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WHERE IS THE "ME" AMONG THE "WE"? IDENTITY WORK AND THE SEARCH FOR OPTIMAL BALANCE

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Through two qualitative studies, we examine how members of a particularly demanding occupation conduct identity work to negotiate an optimal balance between personal and social identities. Findings are based on open-ended survey responses from and in-depth interviews with Episcopal priests. We first explore the situational and vocational demands placed on those in challenging occupations, along with the identity tensions that often result from those demands. We then specify and classify several identity work tactics that ameliorate these demands and tensions by differentiating or integrating personal and social identities. To synthesize findings, we develop a theoretical model of identity work.

> At this point, I feel that who I am as a priest and the role associated with that and who I am are the same. The human Tom and the priest Tom are so intertwined generally that I cannot separate them.[1]
>
> -Episcopal priest

How do people negotiate their unique individual identities in the face of strong social demands toward shared collective identity? Today's society is replete with social groups such as organizations, clubs, churches, and vocations that ask their members to submit, surrender, and succumb to the needs, values, or identities of the collective. Given the preponderance of popular writing on the overworked, underrefreshed, too-stretched-out modern man or woman, these social groups might be getting precisely what they ask for. Yet complete conformity to collective identity can result in excessive homogeneity of a social group, which is detrimental to creativity, innovation, decision making, and a host of other important social processes (cf. Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998; Glynn, 1998). Hence, individuals and those who share responsibility for their well-being (e.g., managers, mentors) face an ongoing tension about preserving personal identities in the context of ubiquitous social, organizational, and occupational identity demands.

In this article, we examine the process of this identity negotiation. We focus on occupational identity, as an example of a social identity that can be especially greedy or demanding. Social identities often manifest themselves in jobs, vocations, and occupations (Barley, 1989; Pavalko, 1988; Trice, 1993), and we focus on members of an occupation—the priesthood—that is particularly challenging in terms of identity. We explore (1) the intense identity demands placed on priests by their occupation and pertinent stakeholders, (2) the identity tensions associated with these demands, and (3) the identity work priests engage in to maintain a state of optimal balance between social and personal identities. After a review of pertinent literatures, we present findings of two qualitative studies. Our in-depth analysis provides a "thick description" of a particularly problematic vocation while uncovering far-reaching identity issues that cut across not only occupations, but also other social identities as well. Specifically, we develop a model of identity work that illustrates the complex interactions between individual and situational influences as individuals strive for optimal balance. The model shows how individuals employ various tactics to differentiate (segment) or integrate (merge) their individual and social identities. Our work is an effort to inform both the social and

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[1] All names and locations in the paper have been changed to preserve interviewees' confidentiality, a condition guaranteed in our research design. We have, however, used names that reflect speaker gender.

personal identity research streams by illuminating a vital link between them.

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

How individuals create, sustain, and change their perceptions of self, other people, their organizations, and their occupations has long intrigued management scholars. According to social identity theory and its conceptual cousin, self-categorization theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), "identity" at the individual level has two parts. According to Brewer, *personal identity* is the "individuated self—those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others" whereas *social identities* are "categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units that *depersonalize* the self-concept" (1991: 476; emphasis in original). These social identities can include categories such as race, gender, occupational roles, organizational membership, and so forth (Ashforth, 2001). An ongoing struggle between an individual's personal identity and his or her various social identities can exist, as the demands of the social identities infringe upon the uniqueness of the personal identity (Brewer, 1991, 2003).

The term "identification" is used in the literature with two meanings, to describe both a state and a process, so some clarification is useful here. Identification (as a state) refers to that part of an individual's identity that derives from his or her association with a social group (e.g., an organization or occupation). It is the overlap between the individual's identity and the social group's identity that the individual perceives (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). The second and less explored meaning of identification refers to the process of aligning identity with that of a social group. It is imperative to understand how identity can change, since identity construction is cyclical and does not end when the individual initially identifies with an entity (Pratt, 2001). Clearly, identity adjusts and evolves, and it is subject to many influences, including organizational and occupational demands, as well as individual impetus for change. Therefore, one's level of identification (state) with any given social identity can vary as individual and situational factors influence identification (process). These changes by individuals—whether adjustments, tweaks, or overhauls—are what comprise identity "negotiation" or "management." The first theoretical gap that we sought to help fill, then, was a gap in the understanding of the *process* of identity negotiation, *how* identification waxes and wanes as individuals and their contexts evolve.

Identity Work

Thus, it is clear that after an individual's initial entry and socialization into an organization or occupation, identity issues are far from over. An ongoing process takes place in which the individual negotiates the "Who am *I*?" question amidst social "This is who *we* are" messages. As both individuals and their social contexts are dynamic, so too will be the relationship between them. An individual's active response to this dynamic is what Snow and Anderson called "identity work," defining it as the "range of activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (1987: 1348). Identity work involves "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1165). Social group members engage in identity work in order to negotiate and optimize the boundaries between personal and social identity.

Although we focus on identity work dealing with the tension between personal and social identity, previous research provides glimpses into how individuals do other kinds of identity work. For example, various strategies for managing *multiple identities* have been documented (e.g., Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Thoits, 1983). Further, though they focused on the organizational level, Pratt and Foreman (2000) drew on individual-level theories to identify four strategies for identity management: compartmentalization (preserving multiple identities without seeking synergy among them), deletion (ridding oneself of a particular identity), integration (fusing multiple identities into a distinct new one), and aggregation (retaining all distinct identities while creating links among them). Another area of identity work research has involved managing *threatened identities*. For example, Breakwell (1986) identified several coping strategies within three broad categories of intrapsychic, interpersonal, and intergroup responses to identity threat. As this previous work does not directly address the issue of how an individual negotiates the tension between his or her unique personal identity and salient social identities, we sought to address this gap in extant identity work research.

Another approach taken in some identity work research has been to focus on issues of image preservation (e.g., Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Roberts, 2005; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996), as opposed to the inward cognitive processes of identity creation and maintenance. This line of research examines only the externally driven aspects of identity—

what individuals do with and to *others* in order to negotiate image and reputation—at the expense of understanding the internally driven aspects of identity: what individuals do for and by *themselves* to negotiate identity. This distinction is important to recognize and is similar to the difference between organizational image and identity that has been clearly articulated elsewhere (e.g., Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Yet focusing only on the image aspects of identity work limits one's understanding, since it restricts the range of identity work that an individual performs. Hence, we sought to include both external (image) and internal (identity) aspects of identity work in our study to allow us to paint a more complete picture of the processes involved and to develop a more complete model of these processes.

Optimal Balance

In this article, we demonstrate how a significant purpose and function of identity work is finding an optimal balance in identity—a state of being neither too distinct/independent nor too inclusive/dependent in relation to a given social identity. Individuals strive for ways to maintain and express individuality (Brewer & Pickett, 1999; Elsbach, 2003) yet *also* yearn to belong to something greater than themselves (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Indeed, Graafsma, Bosma, Grotevant, and de Levita's (1994) review of the study of identity in multiple disciplines identified these two opposing pulls as primary drivers of identity dynamics. Similarly, in her model of "optimal distinctiveness," Brewer (1991, 2003) argued that individual identities reflect two basic human needs that are in tension with one another: one for inclusion ("How am I similar to others?") and one for uniqueness ("How am I different from others?"). In ideal situations, these dual functions work together to (1) prevent identity dysfunction and (2) enable healthy identity processes. By achieving both inclusion and uniqueness goals, optimal balance reduces stress and conflict and increases well-being and satisfaction. The individual is comfortable with the level of identification and the proportion of his/her life, time, and attention that the social identity comprises.

Yet life is often less than ideal. Too much emphasis on *personal* identity (i.e., too much distinction from social groups) can yield isolation and loneliness, sacrificing any communal sense of "we" for the disconnected "me." Yet, conversely, too much emphasis on *social* identities can depersonalize an individual, blurring the "me" into the "we." Hence, although most applications of social identity theory emphasize the positive outcomes of identification, this potential for person-environment imbalance clearly indicates identification's dual nature.

Dukerich and her colleagues (1998) noted a similar tension. As part of a movement among researchers toward an "expanded model of identification" (Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), they defined the concepts of "underidentification" and "overidentification," wherein the overlap between an individual's identity and a social group's identity is either deficient or excessive. In the former, "a pathological form of apathetic identification" (Dukerich et al., 1998: 246) exists, as the person allows no aspect of the social group to affect his or her identity. In the latter, the identity of the social group replaces self as "a sort of creeping annexation of the workers' selves" (Kunda, 1992: 12). In this state, the self gets lost and "there is little or no perceived uniqueness, . . . similar to the Borg of *Star Trek*, where there is *only* the collective" (Dukerich et al., 1998: 247). These pathologies of under- and overidentification represent what Dukerich et al. called the "darker side of identification," extreme forms of identification that can come at great costs to individuals, their organizations, and/or their occupations. We sought to investigate this "me versus we" phenomenon by uncovering the types of identity work people perform.

