. As noted above, in addition to the Master, there are three main groups of participants in the ritual: Fellows, students, and college staff. It is striking that each group plays a quite different role. The Fellows' role is to set an example to the students and to engage in sophisticated intellectual exchanges with colleagues from varied academic backgrounds; Formal Hall offers an opportunity for them to demonstrate academic and cultural competence, and in doing so, justify their place at the High Table. Students are junior scholars, and the ritual of dining forms part of their social and academic development. Their role is to adhere to the traditions of the ritual and to learn, through observation and the enactment of particular practices, the norms and values exhibited by civilized intellectuals. In contrast, the role of college staff is to make certain that the ritual functions effectively and to ensure that the relevant traditions are respected. This task includes maintaining order among the students.

The ritual is designed to highlight the boundaries between these roles and to display a hierarchy. The boundaries are reinforced first and foremost through spatial divisions. As noted, Fellows dine at the High Table, a long table that is actually placed on a plinth. Students dine at low tables. College staff are not seated at all. Rather, they scurry to and fro, bringing food and drink and clearing empty plates as unobtrusively as possible. It is interesting to note that despite being the only mobile people in the dining hall, they are also the most invisible ones (Zerubavel, 2006).

Other symbols reinforce the boundaries among participants. For example, in many of the colleges we visited, the Fellows consume different (and higher-quality) food than the students, drink much more expensive wine, and often use higher-quality silverware as well. Differences in dress further demarcate the three groups. Specifically, both Fellows and students are required to wear gowns, while staff do not wear gowns. However, the gowns of the Fellows are more elaborate than those of the students. In addition, students are required to stand when Fellows enter and leave the dining hall in a procession; college staff stand in fixed positions in the hall at these points in the ceremony. Interestingly, during dinner we did not observe any interaction between the Fellows and the students (except for those few students who were invited to dine at High Table), nor did we observe any meaningful interaction between Fellows and college staff. Through our interviews we learned that such interaction is generally considered inappropriate. In other words, the transgression of boundaries is discouraged.

Despite these clearly demarcated boundaries and the resulting stratification of groups, we found a widely held and shared collective identity anchored in participants' association with their colleges. This common pride in a particular college and its legacy bound college members together. Interestingly, the college staff shared this bond. Our observations of dining rituals at the Cambridge colleges we visited led us to believe that college staff were effectively third-class citizens in the college system, performing a role akin to that of servants during England's Victorian era. However, rather than seeing themselves as a kind of underclass, many of the staff expressed a deep sense of pride in their positions and their roles as custodians (Dacin & Dacin, 2008) of a ritual as much as 500 years old.

In *Porterhouse Blue*, Tom Sharpe's Head Butler, Skullion, personifies this attitude, taking it upon himself to make sure that the proud traditions of Porterhouse College are upheld and that all plans to "reform" the college are frustrated. In our data too we found this dynamic. Despite the fact that college staff salaries are very low, they see themselves and are seen by others as constituting a central part of the organization and proudly proclaim their association with the illustrious history of their college. Their participation in these formal, highly focused rituals enhanced this sense of inclusion, and although they certainly form the lower stratum within the dining rituals, they are still part of the privileged few by virtue of being ritual insiders rather than ritual outsiders.

This is not to say that college staff members believe themselves to be of equal standing to the students or the Fellows; the staff "keeps a distance" from the student body and is deferent toward the Fellowship, particularly during dining. According to the Head Butler at one college:

> On an everyday basis, I sometimes chat to the Fellows and with some of them I am on a first-name basis. But obviously I know that if they have guests, I would give them more respect. I would not call them by their first names for example. I'll be like, ok now you are a Fellow, I am just, well I'll just keep in the background.

By privileging particular activities and roles over others, dining rituals articulate implicit hierarchies, and in doing so, make certain inequalities durable (Tilly, 1998). In this way, dining rituals reify a particular social pattern that participants come to see as representing the natural order of things. The smooth functioning of the ritual makes

the hierarchy seem almost benevolent and, when coupled with notions of education and tradition, highly legitimate. This legitimization helps to validate the concept of a class system comprising vertically ordered strata. As we discuss below, students, who are temporary participants in the ritual, carry these values with them when they leave university.

Control and conflict. Since a new cohort of students and a small number of Fellows join the performance every year, conformity needs to be ensured to prevent any disruptions. Although the first experience of college dining may seem highly affected to participants, our analysis suggests that all three groups of actors are gradually enveloped by it and come to play their parts naturally and instinctively. The enactment of the ritual relies on few formal mechanisms for instructing newcomers. The etiquette for dining is learned through observation, deference, and conversations with peers. As one of our informants put it: "Nobody tells you anything. You very quickly come to learn what . . . [others] value just by the way they talk about things." The desire to remain part of a ritual and to present themselves in a favorable light encourages participants to exhibit behaviors that are consistent with their role and support the performance of the ritual, and to avoid behaviors that undermine the performance by deviating from the script or are unlikely to meet with the approval of others.