Research on optimal distinctiveness and related constructs has been fruitful, but an important limitation in that literature is that it focuses on *selecting* a particular social identity (or set of identities) in order to achieve optimal balance. By so doing, it overlooks another important option individuals have at their disposal—*negotiating* a given social identity. And although previous research in other areas touches on managing social identities in terms of importance, salience, or hierarchy, researchers know very little about that negotiation process (Ashforth, 2001). Understanding this process is tremendously important, however, as it represents a viable means for individuals to resolve personal and social identity conflicts. Therefore, we also sought to increase understanding of how identity work can be a mechanism for identity negotiation aimed toward optimally balancing personal and social identities.

Understanding the path to optimal balance is important for several reasons. First, it would illuminate how to avoid identity *im*balance, which can be emotionally draining and take precious cognitive resources away from performing roles effectively (Ashforth, 2001). Second, balance has been linked to important constructs of individual per-

ception and identity (including increased self-worth, personal self-esteem, and collective self-esteem) as well as several intra- and interpersonal processes of importance to group and organizational functioning (including information processing, affect regulation, motivation, decision making, reactions to feedback, group goal setting, and group performance) (Brewer, 2003; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Wegge & Haslam, 2003). Hence, uncovering the dynamics of optimal balance holds potential for improving not only individual well-being, but key group and organizational processes as well.

Challenging Occupations

Our focus was on occupational identities, though we believe the logic, processes, and findings of our study can be applied to social identities more broadly (e.g., organizational or group identities). To study identity work most precisely, we looked for an occupation in which the structure suggested that identity work would be considerably intense for its members. Past research on identity has shown tremendous benefit in studying problematic organizations, situations, or occupations. Such work has included studying situations in which an organization's identity and/or image are in crisis (e.g., Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Glynn, 2000); examining individuals' responses to strong organizational cultures (e.g., Kunda, 1992); and exploring *occupations* that are somehow problematic in terms of identity (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, in press).

We sought to follow this occupational approach to studying identity work by considering vocations that place particularly strong identity demands on their members. We defined *identity demands* as situational factors that pressure individuals toward extreme integration or segmentation of personal and social identities. We further sought to understand the identity tensions that could result from working under such strong identity demands. We defined *identity tensions* as the stresses and strains experienced by an individual in relation to the interaction between her or his personal identity and a given social identity. Hence, whereas identity demands are *situational,* identity tensions are experienced at the *individual level*. This leads us to the final purpose of the research project: to discover *how* those in particularly demanding or "greedy" occupations (cf. Coser, 1974) create and maintain healthy individual identities when their occupations require so much of them. We sought to explore the *processes* in which individuals engage in response to strong identity demands and identity tensions. Demanding occupations—particularly ones that are in the public eye—are especially prone to intense identity demands and tensions, and they should therefore be fertile grounds for investigating these phenomena. This discussion leads us to the following research questions:

Research Question 1. What is the nature of situational identity demands placed on those in particularly challenging occupations?

Research Question 2. What individual tensions result from these identity demands?

Research Question 3. How do occupation members engage in identity work in response to these identity demands and tensions?

SAMPLE

A particularly demanding occupation is the priesthood, and we chose to study Episcopal parish priests.[2] This population has both unique and universal characteristics, making it a particularly interesting one to study. Like many occupations, the priesthood contains elements of both *job* and *vocation*; as one of our interviewees put it, "When I came here actually it was very clear that there are two ways of looking at being a priest. One is as a CEO. The other is as a theologian" (priest #3-M).[3] Most Episcopal priests are married and living "traditional" family lives, so they face many of the work-family demands of modern living. This characteristic makes Episcopal priests' experiences considerably more generalizable to those of the broader workforce than, say, the experience of Catholic priests, who do not marry and have children. However, despite most Episcopal priests having families, they face tremendous "pulls" and "pushes" on their identity, similar to what Catholic priests experience. They go through a rigorous socialization, both in the seminary and through ordination; they typically wear priestly attire ("clericals" or "a collar") so as to be seen by the general public and parishioners as having a unique position in society; and perhaps most importantly, they see themselves as called by God to perform divine work. These aspects of the occupation make it an "extreme

[2] The majority of Episcopal priests are parish priests who work directly with a congregation of church members. Nonparish priests have other specialized roles, such as hospital chaplain, school teacher, etc.

[3] Identifying numbers ranging from 1 to 60 are used to link each quote to a respondent. Gender is noted by "M" for male and "F" for female.

case" of social identity demands, as the identity work separating personal and professional identity is particularly salient. Extreme cases are desirable when building theory because the dynamics being studied are more visible than the parallel dynamics would be in another context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990).

Parish priests also engage in fairly typical managerial roles, making many of the processes in which they engage more generalizable. For example, they must create and balance budgets, work with internal and external stakeholders (e.g., vestries, community leaders, Church leadership), manage political tensions, and hire/train/fire/supervise paid and/or volunteer staff members (e.g., administrative assistants, education leaders, assistant priests, teachers, and specialists such as writers or musicians). In addition, the priests in our sample came from a wide variety of occupations *before* entering the priesthood. Only 6 of the 60 priests in Study 2 (explained below) went straight from college to seminary and then to the priesthood. The remaining 54 had had at least one full-time occupation before beginning seminary; these included social service worker, accountant, travel agent, actor, lawyer, Wall Street securities broker, teacher, military person, police officer, banker, chef, magazine editor, book editor, management consultant, lobbyist, and retail manager. This diversity of occupational backgrounds allows Episcopal priests keen insight into comparisons between the priesthood and other occupations and sensitizes them to pressures found in more ordinary occupations. Hence, although our sample members clearly had unique identity demands (aiding in thick description), they also shared many characteristics with the incumbents of other occupations (aiding in generalizability).

METHODS

This work is based on two studies. Study 1 was a preliminary, exploratory study that informed the design of Study 2 by offering broad insights into the population and the identity-related issues its members faced, while also providing important themes to further pursue.

Study 1

Study 1 involved analysis of open-ended survey responses obtained from 220 Episcopal priests. Surveys were collected as part of a wellness program undergone by the priests; questions for our exploratory study were included in evaluation materials for the program.[4] Questions were broad, so as to enable the collection of multiple viewpoints. An example question is, "Are there issues or challenges associated with separating priestly from non-priestly roles and how do you respond to them?" All three authors read all responses to the identity questions in the survey and independently generated lists of themes and issues. We then collaborated on determining the major themes to be included in Study 2. We also spoke with Episcopal Church leaders and advisors and read ethnographies and sociological accounts of priests and other religious occupations, to gain more contextual knowledge about the life of the priesthood. From the analysis of the survey responses and discussions with Church advisors, we determined two dimensions that appeared to directly affect priests' attitudes toward their vocation, and we stratified the sample for Study 2 on those two dimensions: (1) tenure in the priesthood and (2) living on church property (e.g., in a home adjacent to one's church) or living away from the church. For tenure, we created three classifications: 1–5 years, 6–19 years, and 20 years or more; these cutoffs were based on discussions with numerous advisors about typical career stages.

Responses from Study 1 helped us identify several themes to explore in more detail in Study 2. Specifically, the themes of differentiation (segmentation of individual and occupational identities) or integration (blending of individual and occupational identities) were often mentioned when priests discussed identity. For example, one priest demonstrated clear personal identity boundaries by noting, "Here's what I do: I separate and have established boundaries . . . dress differently, live by my day timer, review how many hours a week I work, do not bring work home." Conversely, though, many priests noted an inability to separate their occupational and personal identities; one wrote, "The Church is my life and I am finding that I cannot make a separation—that gives me comfort." Hence, in Study 2 we made differentiation (segmentation) versus integration (blending) one of the major themes for the questions, asking priests about the identity "boundary work" (cf. Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) they might engage in to either differentiate or integrate their personal and occupational identities.

[4] One of the authors was an evaluation advisor to the organization that designed and administered the wellness program.

Study 2

We sought to use a method that would allow us to build on Study 1 and probe more deeply into the ideas of identity work. Therefore, for Study 2 we interviewed 60 Episcopal priests in the United States in hour-long telephone interviews. Interviewees were divided evenly among the three tenure groups and between on-site/off-site residency (described above). Forty percent of the priests in our sample were women, which represents an oversampling of women, carried out for theoretical sampling reasons.[5] Our primary intent in this stratification was to investigate the perspectives of a wide range of priests, as breadth helps to build "ecological validity" into the design of a study (Lee, 1999: 152); our secondary intent in the design was to enable post hoc analysis between subgroups. Episcopal Church administrators generated a stratified random sample to fit our requested parameters (based on tenure, location, and gender). Priests were located across the United States and lived and worked in a mixture of urban, rural, and suburban communities; all were parish priests, and their parish memberships ranged in size from 40 to 1,800. Hence, we conducted both "theoretical sampling" (in that we collected data from certain subgroups of priests for theory-building reasons) and "random sampling" (to alleviate any bias in the selection process).[6] To diversify the perspectives of the research team, each author conducted one-third (20) of the interviews and interviewed people in each tenure group and in each location group. In no instances did priests with whom we spoke decline to be interviewed.