Even though learning tends to be implicit rather than explicit, all newcomers are aware of monitoring. For example, when Fellows are deemed to break convention or make a "mistake" in their enactment of the ritual, a polite nudge is often forthcoming and is usually sufficient to inform them of their transgressions. This polite nudge often comes from the Senior Steward, a Fellow who has primary, although by no means sole, responsibility for monitoring the behavior of his or her colleagues at High Table. Students, too, learn principally from observation:

> When I first went to formal hall I didn't know when to stand up, when to sit down. . . . It was all a bit awkward really but after a few times you get to know the routine and you sort of feel at home.

However, the monitoring of students is much more direct and less subtle than the monitoring of Fellows: when protocol needs to be enforced among students it is done through Porters or Manciples who, while supervising the waiters, act as custodians of traditions, ensuring participants are conforming to the dress codes and various norms. The entire supervisory staff and waiters cannot have dinner in the Hall themselves, but they are extremely conscientious in making sure tradition is honored at all times.

For example, one of the students we interviewed described an incident that occurred early on in her first year as an undergraduate:

> One day we went to dinner and a friend of mine had a baseball hat on. The Manciple stormed up to us and said "Can you take your hat off please!" . . . He asked "Why should I take my hat off?" "Well because you are dining, and you don't wear hats in halls!" and my friend said, "How am I supposed to know that you can't wear hats in hall?" And the Manciple said "Well you wouldn't wear a hat in church, would you?"

Such overt conflict is rare because the overriding goal is to maintain the integrity of the performance. There are occasionally some expressions of resistance and defiance among college members. For example, some students (and occasionally one or two Fellows) may choose not to raise their glass to toast the Queen. Moreover, not all of the Fellows are comfortable at Formal Hall. One of them told us that he preferred to eat in the buttery with the college staff than with his colleagues at High Table:

> I constantly get asked why I don't go to High Table, and because I live at College it's very difficult for me to answer. It's actually easier to answer you than it is for me to answer some of my colleagues because I wouldn't even know where to begin with them. We're really not speaking the same language. . . . What I feel when I dine is very uncomfortable. Firstly, the expectation is that you wear a tie, a suit and a gown which I don't like. Secondly, I find the conversation boring at best and downright depressing.

Similarly, some students, rather than being enthralled by their participation in the ritual, consider college dining a traumatic experience, and attendance is endured rather than enjoyed. One of them told us:

> I hated formals. I used to get so nervous beforehand I felt sick. . . . I've never been very comfortable in social situations, and so I always felt a bit of an outsider. It was as if I was an observer and not really, you know, part of the thing itself.

On the whole, however, such negative sentiments are generally muted. Any resistance is liable to be passive rather than active, taking the form of nonattendance rather than disobedience. The effects of nonattendance for individual actors were difficult to ascertain from our interviews and observations. Students are generally expected to dine at least once per week. For Fellows, especially those who "live in," the expectations are greater. Although there are no formal sanctions against those who do

not engage in formal dining, both students and Fellows who did not dine regularly indicated they felt marginalized to a degree from the rest of their college.

In sum, our first finding is that dining rituals at Cambridge take the form of an elaborate performance in which participants are assimilated into particular behaviors. The performance is a kind of social drama relying on an elaborate stage setting to seduce participants into a desire to enact its various aspects. The performance also assigns roles and affirms boundaries that demarcate the students, Fellows, and staff. This demarcation normalizes and legitimates status differences for each new cohort of students who join the university. Finally, the performance represents a form of control, ensuring compliance to the norms of the ritual while at the same masking conflict and undermining resistance.

Individual Transformation

The ritual performance of college dining outlined in the previous section creates a stratified, hierarchical universe in which students spend a lot of their time. As noted, titles, designations, roles, seating position, artifacts, language, robes, and many of the other objects present are invoked to reinforce hierarchy and create boundaries that separate students from Fellows and staff. Even if they are uncomfortable to begin with, our analysis suggests that over time, students come to internalize, and indeed admire and defend, many of the ritual's peculiarities. This internalization, in turn, appears have a powerful bearing on their individual identities and the image that they believe they are projecting to others. Below, we elaborate on this process of individual transformation.

Identity. Our analysis suggests that for students, who constitute the majority of participants, the construction of a new identity effectively begins with the first dinner. Almost all the students whom we interviewed recalled being deeply affected by the occasion. As a young classics student recalled:

> The first time I went for formal hall, it was absolutely overwhelming. Even people who had come from Eton College or Harrow were going "bloody hell!" It was just so amazing. Formal dress with gowns and all that. All these famous scientists, philosophers, poets, who had sat here on these tables and whose portraits now adorned the walls. We were part of this illustrious legacy now. We were being waited upon, and big things were I guess expected from us.

Even though Formal Hall also has a powerful effect on students arriving from private schools, it has a particularly profound effect on those from the state school system. These students often start off with feelings of inadequacy and the belief that, since they have come from resource-poor schools, they will struggle to fit in at Cambridge. One state school student remembered:

> In my initial days, I was thinking, oh God, you know, I haven't had the same education as these people. I'm probably, you know, my vocabulary isn't as good as theirs. I mean, even my English vocabulary, I spoke quite straightforward English, you know. Friends of mine who went to private school, they all had, like, language labs or they could, you know, have grammar drills and all these kinds of things, and we just never had any. We were lucky if we had a TV screen in our classroom. I guess I kind of had a slight inferiority complex when I first got here . . . and then there was the Formal Hall. There was bit of something like magical about it and you were like, wow, I was kind of . . . I felt like I'm kind of part of something special.

Going to their first Formal Hall is like being "thrown in the deep end" for these students: this is the moment when they begin to reevaluate their lives and reset expectations for themselves. This reassessment of their identities is often given a helping hand by other participants. For example, one student recalled:

> At our first formal hall, a couple of people got up to go out and have a cigarette in between the courses and the sort of the head waiter came up to them and said loudly, "You are not peasants! Getting up and smoking in between meals is for peasants!" That incident has just stuck in my mind.

In other words, students are implicitly encouraged to shed the identities they bring with them and to assume new ones. Through repeated participation in these dining rituals over three years, individuals not only come to have a strong feeling of belonging to a particular "family" (their college) but also acquire a number of new traits. Most students who started off with regional accents admitted that their accents had changed since their arriving at Cambridge. Similarly, their culinary tastes and expectations of how dinner was to be presented or consumed had also changed. One student reflected:

> Now when I go out for a meal, I'm more critical, say, than I would've been. I think my personal tastes have really changed. And things like wine . . . where I grew up no one really appreciates wine, for example. Especially when you're younger, you don't have a taste for it. You just, when you're dining with alcohol or whatever, you would just drink anything and everything. But here, they make a point in saying, okay, well, this is the "X" year wine from "X" harvest. I've noticed sometimes I catch myself say-

> ing things like, oh, actually that wine was really horrible at dinner, or we've had much nicer. . . . So I definitely think that your expectations are certainly raised by that environment.

The result is that, by the end of three years of study, most students have identities that are firmly anchored in their Cambridge experiences, of which Formal Hall is usually considered the most formative. College life in general, and college dining in particular, thus has a powerful bearing on their senses of self. Wearing black tie and gowns becomes second nature to them, and dining in what was repeatedly described as a "civilized" or "proper" manner is obligatory. Subtle signals of class are recognized and incorporated into behavior. For example, one of our informants told us that if someone broke their bread at dinner rather than sliced it, that person was inadvertently giving away an important clue about their social background! In addition, new affectations were learned through dining: "Drinking with your left hand is a John's ritual." Interestingly, we found evidence to suggest that the identities of students from different backgrounds converged while they were at Cambridge. For example, according to one state-school-educated student:

> I think we [students from state and private schools] are a lot more similar now than we were when we were starting off. I don't have any friends from really posh private schools but a couple of friends that went to private school and I think I genuinely don't see there's any difference to us now, you know. We all talk about the same stuff and we hardly ever to talk about school days and, you know, I was from this school, and you know, this kind of thing, it doesn't matter anymore because we're all at Cambridge.

Over time, students from all backgrounds require less and less monitoring; by their second year they seem to automatically enact the traditions associated with the dining ritual and to enjoy their role in the ceremony. Indeed, one of the Fellows we interviewed expressed surprise that the students in his college appeared to observe the formal dress code more conscientiously than the Fellows, whom he noticed often dressed quite "scrappily." Perhaps most tellingly, and as we elaborate upon below, several of them took elements of these rituals away with them. As one recently graduated student suggested:

> Formals do change you. At the end of your life in Cambridge, you may not become the brightest person in the world, but you are definitely taking all these privileges for granted. Now with my friends at home, I would just sit with a bottle of wine, and we toast Lady Margaret (the benefactor of St. Johns College). It's by no means snobbish! It's just normal for us.

Image. In addition to the change in identity that rituals like Formal Hall bring about, ritual participants also experience a transformation in their image—that is, their perception of how others see them (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). A number of students said that they first became aware of this change when they visited their hometowns at the end of their first term at Cambridge. Some felt that they were taken more seriously and held almost in reverence by friends and family, whose perceptions of them appeared to be influenced by the picture of Cambridge that the media and various writers have popularized. This change of image was reinforced when students invited friends who did not study at Cambridge to Formal Hall:

> I have invited a few friends from outside to Formals. They always ask how formal is it, and I tell them, but they are still awe-struck every time. Their reaction is, we don't have anything like this! I guess the word would be jealousy? Or envy? Yes, I think they are envious, and I would be too.

Another student described the times when she invited some of her high school friends who had gone to other universities to Formal Hall:

> They were always totally blown away by the whole experience. They're like, wow, you have this more than once in a week like it's crazy. 'Cause sometimes they have like a posh dinner like the end when they graduate or something like that, but I'm like you sort of take it for granted whereas they are totally blown away by the whole sort of ceremony.