Interviews were semistructured. There were approximately 20 "required" questions dealing with identity and career background; this *structured* dimension allowed for meaningful and standardized comparisons across interviews. The Appendix gives our key identity questions. Each interviewer was also able to pursue interesting comments and themes arising within an interview in more detail; this *unstructured* dimension allowed for greater depth and individuality in each interview and further allowed us to see work through interviewees' perspectives. Each interview was recorded on audiotape and professionally transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts averaged 20 single-spaced pages and totaled 1,175 pages from the 60 interviews.

We followed the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in our design and analysis. We used a two-step fine-coding system in which codes are derived inductively from interviews and ultimately agreed upon by the authors. Coding is an established method of "meaning condensation" (Lee, 1999: 89) wherein researchers extract or abstract the most relevant themes (called "codes") from their data, arrange them in a hierarchy to record their relationships, and note them in a dictionary that builds during data analysis, to document their precise meanings. A code is assigned to a section of text when researchers identify a phenomenon present in it as a theme. Coded text length for this study ranged from one sentence to multiple pages. Multiple codes can be overlaid onto any given passage of text, when multiple phenomena are found. The process of coding was as follows: First, each transcript was read word-for-word and independently coded by two of us—the person who had conducted the particular interview and one other author. Second, we analyzed batches of two or three transcripts in joint meetings in which the two authors who had coded a given transcript compared and discussed their independent codings to determine a final coding for the transcript. The noncoding author served as record keeper and as a third source of analysis (or "judge") whenever the two coding authors sought further clarification on a coded passage; the role of judge alternated at each joint coding session. This coding process makes traditional interrater reliability measures impractical, as new codes emerge throughout the process and are not determined a priori. Yet our process ensured that multiple perspectives were offered on each transcript, helping alleviate researcher bias in the analysis. We used the NVivo 2.0 software program to enter all codes, facilitate coding links (i.e., connections among codes in the data), perform text searches, and count instances and intersections of codes.

Our grounded theorizing involved creating theory iteratively from observations and data points. Insights from early data drove decisions about the next wave of data collection and/or analysis. Our inductive method also compared emerging ideas from the data with existing literatures and vice versa in such a way that each was used to inform interpretation of the other. After coding 52 interviews, we found no new themes (i.e., created no new codes) in the remaining 8 transcripts; this absence of novel codes suggested considerable sup-

[5] Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church ordains women to the ministry and has done so since the 1970s.

[6] In 2003, the Episcopal Church ordained its first openly gay bishop—an event that has led to considerable identity challenges for the Church. Interviews for this study, however, were conducted in 2002. Hence, that event did not affect these data.

port for our having reached a key goal in grounded theory research known as "theoretical saturation," the point at which collected data are deep enough to begin yielding only redundant responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

FINDINGS

We present our findings using the two-order approach noted by Van Maanen (1979) and Gioia (1998). Specifically, we include first-order data (codes and text passages comprised of words, ideas, and phrases from interviewees) as well as second-order data (more abstract concepts we developed from linkages and themes in the first-order data). Hence, we represent identity work in the actual words of informants and in the basic codes used in analysis (first order) as well as build a grounded, theoretical explanation for the patterns observed in informants' words (second order). For maximum clarity and parsimony, we interweave both orders of findings throughout this section; that is, we supply an overarching structure that provides the skeleton for our theory and the thick description from our data to put "meat on the bones." To preview our findings, we next offer a brief overview of our emergent model.

A Conceptual Model of Identity Work

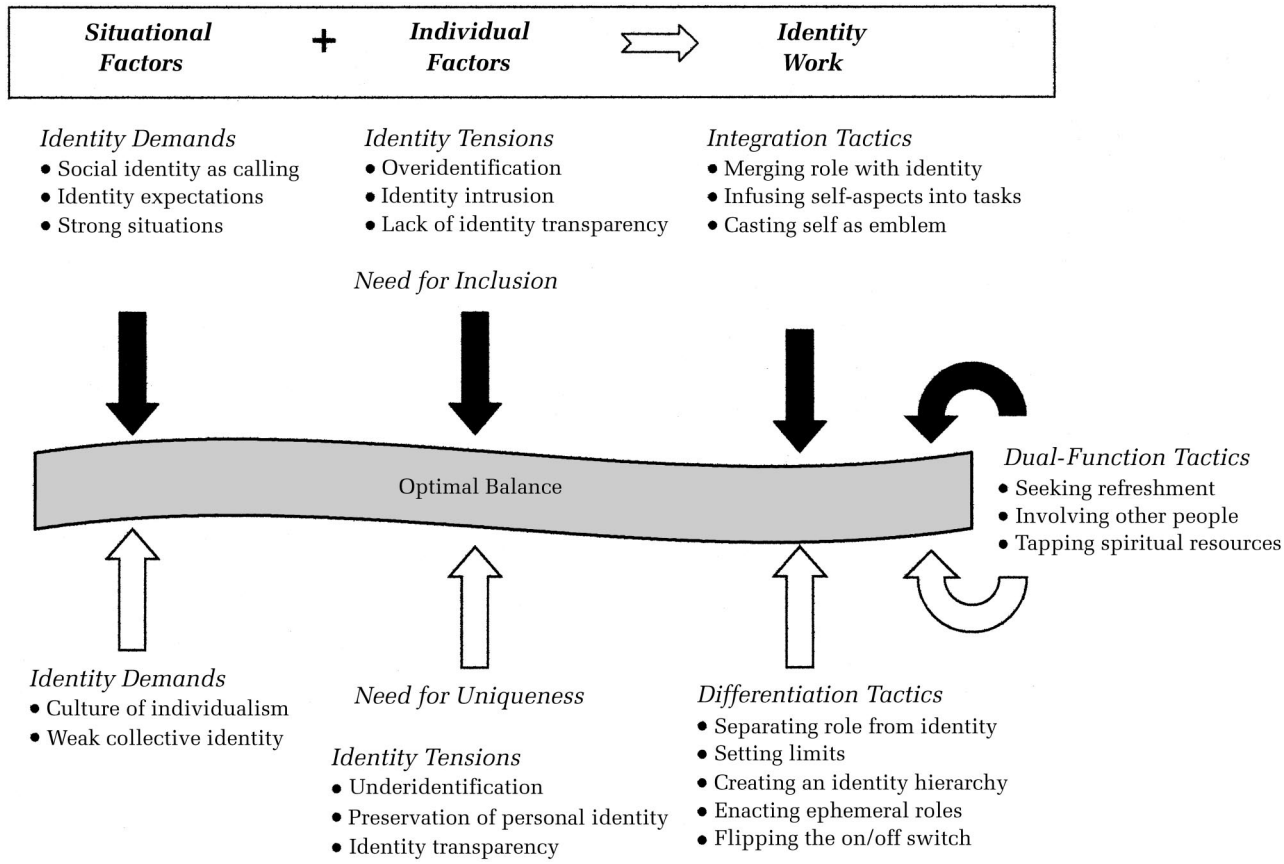
As noted above, to develop a theory of identity work more precisely, we used grounded theory techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to create a conceptual model that integrated the three research questions with our empirical findings. We sought to create a model that, while anchored in our occupational data, would also have predictive value for explaining how identity work functions for a broader array of social identities (e.g., group and organizational). To build our theory of identity work, we drew upon visual themes from Lewin's (1951) field theory to cast our data in a dynamic light and thus illustrate ongoing negotiation toward optimal balance—the state of neither overidentifying nor underidentifying with a given social identity.

We selected field theory as a basis for our conceptual model because of the dynamism and precision it affords and because we believed that the search for optimal balance is a prime example of a force field in action. In essence, the argument of field theory is that many situations are made clearer when viewed as being maintained by a set of forces that interact to create a "field" or context in which groups and individuals operate. Changes in an individual's behavior stem from changes—small or large—in the forces within the field (Lewin, 1951). Lewin's view was that if these forces could be identified and diagrammed, it would then be possible to better understand *why* individuals behaved in certain ways, and what the strengthening or weakening of forces would imply for individual adaptation, or *how* they changed their behavior.

We adopted this logic in order to create a dynamic model of identity work, as summarized in Figure 1. At the top of the diagram are forces toward *integration* of an individual's personal and social identity. At the bottom of the diagram are forces toward *differentiation* of an individual's personal and social identity. These forces represent aspects of the pertinent field. They can all occur simultaneously, yet can vary in strength, and as they increase in strength they exert more influence on the identity field. We propose that optimal balance is achieved when these forces are in equilibrium. That is, an individual benefits from achieving the desired symmetry between pressures for inclusion/assimilation and for uniqueness/distinction. Individuals can take action (via identity work tactics) to compensate for fluctuations in other forces in the field that create an imbalance.