Many students found a need to temper their "normal" personalities when interacting with friends from outside Cambridge. A key reason for this was a concern that they might be perceived as being overly "posh." Although they could speak their own language, with its curious acronyms and cultural referents, among their Cambridge friends, with outsiders there was a need for self-monitoring:

> No, I do sometimes find that when I go back home, I might slightly change the way I talk about things, not because I think my friends are less educated at all, but, you know, I think maybe that they might think, she's turned into a toff or, you know, or whatever. So, I mean, I do notice that I have changed in that way.

Some students basked in their new image, but for others this transformation was an uncomfortable and disconcerting experience. Several students, (particularly those who came from more modest backgrounds) admitted gradually freeing them-

selves from old high school and family networks of friends and developing new friendship groups that mainly comprised fellow Cambridge students. This is not uncommon in any university setting, yet the bonds appeared particularly strong among the students in our study because they were based in part on class dynamics. One of our informants described how she had found it more difficult to relate to her school friends after a year at Cambridge, and as a result had become much closer to her college friends:

> My school friends got a bit weird with me, cause I was at Cambridge, and that meant I became more friendly with my Cambridge friends. . . . They [my school friends] thought that I thought I was too good for them, which isn't true at all, but that's what they felt. So we sort of drifted apart really, because we had less and less in common.

In sum, our interviews with students, who included those who were just starting out as well as those who were in the middle and at the end of their time in Cambridge, gave us a strong impression that dining represented their most intense socialization experience while at Cambridge; almost all students identified dining as the most significant factor that set their experience apart from that of their friends at other universities. Dining played a role not only in shaping their identities but also their image. And in turn, this transformation helped to bring about a shift in their social positions. It is this shift in social position to which we now turn.

Dining and a Shift in Social Position

Thus far we have argued that dining rituals at Cambridge serve two important purposes at the micro level. First, they constitute elaborate performances in which participants are assimilated into particular values and behaviors. Second, they have the effect of transforming the identities and images of each new generation of participants. However, we also found that the ritual of college dining appeared to have a profound bearing on participants' lives *after* graduation, because it facilitated a distinct shift in their social position. Specifically, our analysis suggests that college dining rituals support Cambridge graduates' entry into, and sense of connection with, an elite professional-managerial class that dominates key positions in the U.K.'s economy and society. We interviewed several Cambridge alumni who had graduated between 5 and 15 years ago to gain their perspective on how their college experiences, and in particular their experiences of college dining, had influenced their lives. We found that the ritual of dining appears to have three distinct effects: it demystifies the upper echelons of the class system, provides cultural knowledge about how to interact with the establishment, and acts as the "glue" that creates and bonds one of the most influential social networks in the U.K. and beyond.

Demystification of the elite. First, our analysis suggests that participation in college dining dereifies and demystifies the elite and helps participants to feel at ease in the company of people who are in the establishment. In part, this is simply because college members come to take the sheer grandeur and pageantry of the dining ritual for granted; as noted above, over time, and through repeated enactment of the performance, participants begin to feel more relaxed in their surroundings and become accustomed to living among the trappings of wealth and status.

But in addition to the setting, other factors contribute to this process of demystification. Most notably, Cambridge students regularly come into contact with members of the establishment at college functions and dinners. For example, most colleges regularly host dinners to which college alumni are invited. These so-called "old boys" events not only allow alumni to reconnect with their colleges and reaffirm their Cambridge identities but also enable current students to meet their predecessors, most of whom are firmly embedded in the elite professional-managerial class for which they themselves are being prepared. According to one of our informants:

> You might go to a dinner where a future controller of the BBC turns up, or a future ambassador. And if not at dinner then at drinks you could be rubbing shoulders with that sort of person and talking about their life at college.

The feeling of ease that students develop about their surroundings through their interactions with members of the establishment stays with them long after graduation. For example, one of our respondents told us that he "never feel[s] nervous or intimidated at work functions" because of his college dining experience. Accounts of successful Cambridge and Oxford graduates in the popular media support this finding. For example, writing in the *Observer*, Carol Cadwalladr (2008) cited the example of Toby Young, the author of *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*. Young came from a state school in north London and described going to Oxford as like "going to a foreign country or back 100 years in a time machine." Cadwalladr quotes him as follows:

> The Oxbridge effect . . . works because "seeing the citadels of the ruling class up close does demystify them. So you are then less frightened of doing things like applying for a job on the *Times* or starting up a magazine."

Related to this process of demystification, participation in lavish dining and other rituals creates a strong expectation that Cambridge students can and will do well. As one of our informants put it, "There's obligation around going to Cambridge. If you wanted to be a housewife or a bin man, that would be deemed a betrayal of everything you've been trained to do." Another informant told us that he felt he had been pressured into pursuing a career in management consulting and into feeling he would be squandering the opportunity Cambridge had given him had he chosen a less high-status career:

> In most people's eyes I've done very well and am still doing very well. After graduation I went on to the Kennedy School to do a master's, and now I've climbed the pole [at a well-known management consulting firm]. . . . But I don't really enjoy my job. I studied classics and would have been quite happy being a school teacher, but I didn't feel I could do that or really make that choice. . . . There was a lot of pressure [at college] to be successful, but deep down this wasn't something that I really wanted to do. . . . I know that's easy to say now with my lifestyle!