The left column in the model represents situational demands upon individuals, such as identity pressures toward the collective or toward individuation. These situational factors are external to an individual and represent extant forces that affect his or her quest for optimal balance. The middle column includes pertinent individual differences, such as the need for inclusion and the need for uniqueness (cf. Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Glynn, 1998). These needs compel an individual toward either integrating personal identity with the social identity at hand or separating personal identity from that social identity, and they are a fairly stable aspect of the model. The middle column also includes the identity tensions often resulting from strong identity demands: under- or overidentification, preservation of personal identity or intrusion of social identity, and identity transparency or lack of transparency. Hence, the middle column contains individual factors that interact with each other and with situational factors to spur the need for identity work. The first two columns in the model, then, represent conditions that create a situation of either balance or imbalance for an individual. Balance does not stimulate action; that is, the individual does not deem it necessary to enact tactics and thus conserves his or her cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral resources. In response to *imbalance*, however, the individual can enact various integration or differentiation tactics to

FIGURE 1
A Model of Identity Work toward Optimal Balance



counteract the opposing forces (as illustrated in the right column). By engaging in these tactics, the individual increases the overall forces on one half of the model to offset the imbalance. Hence, we propose that situational and individual factors create forces in the identity field that individuals then respond to in order to achieve optimal balance. Details of the model are now presented throughout the rest of our findings section.

Research Question 1: Identity Demands in a Challenging Occupation

In our first research question, we sought to document the intense situationally imposed *identity demands* in a challenging occupation. We therefore asked a series of questions of our interviewees to elicit their reflections on how their occupation placed demands upon them and what situational factors invoked, increased, or decreased these demands. Asking these questions was important, as it allowed us to document *their* perspectives and hear *their* voices rather than merely imposing *our* idea of the demanding occupation onto the interviewees. As noted above, the occupation of Episcopal priest is embedded in significant identity demands. Priests answer to a number of constituencies: bishops (who supervise them), parishioners (whom they serve), vestries (boards of parishioners who often control financial issues, including the salary of the priest), their families, and the general public. Episcopal priests attend one of several seminaries for three years of intense study, personal reflection, and socialization into the Church and profession. We found ample evidence of the strong identity demands on the priests, and we present three of those demands here: social identity as calling, identity expectations, and strong situations. Table 1 provides examples of codes representing identity demands found in the study, along with descriptions of the codes and samples of text.[7]

Social identity as calling. Typically, priests see the social identity associated with the priesthood

[7] Reviewers recommended that we not provide counts for every code. We note, however, that each code was documented in at least 13 and up to 45 interviews.

TABLE 1
Identity Demands and Identity Tensions

Demand/Tension	Description	Exemplary Quotations
Identity demands		
Social identity as calling	Vocation is a calling, not just a job or traditional occupation.	"It's not a profession; it's a calling. It's not a job; it's a life."
Identity expectations, functional or ontological	Strong expectations placed on individual about what should be done or said (functional) or what his/her identity/image should be (ontological).	"If I am with a number of parishioners, they want to subtly remind me all the time that I am a priest. As a Christian, I try to have behavior that isn't offensive to others. I'm not the kind of priest that is uttering four-letter words or seeing if I can get more loaded than the next guy."
Strong situations	Specific contexts invoke/cue the identity demands.	"The time when there is an expectation of the priest being in the position of strength or power. I'm thinking like a funeral service. Dealing with someone who is bereaved. . . . You've got to conjure it up from within and be that for them. Even though you might not be that at that moment, that's what you need to be for them. It is certainly a part of . . . what our faith articulates."
Identity tensions		
Overidentification	Identifying with occupation too much; loss of self identity; often is *not* perceived by individual.	"I think a lot of clergy take themselves way too seriously. My metaphor is that they need to buy a collar that is one-half inch bigger because that one is way too tight, cutting off oxygen to their brain." "In our diocese they use to call them 'the black shirts.' That group, those are the guys who we think went to bed with their clericals on. Being a priest was almost a different status. You have human beings, and you have *priests.*"
Identity intrusion	Instances or impressions of the social identity intruding on personal identity; is perceived by individual.	"I sometimes think that I'm only supposed to be giving a *reasonable* sacrifice. Sometimes I really feel like I'm being asked to give an *unreasonable* sacrifice here. Yeah, so in that sense, sometimes it does feel like it is completely consuming."
Lack of identity transparency	Not being able to be yourself or the "real you" to the public or stakeholders.	"[My parishioners] have no access to the internal part of me. . . . I think that there are huge parts of who I am as a person [that] they just don't have access to unless I'm very explicit and make that personal, internal part explicitly out there for them."

not as a job, but as a calling. Indeed, when asked "What led you to become a priest?" 48 of the 60 interviewees responded *directly* by saying it was a call from God. One interviewee, after enumerating all the difficulties of the priesthood, said, "There are a thousand reasons not to be a priest, but there is only one reason to be a priest. That's because God has called you to do that" (priest #22-M). The strength of the perceived calling was evident throughout the interviews. Sometimes priests even noted that they personally did not want to become priests but felt compelled by God to do so. For example:

> *Interviewer:* Have you ever had mixed feelings about your vocation?
>
> *Interviewee:* About every morning when I wake up and go to work. It's one of these things where I didn't want to be ordained. I knew I was *supposed* to. The longer that I wasn't ordained, the more miserable I was. Now that I am ordained, I knew I was going to be miserable when I got ordained, but at least I've got the peace of the Lord in my heart about it. (priest #19-M)

The belief that entering the priesthood results from being called was widespread among not only the priests themselves, but also among the stakeholders with whom they dealt regularly (e.g., church leaders, lay volunteers, parishioners). Thus, this sense of calling was part of the situational landscape in which the priests operated. Vocations

with a strong sense of calling often push individuals toward a high degree of overlap between their personal and occupational identities (Dobrow, 2004), thus creating an identity demand toward inclusion. (Later, we will discuss how priests interpret the implications of this sense of calling differently as individuals, even though the overarching demand on their identity is shared collectively.) Of course, a sense of calling is not restricted to "sacred" vocations (as in a calling from God), but can be recognized by members of secular organizations as well (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Dobrow, 2004; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997).

Identity expectations. Individuals do not enact their vocations in a vacuum. Rather, work involves, to some degree, responding to the expectations of various stakeholders. Sometimes those expectations take the form of specific behaviors, and sometimes they are ontological expectations about how a job incumbent should "be." Both kinds of expectations emerged in our data. One priest noted, "There is an identity that is forced upon people of what a typical priest should be, by the congregation" (priest #19-M). Another interviewee described that imposed identity by saying, "I think for me the boundaries are the most important thing. It is so easy for people to assume that a priest is boundaryless. . . . It sort of feels like we are a non-person" (priest #6-F). She also noted how depersonalization occurred in the ministry, saying, "When we are invited to dinner [by parishioners], they are inviting *the priest*, not *Susan*."

The behavioral expectations various stakeholders have for priests also tend to stem from identity/image norms of the occupation and have observable consequences. For example, one interviewee noted, "Some of those characteristics . . . that a congregation forces onto a priest would be those of nurturer, problem solver, workaholic" (priest #19-M). The result of these identity demands was a perception by the priests that living up to the sum of the expectations was "not something that can be humanly done; I think the expectations are superhuman" (priest #3-M).

Strong situations. In addition to ongoing expectations placed on them by various stakeholders, our interviewees reported how particular events, circumstances, or situations could cue identity demands. Unlike the general identity expectations just described, these were temporary demands that ebbed and flowed, which made normalizing them more difficult (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002). According to identity theory, situational influences can affect the cueing and enacting of salient roles (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Mischel (1977) articulated the notion of a strong situation as one in which all individuals involved clearly understand the behaviors certain people are to enact. For our sample, these shared understandings created contexts in which being a priest involved specific identity demands. Ashforth's term "situational relevance," defined as "the degree to which a given identity is socially appropriate to a given situation" (2001: 32) is a good conceptual fit here. For our sample, situational pulls on identity ranged from the simple to the profound. For example, one priest noted this: "Every time the phone rings at three o'clock in the morning, I don't answer it as a person, I answer it as a priest" (priest #58-M). Another noted that when a priest is in a position of power, such as at a funeral service or in counseling sessions, the situation dictates a set of behaviors that help the people in need and do not cross inappropriate interpersonal or social boundaries.

In sum, the priesthood exerts strong identity demands on its members. These demands often start years before they enter the priesthood, during the phase of "being called," continue throughout seminary, and exist for many priests throughout their tenure in the Church. We note here, too, that although we have documented several *occupation-specific* identity demands for our study, we would argue that many occupations have similarly themed yet particular identity demands. Priests face a calling from God and identity demands related to perceived piety, yet individuals in many other occupations also experience a deep sense of calling at work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Dobrow, 2004; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997); identity demands of professionalism, political presentation, reputation, etc. (Alvesson, 1994; Hall, 1972); and strong identity-invoking situations (Ashforth, 2001; Michel, 1977).

Research Question 2: Identity Tensions for Occupation Members

In our second research question, we sought to understand the tensions experienced by those in a demanding occupation. Recall that whereas identity demands are situational, identity tensions are experienced by individuals. Our review of the literature primed our awareness of the concept of overidentification, but we also sought to document other potential identity tensions. We therefore constructed questions to probe for possible individual-level consequences of being in a demanding occupation. These questions elicited interviewees' reflections on how the occupation had affected them over time, what the vocation asked of them as individuals, whether they could "be themselves" in

their work, and whether certain circumstances were particularly taxing or identity-demanding. In this section, we present findings on three cognitive states that, we posit, often result from membership in a demanding occupation or other social identity: overidentification, identity intrusion, and lack of identity transparency. In the subsequent section, we then explore a host of responses to these problematic cognitive states.