Cultural knowledge. Second, dining rituals provide participants with cultural knowledge about how to behave and interact with people from the establishment. As noted above, this includes general knowledge about food, wine, and the etiquette around dinning, but our analysis suggests that it also includes the social skills required for effective relations with members of the elite. For example, one of our informants, who worked for a City law firm, commented that:

> You learn how to talk to people who are very much more expert and senior to you. If you were invited to High Table you could in theory end up sitting next to a Nobel laureate or something, and it wasn't uncommon to have to sit with an academic who was professor of whatever that you knew nothing about. That's actually really hard. You learn to know not to be silent, but at the same time not be awestruck, but also not to be obsequious. You're pretending that you're on the same level, but at the same time subtly signaling how important they are. That's something that you need to be successful in my job [law].

Interestingly, one of our informants made the point that learning how to behave and interact with members of the establishment does not necessarily equate to politeness or even good manners. She explained that she was shocked the first time she saw people "working the room" at drinks before dinner and was offended when someone she was talking to walked away from her mid conversation in order to "speak with someone more important." Yet she acknowledged that this is typical behavior at most corporate events and conferences and that she routinely "works the room" while she is representing her company.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is students who are educated in the state system whose learning curve appears steepest with respect to these social dynamics, but even those who come from the most prestigious private schools have the opportunity to gain important social knowledge, as the following anecdote from one of our informants illustrates:

> One time my tutor invited me and another English lit student to go to High Table. I felt so nervous because the other guy was ex-St Paul's [an elite private school] and so much more at ease than I was. . . . It was hilarious 'cause he totally put his put foot in it trying to show off. He was talking about this new book by some author or other, and he was going on and on about how awful this book was. And my tutor just let him talk for about 10 minutes, and then he said: "Actually he [the author] is a very good friend of mine!" That's been an important lesson for me in my career, that you need to be careful what you say in social situations because this is a small world.

Social networks. The third way in which dining rituals facilitate a shift in social position is through the ties ritual participants are able to draw upon and leverage throughout their careers: upon graduation, students of Cambridge, along with those of Oxford, become members of one of the most powerful and influential social networks in the U.K.[5] As noted, these graduates dominate key positions in commerce, the professions, the media, and the arts, and strong evidence suggests that employers in these sectors exhibit a clear preference for Cambridge and Oxford graduates as they replenish their ranks each year (Sugden, 2009; Williams, 2006). This preference could simply be the result of grad-

[5] It is interesting to note that, despite the rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge universities, the Cambridge alumni whom we interviewed generally considered themselves as becoming part of an Oxbridge network, and not just a Cambridge network, after they graduated. As noted, this is partly because they have had many of the same dining and other college experiences as Oxford graduates and partly because graduates of other universities treat Cambridge and Oxford as a kind of composite, because of the perceived privileges that result from attending either university.

uates of these universities being of a higher quality than those of other universities, but our analysis suggests that underpinning this dynamic, at least in part, is college dining, with a shared understanding of the peculiarities of Formal Hall providing a kind of social glue that binds the network together. In other words, although attendance at Cambridge or Oxford is clearly required for membership in the network, it is not mere attendance that underpins its effectiveness; rather, it is the sense of privilege and common identity that emanates from the shared experience, manifested as appreciation and comprehension of the idiosyncrasies of college life in general and dining in particular.

Specifically, having had the same "authentic" experience of college dining, and in some cases having been part of the same dining societies, creates a connection and sense of identification that graduates are able to leverage strategically throughout their careers. There are of course other college rituals that could create this identification, but dining is the most important because (1) it is enacted so frequently (often several times per week) and (2) it is a ritual that all students experience. College dining therefore appears to have particular significance for the functioning of the network. For example, discussion of Formal Hall might be used as an icebreaker at job interviews or among new colleagues. Crucially, then, not only does membership in the network often become a heuristic for vetting colleagues, but also the mutual experience of college dining is actually used as a way of building interpersonal relationships within the network. This dynamic enables the network to be sustained over time and helps to perpetuate the place of Cambridge graduates among the British elite:

> People use Oxbridge as a way of screening people they do business with. Other Oxbridge grads will often ask what I studied and where I studied it. When they find out I went to Cambridge, the next question is, What college did you go to? Then we'll exchange pleasantries about our college days and what we got up to, college dinners, rowing, that sort of thing.

Conversely, those who had not studied at Cambridge or Oxford were excluded from the conversations about college dining and other rituals, which sometimes created a schism in the workplace, as this alumnus who had read classics noted:

> There is definitely a divide that is created as a result of this education. Those who went to Oxbridge and those who went to say, Bristol. The latter are just left out of many conversations involving Cambridge idiosyncrasies. What's a formal, JCR etc., they don't really know what we are talking about. I guess you develop a very high level of confidence in yourself because of all this.

Partly as a result of this divide, a number of respondents argued that an insidious tension exists between Oxbridge and non-Oxbridge graduates in many professions. For example, an informant who occupied a senior position in the publishing industry described her colleagues who had not studied at Cambridge or Oxford as "chippy" and claimed that they had tried to block her promotion through the ranks of her company because they were "jealous" of her Cambridge college experience and her "posh dinners." Thus the strength of the social network in which Cambridge and Oxford graduates are embedded rests not only on a shared experience of college life, with its idiosyncratic rituals and traditions, but also on a perception of hostility from graduates of other universities who, they believe, resent the sense of history and grandeur associated with college dining and other aspects of college life, as well as the social and career advantages that they appear to hold. The result is a strong sense of solidarity among the graduates of Cambridge and Oxford universities, which further reinforces the tensions between the "Oxbridge elite" (Cadwalladr, 2008) and the rest.

Interestingly, although all the alumni whom we interviewed acknowledged the advantages of their Cambridge experience for their careers, several argued forcefully that studying at Cambridge and participating in dining rituals does not in any way guarantee a place amongst the elite, or even a successful career. Some told us stories and anecdotes about their friends from college whom they remembered as very able students, but whose subsequent careers were either unremarkable or, in conventional terms, could be considered failures. According to one alumnus:

> The majority of my friends have done really well, but a few of them haven't. A lot of my college friends are like me [pursuing a successful career in law] and who I'm still in touch with and who I meet professionally. But I've got one friend from college, who also did English lit, who's a ghost writer for very minor celebrities and another who works on a small local newspaper. I don't know if you you'd call them failures, but if you went back and interviewed their 21-year-old selves, they would have told you "get stuffed. I'm going to do much better than that."

Thus, entry to the establishment is not automatic for Cambridge graduates; to become part of it they need to be able to demonstrate that they have internalized their college experience and are able to leverage the social skills acquired through dining, as described in the previous section, in a range of situations. In other words, graduates need to appear comfortable and assured in different settings and with different audiences.

In sum, we did not immediately connect dining rituals with the British class system when we began our research, yet as our study progressed we came to the view that Cambridge college dining rituals serve to tacitly support the class system and, more specifically, to maintain an elite professional-managerial class that dominates the establishment in Britain. As noted above, participants' shift in social position begins while they are university members, and later in life the ramifications of college dining manifest themselves and alumni are able to cement their place in this elite.

DISCUSSION

Our objective in this study was to understand how organizational rituals support the maintenance of macrolevel institutions. We studied the seemingly innocuous ritual of formal dining at one of the leading U.K. universities and showed how its significance goes far beyond a group of college members getting together to dine in the evening. Specifically, we found that although dining rituals initially started as a reflection of a larger, highly class-based society, over time, they had come to serve as powerful yet subtle devices for socializing new generations of actors who, when they leave Cambridge, go on to reproduce various aspects of the British class system. We believe our findings allow us to make three distinct theoretical contributions. Two of these relate specifically to institutional theory, and the third relates to the ritual studies literature. In this section we outline these contributions and consider avenues for future research.

Contributions to Institutional Theory

Institutional maintenance. With a few exceptions (e.g., Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Zilber, 2009; Zucker, 1988), the process of institutional maintenance has been overlooked in much recent institutional research, a central assumption being that institutional reproduction is essentially an automatic process. In attempting to address the "mystery" of how institutions can be made to be self-replicating, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) drew together empirical insights from the extant institutional literature (e.g., Angus, 1993; Holm, 1995; Leblebici et al., 1991; Townley, 1997, 2002; Zilber, 2002) to propose a range of purposive strategies, or types of institutional work, that actors engage in as they seek to maintain a given social order. A key tenet of the studies considered by Lawrence and Suddaby is that maintaining institutions involves the support and/or re-creation of mechanisms that ensure compliance to current norms and practices.

In this study, we have sought to augment and extend this emerging literature by examining the role of ritual enactment as a mechanism for institutional maintenance. Although institutional theorists have acknowledged that rituals play an important role in institutional processes (e.g., Friedland & Alford, 1991; Meyer & Scott, 1983), the concept of ritual has been marginal to much institutional research, and institutional theorists have not engaged meaningfully with the ritual studies literature.

Our analysis highlights a number of aspects of organizational rituals that collectively underpin their capacity to support the maintenance of institutions. First, rituals socialize participants into particular norms and values and teach them the roles they are expected to play. The ritual of college dining we studied here has historically reflected the British class system in the sense that Fellows and students were drawn almost exclusively from its upper reaches and served by waiters and butlers whose primary objective was to protect the privilege of the former. Participants were therefore familiar with the performance and how to enact its main aspects *before* their arrival at Cambridge. Moreover, they essentially took for granted the notion of a class structure and their place in it. More recently, however, as the social backgrounds of participants have become increasingly diverse, the purpose of the ritual has changed: it now subtly socializes the participants into *adopting* the sensibilities that make the elite "distinct" (Bourdieu, 1984). In particular, it legitimates social stratification and an explicit categorization of people according to rank and station. In short, it endorses and reifies the concepts that lie at the core of the class system.