Overidentification. Most of the priests in our study clearly experienced overidentification. Indeed, our interviewees sometimes used the word "overidentification" on their own volition (without prompts from us), suggesting both the prevalence of the issue and the usability of the term itself. One priest described it these terms:

> *Interviewee*: [It's] when the role becomes all that there is. In other words, when you can't get at the person behind the mask, so to speak. I suppose when there is a total identification.
>
> *Interviewer*: I'm interested in the phrase that you used, "total identification." Can you elaborate more on that?
>
> *Interviewee*: It is as though there isn't a living, growing person behind the collar. It seems to me there is a rigidity about the person. It feels like that if you sort of said the wrong thing or did the wrong thing, they'd break. . . . It's like when you build the wall and it all depends on one brick. If you pull that out, it comes tumbling down. (priest #48-F)

Contrasting overidentification with a healthy level of identification was a common way for interviewees to articulate what the former meant to them. For example, one priest said, "If you begin to let the priesthood determine who you are . . . then I think you are taking it too seriously. If the clothes can become you and you not the clothes, then I think you are in the right space" (priest #11-M). Others chose to focus on behavioral manifestations in order to describe overidentification. For example, interviewees told us of their dismay and disapproval of other priests whose own spouses referred to them as "Father," at the request of the priests themselves. Another priest reported how overidentification had played out in his own life:

> [It's] over-involvement in the parish, doing too much, doing too many things, having all my creative thoughts go into what would be nifty to do in the parish and not any other part of my life. So, letting my wife run my family and our marriage. "Whatever you want dear, is fine," . . . "Oh, I don't have any opinion, whatever you want is fine," that kind of thing. Not having any energy left to think about any other part of my life. That is all, to me, overidentification. (priest #42-M)

Interestingly, more priests reported *others* as having problems with overidentification (42) than reported experiencing it themselves (36). This breakdown suggests that others recognize and/or acknowledge overidentification in an individual somewhat more readily than the overidentified person him- or herself does. As an occupation takes over an individual's identity, or when the individual's need for inclusion is high, it may become very difficult for the individual to notice the overidentification. The absence of recognition could also be a result of social comparison processes, as individuals would resist categorizing themselves with a negatively assessed group (e.g., those caught in overidentification). Similarly, from a psychoanalytic perspective, this could be a classic case of a defense mechanism called "projection identification," in which individuals split off aspects of themselves that they deem undesirable and project them onto someone else (Freud, 1936; Klein, 1975).

Identity intrusion. On the opposite end of that inability to perceive overindentification, however, we documented other priests' clear ability to sense that the occupation was asking too much of their personal identities and/or that they had to give up important parts of themselves to be good priests. We called this phenomenon "identity intrusion": clearly perceived invasion of one's personal identity by the social identity. A majority of our interviewees articulated experiences or perceptions of this for themselves. Sometimes identity intrusion was illustrated by giving up of one's personality: "I have given up the guy who was fun loving, whimsical, and at times reckless" (priest #28-M). Other times identity intrusion was manifested by a deeper sacrifice of personal identity, either for a perceived greater good or for undeserving reasons, as in the following example, in which the stole (a long band of cloth worn by clergy during ceremonies) is a metaphor for sacrifice:

> I think the weight of [the vocation] is heavy. I think the stole is shaped like a yoke for a reason. It really is. It is a yoke and it binds you. . . . It means you can't do what you want to do sometimes, because it is wrong. We have to catch ourselves. Our own impulses, our own desires, our own desires to be negative and nasty and selfish and blissful or whatever. Fill in the blank. I think as a priest, because we wear the stole, we are more aware of it. I don't know if that is fair. (priest #40-M)

Lack of identity transparency. The third identity tension we identified in our data was that priests often felt they had to mask their unique individual identities because of the higher-order identity of the priesthood. That is, they believed

that their "true selves" often couldn't be revealed to parishioners or the general public because those true selves were incongruent with what a priest should do, say, or be. So, whereas *identity intrusion* is the perceived encroachment of the occupational demands on one's identity, a *lack of identity transparency* is the perceived inability to show one's identity to others. For example:

> You know, I used to read comic books. I can't go out to a comic book store and buy a comic book anymore, really. What would it look like to people? Not that that changes who and what I am ontologically, but . . . I wish I didn't have to worry so much about what people would think. . . . I'm doing something that is just something that most people would do, getting the view that, "Oh no, but you are the priest." (priest #3M)

Our interviewees reported a wide variety of aspects of their own senses of self that they felt they could not reveal to parishioners, fellow clergy, and/or the general public because of their priestly identity and the need to uphold a certain image. Examples ranged from behaviors (e.g., not swearing, not speeding) to personality characteristics (e.g., being too playful, being too overbearing).

Research Question 3: Identity Work Tactics

Thus far, our focus has been on the nature of a demanding occupation and the identity tensions resulting from being a member of it. Our data have by necessity, then, presented situational factors of the occupation, and some common individual-level results of those factors. In this section, we acknowledge that occupational incumbents need not be merely passive recipients, but rather, can actively respond and adapt to these intense demands via *identity work*. As Kunda (1992) argued, normative demands in the workplace are only one side of the control equation because occupation members need not be passive objects of control, but are free to react. He noted, "Members are active participants in the shaping of themselves and of others. They may—at various times—accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, conform, and define and redefine the demands and their responses. In other words, they create themselves within the constraints imposed on them" (Kunda, 1992: 21).

Our third research question, then, focused on the "how" of identity work—namely, the tactics that members of a challenging occupation might use to respond to the identity demands and tensions facing them. We therefore asked specific questions probing for how priests responded to these various demands and tensions. Through our grounded theory process, we discovered several distinct tactics; after coding and analyzing all 60 interviews, we organized these tactics into three broad classifications of identity work: *differentiation, integration,* and *neutral/dual-function tactics*. Although some of these tactics overlap somewhat with conventional coping tactics, we carefully excluded from our counts tactics that were not clearly identity-related, hence preserving unique contributions of the study that went far beyond existing coping models. That is, if we saw a particular tactic in the data but it was not linked to identity work, we did not count it in the data tabulations. We note also a key proviso of our use of the term "tactics": we found a mixture of strategies the priests had *purposefully* invoked as tactics and strategies that had emerged on their own. Hence, the "tactics" we describe include both consciously invoked stratagems and devices that occurred as more natural responses to identity demands and tensions.

We conducted several analyses on the codes to document and discover any patterns that could inform us even further about identity work strategies. We coded an average of 4.1 tactics per interviewee (a range of 1 to 9). Integrating tactics were mentioned more often than segmenting tactics (44 to 33). Seven interviewees only mentioned using integrating strategies; 14 only mentioned differentiation strategies; and 39 mentioned using both kinds of strategies.

Underlying our classification of these tactics into the three broad types was our discovery that a fundamental difference in how priests defined themselves vis-à-vis the priesthood concerned a distinction between an ontological and a functional view of the priesthood. A priest who took the former perspective said, "Upon ordination, an ontological change took place in who and what I am. . . . It's not what I do; it's who I am" (priest #3-M). Contrast that approach with the functional one, represented by this quotation: "I have more of a functional understanding of the ordained ministry than an ontological one. That is to say, I am a priest because of the things that I do. . . . I'm not a priest because the Holy Spirit has changed me from ordination on" (priest #34-M). As we shall see below, this definition of "self-in-job" plays an important role in how a priest's individual and occupational identities coexist and in what tactics he or she invokes to counter identity tensions. And although the social identity of the priesthood typically includes a sense of *religious* calling, other *nonreligious* occupations also include a strong sense of calling—even to the degree of occupation incumbents perceiving an ontological change

(Wrzesniewski et. al., 1997). Table 2 presents codes of identity work tactics, along with their descriptions and exemplary quotations.

Differentiation (Segmenting) Tactics

Our interviewees used differentiation tactics to consciously separate personal identity from social identity. These tactics are a form of identity work that serves to separate the "me" from the "we" so that individuality is preserved amidst strong occupational demands. As will be seen, though, the use of differentiation tactics does not inherently indicate a lack of identification with the priesthood; indeed, strong identification can exist while optimal balance is maintained. That is, priests were able to identify strongly with the priesthood, yet separate their personal identities from it. As a whole, these tactics are congruent with the notion of compartmentalization, as described in research on multiple identities and multiple roles (e.g., Breakwell, 1986; McCall & Simmons, 1978).