Second, rituals induce a powerful desire in participants to maintain the integrity of the performance. Most notably, the sheer spectacle that is often associated with organizational rituals can mask conflict and undermine resistance. As a consequence, organizational rituals are often highly effective at ensuring conformity to a particular set of practices, which leads participants to accept their roles even if they are initially uncomfortable with them. In our study, the colleges' ornate dining halls, with their centuries-old portraits and other artifacts, are invested with rich meaning and symbolism. Moreover, the use of ancient language, artifacts, labels, and other medieval customs creates a compelling link with an illustrious past. These aspects provide a historical context and "webs of significance" in which students become "suspended" (Geertz, 1973: 5). In this situation resistance becomes extremely difficult, and very few participants choose to deviate from the script.

Third, organizational rituals not only affect the identity and image of actors while they are active participants, but also influence behavior and social interaction beyond the confines of their original context. In this respect, rituals are powerful carriers of cultural material and in particular of symbolic, linguistic, and relational material that actors draw upon at other times and in other places. Indeed, it is the transtemporal and transspatial nature of the effects of organizational rituals that underpin their capacity to regulate behavior, and ultimately, their capacity to maintain institutions. In our study, we found that participants used the shared experience of college dining to gain access to and flourish in the establishment. Not only does the ritual cultivate in the participants the skills and competencies required to interact and build relationships with the elite; it also enables alumni to subsequently use the shared experience of dining and other college rituals as a kind of social glue to bond with one another and to promote a shared identity that reinforces a sense of entitlement and justifies their dominant class positions.

Our study resonates with some recent institutional research that indicates that the maintenance of institutions is rooted in the *repeated enactment* of relevant norms and practices. Most notably, Zilber's (2002) study of a rape crisis center shows how the repetition of particular behaviors, such as providing assurance and comfort to new members, created a shared cognitive framework among organization members. Similarly, Townley (1997) showed how myths of appraisal and accountability were sustained in U.K. universities by the recurrence of a set of practices, including ceremonies of different sorts, that created a shared view about the benefits of formal managerial control mechanisms in that context. And Angus's (1993) study of how institutions of competition, machismo, and violence were maintained in an Australian college through repeated acts of brutality also shows how recurring behavior can support a particular institutional order.

However, our specific focus on rituals allows us to extend this work by explicitly showing how microlevel experiences and events can have consequences in times and places far *beyond* the events themselves, and by showing that *performance* plays a key role in institutional compliance. Moreover, it is notable that the empirical studies that Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) drew upon to illustrate their arguments about institutional maintenance relate mainly to institutions that are specific to a given organization, industry, or field. The result is that institutional maintenance is portrayed in these studies as a quasi-strategic process in which particular decisions have particular intended outcomes. By contrast, the institution that forms the focus of our analysis—the British class system—is a "true" macrolevel concept affecting every aspect of the U.K.'s society and economy, and no one group of actors is able to completely understand or exert firm control over its dynamics and consequences. Our work thus suggests a more complex and less linear picture of institutional maintenance than is portrayed in the existing literature.

The microdynamics of institutions. The relationship between localized micro events in which participants act in situated and patterned ways (Goffman, 1959) and macrolevel structures such as social class or markets is an important one, and it has been extensively discussed in sociology (e.g., Giddens, 1984). However, little work in institutional theory explores how microlevel situations contribute to the reification or erosion of macrolevel institutions. Indeed, although early work in institutional theory reflected a concern with micro sociological issues, over time this focus has diminished (Barley, 2008).

This is unfortunate, since macrolevel institutions are essentially abstract heuristics that cannot directly be observed in their entirety (Collins, 2004). In other words, to know the nature of an institution existing at the societal or field level, one needs to study how actors legitimate (and make sense of) it at a micro level. Indeed, one of the most serious criticisms leveled against institutional theory is that it has neglected how the struggle for legitimacy manifests itself in the everyday lives of organization members (Barley, 2008).

In this study, we help to bring a concern for microlevel interaction back into institutional theory. Our intention is not to regurgitate Giddens's (1984) or other models of how individual agency is recursively linked with structures, but to focus on how microlevel interactions in organizational rituals contribute to the maintenance of larger societal institutions. Our study shows that the way that actors experience institutions is not a direct reflection of how an institution appears at the macro level. Rather, institutions are refracted through context and individual experience. In other words, they are situated, interpreted, and reinforced at local levels.