Separating role from identity. We asked all interviewees, "Is the priesthood something you *do* or is it something you *are*?" Our intent was to surface the "sensemaking" in which the priests engaged by listening to what they said as they thought through the difference between the role (or functions) of a priest as opposed to the identity (or being) of the priesthood. To be sure, answers to this question yielded an important tactic they used to separate the functional duties of being a priest (e.g., running vestry meetings, preparing budgets) from the ontological view of being a priest. (Indeed, in the next section we will see that an *integration* tactic is to merge the role with the identity.) The priests often reminded us about their individuality and nonpriest roles, even while they were acknowledging the consuming identity of the priesthood. Consider this example of a highly conscious yet fluid identity differentiation:

> *Interviewer:* How much does the priesthood define you as a person?
>
> *Interviewee:* I feel like it is all of my being. I can't just discard it. It's [like] a cloth that has been soaked with a stain that is through and through—and yet I am constantly aware of [other] roles. So, when I'm here at work, I am 100% conscious that I am a priest and I'm acting as a priest. When I am home, I am constantly shifting gears and saying, "Now I'm a wife and a mother." Although the priest part of me pops up every now and then, and I'm aware of it. When I'm with friends or whatever, I have to consciously tell myself, "You are being a friend.". . . I see myself as 24/7 and thoroughly soaked with my priestly call and identity and all that [but] I'm also conscious of when I'm operating in which role. (priest #14-F)

With this tactic, the priest negotiated the difference between a role orientation ("This is what I do as a priest") and an identity orientation ("This is who I am because I'm a priest"). In negotiating this distinction, she achieved clarity regarding her degree of identification with the profession. Separating "doing" from "being" a priest leads to gaining some control over the identity negotiation instead of becoming consumed by it. Interestingly, several interviewees used the metaphor of a mask (and consciously putting it on or taking it off) when discussing the interplay between the priesthood and identity, suggesting the active component of managing the "role versus identity" issue. This finding is similar to those from Hewlin's (2003) work on "facades of conformity," in which individuals suppressed expression of their own values and pretended to embrace the values of others (such as an organization or occupation). However, separating role from identity does not inherently involve suppression of one's values.

Setting limits. As noted in the earlier section on identity expectations, priests often feel that they are viewed as "boundaryless" and are not allowed to have the limits of a typical human being. In this vein, we discovered a tactic for setting limits that enabled priests to consciously place a boundary around their or others' expectations. As one interviewee noted, "I think it is partly becoming honest about your own limits as a human being" (priest #42-M). Interestingly, several priests directly linked this tactic with the threat of identity intrusion and/or overidentification, as is illustrated in this example:

> I think that's not because there haven't been times when the church would have wanted too much from me. It is that I have just been real clear about knowing that the church was asking too much and that that wasn't going to happen—that I have limits and I'm okay with that. There was going to have to be a time or a place or a way in which the church didn't get all that they needed from their priest, because I'm only human. If the question was, has the church asked too much of me at times, I guess yeah, the church has *asked*, but that doesn't mean that I've felt overwhelmed by it or that I've given too much, because usually I *won't.* (priest #28-M)

We noticed two temporal orientations within the setting limits tactic. One was to look at the short term and acknowledge that one person could only do so much; that orientation is evident in the previous example. Another was to look at the long term and realize the limitations on the contribu-

TABLE 2
Identity Work Tactics

Tactic	Description	Exemplary Quotation
Differentiation tactics		
Separating role from identity	Marking the difference between the functional ("what I do") and ontological approaches ("who I am").	"For me, it's about detachment . . . Being a priest is part of who I am, but the priestly activities are like, I go home and they are gone. You forget about them." "I'm very aware when I get up early on Sunday morning and the hour it takes me to get ready to come to church, that I am putting on costume and make-up. There is a sense that I am getting into a role. It's me, but it is still a role."
Setting limits	Acknowledge one's capacity to perform the occupational demands.	"Every single thing requires incredible energy—every task, practically. It does demand more of me than I am able to give or it requests more of me than I am able to give. So what I am constantly seeking is to let that go by . . . realizing, 'Well, who the hell do you think you are that you can solve these problems?' You can solve a part, but keeping perspective and trying to disentangle constantly so that you are not feeling like you have to succeed in every single aspect."
Creating an identity hierarchy	Creating a clear order of identities, such as "family first" or "take care of myself first, then others."	"My identity—when I think of myself, I just think of myself as a Christian more than I think of myself as a priest. *A lot more* than I think of myself as a priest. As I've thought about it more, the more I think and pray about that, the more that I think that that is absolutely right."
Enacting ephemeral roles	Stepping or escaping into an entirely different role, such as playing poker, musical instruments, etc.	About refereeing youth softball: "Some days, you know, it is a spring afternoon at 3:00, you have one of those days where you want to take the collar and throw it a mile. All of a sudden you say, 'Oh, I have a game today.' You are behind the plate, calling balls and strikes and it is like therapy."
Flipping the on/off switch	Choosing consciously to make the social identity explicit/implicit at a given time. Asking, "am I 'we' or 'me' *right now*?"	"I'm always a priest, and especially when dressed as a priest, I'm aware of my role. But I also know I'm a person as well, and I don't think I have difficulty separating the two. In fact, there are times when I deliberately take off the 'role' so as to just 'be.'"
Integration tactics		
Merging role with identity	Consciously merging identity and not treating "self" and "role" as separate at all.	"You can always be a priest and at the same time always be yourself. I don't buy into the separateness. . . . Even my kids, sometimes when they want to get my attention, instead of saying, 'Daddy,' they will yell, 'Father Dave.' That is probably a little reflection of what is going on in my life."
Infusing self-aspects into tasks	Unique elements of self (personal identity, personality, life history) incorporated into tasks.	"I think that there are times when you hit this sweet spot of ministry where your identity and your action are kind of one. Then it feels good."
Casting self as emblem	Frame oneself as a symbol of the occupation or the ideologies inherent in it.	"I really feel like I am not only a priest, but a person in a role between God and a new member, who is actually facilitating the building of this connection between a God and a person. It really feels like I am there and that's me and that's what I want to be able to do."
Neutral or dual-function tactics		
Seeking refreshment	Seeking renewal of important individual aspects, for sense of self-preservation/respite, or to avoid burnout.	"As a member of any helping profession, I think you just have to realize that you;ve got to stop helping for a while and take periodic breaks for sleep and rest and refreshment so you can come back and help in a good way the next day."

Continued

TABLE 2
Continued

Tactic	Description	Exemplary Quotation
Involving other people	Allowing/inviting help with identity work from others such as family members, stakeholders, friends, therapists.	"I think having a family has been the best thing to keep me from taking myself too seriously. Because so many times when I have slipped in that direction, it's my family who will sort of bring me back down and say, 'Oh, Dad, you are not like that.'" "Have friends who are not in your parish, or even better, people who don't even go to church, to keep you grounded."
Tapping spiritual resources	Nonsecular approaches; e.g., using spiritual director, finding answers to identity dilemmas in prayer, scripture, worship.	"Where is God in all of this? For me, God is a constant kind of companion. Sometimes . . . he'll say, 'Troy, take a day off. If you don't listen to me, you are going to get hurt.' God is part of all of the process so that relationship kind of helps keep things in balance."

tions of one's full career; that orientation is illustrated in the following example:

> Realize that when you leave the place [current parish], everything that you have done will probably be undone. The place existed one hundred years before you arrive. It will exist two hundred years after you left and all you are is a speed bump in time. (priest #58-M)

Creating an identity hierarchy. One tactic that emerged from our data analysis involved cognitively imposing a hierarchy or pecking order onto various identities. We classified this as a differentiation tactic because ranking important identities that are not occupationally related indicates some separation between self and occupation. Further, priests often used this tactic as a specific way to create a comfortable distance between their personal identities and the demands of the priesthood. Creating an identity hierarchy involves what Ashforth (2001) called the "subjective importance" of a component of identity. The idea of an identity hierarchy is consistent with identity theory, according to which roles and other social identities can be arranged in a hierarchy, with the highest-ranking identities being the more central and relevant to an individual's sense of self (Stryker, 1980). Roles higher in the system are more likely to be acted out (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Hence, when a priest placed something other than the priesthood first, a segmentation of self and vocation occurred. Some examples of other identities that were superordinate to the occupation included being a parent, being a human being, being a child of God, being a spouse, and being a Christian. As one of our interviewees explained, "I think that becoming a mother, that is what my identity is. Even more strongly so than being a priest" (priest #5-F). Similarly, another noted, "I suppose when push comes to shove, I hope I'm a husband and a dad before I'm a priest" (priest #28-M). The cognitive processes involved in creating and maintaining an identity hierarchy can be seen in the following quotation:

> I put my marriage vows first. My vows to my wife, even though I was ordained a priest before I was married. That's just the way I do that. It's very important to me and it is my vocation, yet it could all be taken away tomorrow. I could be found disabled or unemployed and obviously there would be grief in it, but I would get on with my life. (priest #30-M)

Enacting ephemeral roles. An important distinction that emerged in our data analysis was the difference between ongoing desire to distinguish self from priesthood and desire for a short break from the occupation for the purpose of renewing independence. Whereas the first three differentiation tactics already discussed were ongoing and recursive, the two tactics we describe next were shorter term or sporadic. The first of these shorter-term tactics was enacting ephemeral roles, which involved temporarily escaping one's predominant role set and stepping into an entirely different role, such as playing poker or coaching little league (Zurcher, 1970). We classified role escape as a differentiation tactic because priests used these roles as a mechanism for saying, in essence, that they could move out of the priest role for a while to do something not inherently priestly. For example, one interviewee noted, "You need places where you can step out of that role as a priest" (priest #31-F). We found priests practicing a wide range of ephemeral roles to escape identity pressures, including athletic (joining a kayaking club, bicycling), musical (composing music, joining bands), artistic (painting, writing), and social (joining environmentalist groups, creating informal clubs) ones. For example:

> Well, one of the things that I used to do is I played for ten years in indoor soccer . . . in the adult co-ed league. . . . Most of the people there, with the exception of a couple folks on my team, had no idea who I was. I liked that anonymity because other people could be themselves around me. People who wanted to swear or whatever, they would do that; they wouldn't be apologizing all the time, which is really annoying. Don't apologize for being a human being. . . . That was an escape for me because it was a different world where no one knew who I was and what I did. We had people who were doctors and lawyers and other careers. We never asked anybody what they did. Sometimes we'd find out second hand. "Oh, she's a surgeon at University Hospital." "Oh, really?" You know, you just never knew. Everybody came to it as an interested person who had some soccer background. We'd just get together and play. It was kind of refreshing. It wasn't in my town, so people didn't know me from town. Nobody from my parish was there. (priest #52-M)

Flipping the on/off switch. One aspect of doing identity work involves managing the *when* of identity. Drawing on a term used by two of the priests whom we coded as using this tactic, we called this tactic "on/off switch" to capture actively choosing to make one's priestly identity explicit, either to oneself or to others. This second short-term differentiation tactic is illustrated by the following vignette: A priest had asked one of his parishioners to housesit while the family went on vacation. Upon returning home from vacation, he found the parishioner dead drunk on their couch, with the house a mess. He recounted:

> I literally walked in the door and the dog ran up to greet us and [the parishioner] was just sitting in the chair. I went up to him and said, "Are you okay?" He said, "I'm drunk." A little switch in my head went off and I said, "Okay, I'm working." I knew that my wife and my son would do what needed to be done for the house and for the animals. I needed to focus 100 percent of my attention on him and his needs. I did so for the next about five or five-and-a-half hours, until I drove away from the hospital where I put him in a detox unit. I just willingly listened to his request. So after being intensively with my family for the previous two-and-a-half to three weeks, I had to be completely away from them for the next five to six hours, attending to the needs of this guy. (priest #1-M)

A priest's having the option of being "on" or "off" demonstrates differentiation between self and occupation in that there is an option other than always being identified ("on"). And, just as the identity switch can be turned "on," it can be turned "off."

Other interviewees recounted stories to us in which they would consciously decide to "turn on" the priest identity, either directed to themselves as a personal reminder of who they were, or directed toward others in order to convey a priestly image on appropriate occasions. At its core, the on/off switch tactic allows for two separate cognitive states to co-exist—the priest identity being "on" or being "off." Hence, while the turning of the switch into the "on" or "off" position is a short-term tactic, the ongoing presence of these two states is an acknowledgement of differentiated identity in the long term.

Integration (Blending) Tactics

Taking the opposite direction from the differentiation tactics for identity work we have thus far detailed, the priests used integration tactics to blend their individual identities with the occupational and/or organizational identity. These tactics served to fuse the "me" with the "we" to varying degrees, moving the individual closer to identity integration. Not surprisingly for such an identity-challenging occupation, we found fewer integration tactics than differentiation tactics. We posit that the presence of such strong identity demands (as illustrated by the findings for Research Question 1) creates a circumstance in which integration often needs no cognitive attention at all, for it is more a default condition in the absence of any active identity work; overidentification can occur fairly naturally if nothing counters it. Nonetheless, we found and classified active integration tactics. Specifically, we identified three distinct yet related tactics for this type of identity work: merging role with identity, infusing "self-aspects" into tasks, and casting self as emblem. These tactics are congruent with previous research on how multiple social identities can be integrated (e.g., Erikson, 1959).

Merging role with identity. Above, we described the tactic of *separating* role from identity, which meant that priests consciously distinguished what they did from who they were. Our analysis also revealed a parallel tactic that was used for integrating self with vocation. This tactic is employed by *merging* the role (what they did) with the identity (who they were). In essence, the tactic involves not treating "self" and "priesthood" as at all separate from one another. Often underlying this tactic was the individual's belief in an ontological change upon ordination to the priesthood—a change from one kind of being to another through which he or she was made one with the priesthood. Others noted a more gradual change over time, as the occupation slowly changed who they were. Interestingly, some interviewees even had difficulty pro-

cessing our questions about the priesthood possibly being different from themselves, saying, for instance, that they didn't understand or couldn't answer the question. For example:

> It's just part and parcel of every cell in my body. I'm a dad. I'm a husband. I'm an outdoors man. I'm a priest. It's just a character issue, identity issue. It all goes together. I can't imagine not being one. I have no idea what I would do if I wasn't a priest. . . . As our Church history professor said, . . . "If you ain't delivering the milk, you ain't a milkman." That's an odd thing about the Anglican theology is that you are a milkman whether you deliver the milk ever again. You still are. You are a priest. You are a priest whether you have your collar on or not. You are a priest while you are being a dad. You are a priest while you are being a husband. *You are a priest. So, integrate. Learn how to do all that, together.* . . . Learn how to have every piece of what you do be a priest. When there are pieces of you that aren't behaving like a priest, confess it and work on it. (priest #40-M)

In our outline of differentiation tactics, we noted how several priests described their identity with an on/off switch metaphor. One priest also used that metaphor in relation to integration, but he saw the "light" as always on, framing the priesthood as completely intertwined with his personal identity. This was his response to being asked if he introduced himself to new people as a priest:

> To me it is not important whether they know or don't know . . . whether I am in costume or out of costume. It is a fundamental identity to who I am. It doesn't matter. It's not like the shirt is an on switch. The ministry and the nature of ministry go on out of costume, out of uniform, off the church grounds. (priest #26-M)

Infusing self-aspects into tasks. Whereas the tactic of merging self with role involves a full integration of self and occupation, we also documented a tactic that involved taking *aspects* of oneself and infusing them into tasks of the role. In this tactic, priests would identify elements of their own identities, personalities, or life histories and inject them into their work. As one of the individuals using this tactic noted, "How I live out the vocation emerges out of who I am. . . . For the most part I feel I bring myself to the task. So how I am a priest emerges out of who I am" (priest #36-M). Another priest spoke of her former career as an actress and how she would invoke various acting strategies when performing priestly duties such as counseling and conducting worship services. Several gave examples of life experiences (divorce, abuse, past jobs, marital problems, etc.) that they would carry into their philosophy of being a priest and/or into their relationships with parishioners or other clergy to bring a part of themselves into the work. One interviewee described this infusion this way:

> I've learned to say to people, "God doesn't call me to be Father Smith. He calls me to be Danny." People say, "What's your big calling?" They call me "Father" or "Reverend." I always say, "God calls me Danny." That blows them out of the water because that wasn't the answer they expect. God doesn't call me to be Father Smith. He calls me to be myself. I've come to realize that only as I'm comfortable being myself, can I be a good priest. (priest #46-M)

Casting self as emblem. In this tactic, priests framed themselves as symbols of the occupation or the ideologies inherent in it. That is, they cast themselves as not merely casual representatives (like employees representing a company) but as embodiments of a social identity; they saw who they were as individuals as directly tied to how they embodied the priesthood for others. In this population, the terminology often involved the notion of being a "vicar," or the vicarious representation of the Church or the priesthood to people. In essence, the presence of this tactic meant seeing oneself as the Church or the priesthood, as explicitly casting oneself in this symbolic role. (Note that although almost all the interviewees spoke of priests *generally* as representing the Church, we coded this tactic as present only when an interviewee specifically discussed being a symbol as part of her or his own identity, interweaving the notion of vicarious representation with their own identity work.) As is seen in the following example, this tactic involved priests allowing the symbol of the occupation to define themselves, and we therefore classified it as an integration tactic:

> *Interviewee:* You can't separate *me* from the Episcopal priest, but there is a sense that I disappear into that identity. The more serious the situation is, the more I do that.
>
> *Interviewer:* So is it that you are less yourself in those serious situations?
>
> *Interviewee:* No, in a way it is I am almost more authentically myself. I'm not, I'm just not worried about what I am feeling. It's like I don't want my own anxiety or my own feelings to kind of get in the way because it is not about me at those moments. I'm bringing people something that is so much larger than me, than I am. I'm bringing them all the two thousand years of Christian tradition and the comfort of the Church and the sacraments and Holy Scripture. I'm kind of bringing all this to them. How I feel about it is completely irrelevant. Yeah, I do think I disappear, but in a kind of paradoxical way, I become more fully authentic. So it is very much

> who I am, but I just don't matter anymore. (priest #38-F)

This example demonstrates how the tactic of casting self as emblem involves the acknowledgement that "it's not about me" and it "is so much larger than me." Coupled with that statement is the imagery of disappearing while becoming more authentic, illustrating how this tactic involves enveloping the individual with the occupation and all its trappings and ideologies. It is as if by being a vicarious representation of something greater than the self that the individual is both "lost" (in that she disappears into the calling) and "found" (in that she finds herself in the process). Through being ensconced in the higher call and ideology of the vocation, the individual identity merges with the occupation.