In our study, we found that ritual participants were not necessarily aware of how their actions were contributing to broader institutions. Although college dining rituals were invented within a highly class conscious society, Britain in the 21st century is obviously very different than it was when college dining first emerged. Many of the changes in British society, most notably the decline in the power of aristocracy, the ascent in the status of women, and equal rights for ethnic minorities, are reflected in contemporary college dining. Thus as the notion of social class (and in

particular, notions as to the kinds of actors who are entitled to belong to its upper ranks) has evolved, the ritual of college dining has been forced to accommodate these shifts to remain legitimate. This suggests that the institution of class has a bearing on the enactment of college dining, just as college dining helps to support the class system. Indeed, as entry to Cambridge has become more meritocratic, the influence of dining rituals on the class system has arguably increased because, as noted above, participants from a wide range of social backgrounds now need to be "prepared" for their future roles among the elite.

In sum, we believe that our findings show that the survival and perpetuation of macro institutions is rooted in micro events such as organizational rituals. We also show that meaning systems are localized and may not exactly mirror structures observed at a macro level, and that these broader institutions influence micro events such as organizational rituals. We therefore believe that we have been able to respond to Barley's (2008: 510) call for institutional researchers to return to the "coalface" of institutional theory in order to shed light on "the link between institutions and the person."

Contribution to Ritual Studies

Though the main contribution of our study is to institutional theory, we also believe that we contribute to the ritual studies literature. It is evident that ritual studies is focused upon, and gives priority to, microlevel dynamics. However, if we have criticized the institutional literature for being too macrofocused, a similar criticism could be leveled at ritual studies for being too microfocused: the main themes in the ritual studies literature concern the performative aspects of ritual (Rappaport, 1968), the liminality or in-betweeness of ritual experience (Turner, 1974), the emotional power or "communitas" felt by participants (Turner, 1974), the role of time and space in shaping ritual dynamics (Moore, 1980), and the individual transformations that ritual participants undergo (Gray, 2005), all of which relate almost exclusively to the individual and group levels of analysis.

There is a consensus in the literature that rituals support social stability and are often used strategically to strengthen the positions of powerful members of a given social order (Schechner, 2006), yet ritologists are less effective at specifying the mechanisms through which rituals buttress or interact with these broader social and cultural processes. We therefore believe that ritologists may have as much to gain from institutional theorists' understanding of social and institutional dynamics as institutional theorists have to gain from ritologists' understanding of microlevel behavior.

A second contribution of our research to the ritual studies literature concerns the nature of the ritual that forms the focus of our analysis. As noted, much of the scholarship on ritual is concerned with religious ceremonies and/or rites of passage in preindustrial societies (Geertz, 1957; Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1908/1960). Some important recent work has been done on secular rituals in industrial societies, but the study of contemporary rituals remains underdeveloped. Our study helps to address this shortcoming. Moreover, we think that Cambridge college dining is a particularly interesting ritual to examine because, though it is a secular event that is ostensibly about eating and sharing knowledge, it also contains some sacred aspects. This combination of the sacred and the secular is in fact quite common in contemporary rituals (e.g., birthday parties, retirement ceremonies, award ceremonies) and reinforces Schechner's (2006: 53) contention that the "neat division" between secular and sacred rituals is essentially spurious. More broadly, our study highlights the continued importance of ritual and tradition in our lives despite claims to the contrary (e.g., Giddens, 1999).

Directions for Future Research

Our study of dining at Cambridge raises some intriguing directions for future research. First, we have focused on ritual as a mechanism through which institutions are maintained. We recognize, however, that rituals are also important sites of social mediation and change. Indeed, anthropologists have argued that ritual may be a particularly effective mechanism for social change because it invokes a sense of cultural continuity among participants; the modification of a particular ritual can therefore have profound effects on other elements of the cultural system in which it is embedded (Bell, 1997). Future research could usefully examine the role that ritual plays in institutional change and the creation of new systems of meaning.

Second, we have considered how a particular kind of ritual (college dining) reinforces the class system in the U.K. We believe that many other kinds of organizational rituals may also serve to reinforce systems of inequality. For example, the ritual of corporate entertainment, whereby men take business clients to bars and night clubs in an effort to build and maintain business relationships, reinforces male dominance in corporate hierarchies by explicitly excluding women. Office holiday parties or initiation ceremonies similarly put a set of existing and desired values on dis-

play for participants (Rosen, 1985). Likewise, large network organizations such as industry associations or volunteer groups rely on rituals to promote solidarity and particular belief systems or ideologies. It would be interesting to know how these rituals contribute to the maintenance of particular institutions.

Finally, our study considers ritual as a central mechanism for institutional reproduction and maintenance, but other mechanisms such as myths (Ackerman, 1975) and traditions (Dacin & Dacin, 2008) may also play a key role in maintaining a particular system of meaning. An especially interesting avenue for future study would be to consider the extent to which these mechanisms are reinforcing and/or contradictory. It would also be intriguing to consider whether the relationships among these mechanisms varies according to the cultural context in which a particular ritual is embedded. In short, we believe greater attention needs to be paid to rituals as mechanisms for the maintenance of institutions in general, and to the exercise of agency at different levels in this process in particular. We hope that other researchers will join us in this endeavor.

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