It is worthwhile to briefly compare the three integration tactics. Infusing self-aspects into work and casting self as emblem still involve an acknowledgement that self and occupation are different, even while they advocate the incorporation of self into the job or calling. Merging role with identity, by comparison, does not recognize or advocate any separation of self and occupation at all, but seeks to treat them as the same thing. Merging can be seen, then, as a "trump card" tactic in that it might obviate the need for *any* segmenting tactics at all.

Neutral or Dual-Function Tactics

The third broad set of tactics that emerged from the data were neither inherently segmenting nor integrating. Rather, they were mechanisms that were part of the identity work that could facilitate either differentiation or integration. Specifically, we identified three distinct yet related tactics for this type of identity work: seeking refreshment, involving other people, and tapping spiritual resources.

Seeking refreshment. This tactic involved priests' recharging their occupational batteries by engaging in behaviors that removed them temporarily from the function and/or identity of the occupation. The recurrent theme we documented was that time away from the occupation was healthy and necessary. Practices ranged from the elaborate and highly structured (sabbaticals) to the mundane and unstructured (periodically finding a quiet time and place for reflection). Several interviewees described a physical and psychological space for retreat, such as "a place that is just for me where I can work out the stuff, emotionally, that happens at church or at home" (priest #20-F). Other examples of behaviors included taking strategically timed vacations (especially after labor-intensive times such as Easter or Christmas) and scheduling one weekend off per quarter.[8] The following captures the effect the priests sought: "It gives me a chance to not have to worry about the burden of the responsibility that I have, to just sort of get refreshed and relaxed and to have a break from my normal routine" (priest #16-M).

Several priests invoked the metaphor of a Sabbath when describing various refreshment activities. For example, one said,

> Keep a day off. God took a day off once a week. I've heard clergy say things like, "When I work on my day off, I'm giving God two gifts: I'm giving him my work plus my day off. . . ." It makes me sick. I tell them that. I warn young clergy that you know there is a commandment, keep the Sabbath day holy. It is a commandment; it's not a suggestion. . . . In terms of keeping the Sabbath holy, it's not just going to church on Sunday, it's taking a twenty-four period to rest. . . . [Clergy need] to have in their life as a habit a near sacrosanct day of the week so that everybody knows that. It's not like, "Oh, poor guy needs a rest." It's more like, "This is part of my worship. This is the way I serve God and you can and should, too." (priest #43-M)

At first it might seem more appropriate to classify seeking refreshment as a differentiation tactic, since the essence of it is removal from the identity of the priesthood. We classified this tactic as neutral/dual purpose, however, because we found evidence of its use even within an identity-integrating framework. That is, even those priests who framed the priesthood as inherently integrating advised seeking personal respite and refreshment, as is illustrated in the following passage:

> I don't think that you can really separate yourself from the priesthood. That's who you are. That's just an overriding factor in your life. I can say you need to make time for yourself apart from the functions of a priest. You need to find the time or you need to remove yourself from that for recreation, rest, relaxation, renewal, refreshment. Because if you don't do that, it will consume you. (priest #37-F)

[8] Seeking refreshment is somewhat similar to the differentiation tactic of enacting ephemeral roles. Indeed, an ephemeral role can be one way to seek refreshment. However, ephemeral roles involve active, conscious entry into some role other than the occupation, whereas seeking refreshment does not inherently involve enacting any role at all. That is, one does not need to *engage* in another role to seek refreshment, but to *disengage* from the function or identity of the occupation.

Note how the individual focused on the need for refreshment from the *functions* of the priest rather than on refreshment from the *identity* of a priest. Similarly, another priest discussed using a vacation for personal refreshment while maintaining that she did not want to distance herself from the priesthood by going on vacation.

Involving other people. As noted, priests face unusually strong behavioral and identity demands from many people around them (parishioners, staff members, the general public, etc.). Interestingly, we discovered that a common identity work tactic was to strategically involve people around them so as to ameliorate the strong occupational demands. That is, while some people represented a *source* of identity demands, others were used as a way to *negotiate* identity demands. Our interviewees identified specific tactics utilizing other individuals, and we found two broad categories within this tactic. First was the notion of surrounding oneself generally with supportive people. As one interviewee put it,

> You need to surround yourself, or I do anyway, with people who help me to focus on enjoying my life and enjoying the other commitments that I have like my marriage, my family. I rely on people around me to help me keep the balance. (priest #8-M)

Similarly, other interviewees recommended establishing diverse social networks "so that you can call on other people–other priests, lay people, leadership—who can help you" (priest #18-M).

The second broad category in this tactic was to target how *specific* individuals or groups could alleviate identity demands. For example, several interviewees spoke of their spouses as being a good check on their not overidentifying with the priesthood; spouses would comment on signs or symptoms of overidentification that the priests themselves had not picked up on. Similarly, priests in our sample specifically mentioned using professional therapists as a helpful identity work tool. Several others had created or joined "colleague groups" composed of individuals with whom they shared a vocation and could talk in occupational jargon, share stories, and so forth. On the other end of the continuum, however, several priests discussed their need to find people completely disconnected from the parish, Church, and priesthood in order to escape the strong occupational demands. Finding such an individual or group would allow the priests to be themselves as people or, in other words, to achieve the identity transparency so often denied them by others. One priest gave a particularly colorful example:

> I just realize how important it is to have friends and colleagues outside of my parish with whom I can be completely myself. You said this was confidential, so, we get together, with this one [group of] people, my wife and I together. And we say we're going to have a "f*** fest," where . . . we can use any language we want. We are so sick of people apologizing for saying "damn" or whatever in our presence because we are the minister. We get together and we have a good time. We let it fly with anything we want to say and you know, it's great. Those are really, really important friendships and resources, really to have. (priest #35-M)

Tapping spiritual resources. Perhaps appropriately for this population, we documented several types of spiritual resources interviewees drew upon to negotiate identity demands and tensions. The priests mentioned specific spiritual practices that were linked to their identity work, including prayer, meditation, scripture, formal worship services, and guided spiritual direction. Although most spoke about having some kinds of spiritual practices in their lives, we counted only those instances in which the practices were directly linked to identity work. For example, this priest spoke of the intertwining of spirituality and renewing a sense of self:

> Some clergy get burned out because they have been working too much and haven't taken the time for themselves. Others rely too deeply on their inner resources. One of the Christian convictions is that the Holy Spirit is sort of a nuclear fuel rod. You need the strength and energy to do the things you need to do. Some clergy don't rely on God. They try to rely on their own inner resources. You can get burned out there. I think you need to care for your own spiritual life. You need to take time for yourself. If you are doing those two things you are going to stand a much better chance of being able to give what you need to give. (priest #8-M)

Changes over Time

Individuals begin their career paths with certain preferences for integration or differentiation, yet situational factors and their own identity work can change those preferences over time. As they move through various socialization practices (such as seminary, positions, progressive life stages, etc.), contextual forces (as noted above) interact with original individual preferences. Furthermore, we discovered that individuals changed over time in regard to their perception of what a healthy balance between inclusion and uniqueness meant. That is, as individuals changed and adapted, the ideal location of the quasi-stationary equilibrium of optimal balance often moved relative to earlier levels. Specifically, we asked interviewees if and how their identification with the priesthood had

changed over time. Interestingly, 21 of the priests indicated a movement toward more differentiation from the priesthood identity, and 29 indicated a movement toward more integration. Frequently, movement away from overidentification still meant strong identification with the priesthood, but at what the priest saw to be a healthier level. For example, one priest said, "I have backed off of that overidentification to the point where I feel like I have a reasonable distance from it" (priest #42-M). Another, however, compared the positive influence of the vocation on him by invoking a C. S. Lewis metaphor: a once-deformed man wore a mask for so many years that "the face had grown to conform to the very handsome mask, rather than what had been before" (priest #53-M). Here are further examples of movement over time toward, respectively, differentiation and integration:

> In the beginning, I wanted my collar on all the time. The only time I took it off was probably in the shower. . . . [Now] I think I rest easier. It felt very heavy, it felt like I had to do everything right in the beginning because of what I had chosen to do. I allow myself much more leeway to be human now. I also recognize that there are a lot of other parts of who I am too. I'm a wife, I'm a mother, but I think for me the predominant role is that identity. That's really what I was called to do. (priest #2-F)

> One way to say [it] is [that] it has dropped from my head to my heart. That's one sort of metaphor. Another is to say that as I was ordained a priest, I put on the vestments and that made me a priest from the outside in. Then over time, I think this is a maturity in any deep vocation as a teacher, as a physician, as a musician, as an artist. . . . Initially you can be enamored with the image, the symbol, the trappings of the office, the public affirmation, . . . how it sort of functions in society. But, if it is a real vocation, it's not from the outside in; it's from the inside out. . . . I mean, there is something inside of me. I felt called and chosen, but what happens is, part of it is going from the doing to the being. It is also sort of from form to content. (priest #30-M)

DISCUSSION

We began with three research questions dealing with (1) the nature of situational identity demands placed on those in a challenging occupation; (2) identity tensions resulting from these identity demands; and (3) how occupational members engage in identity work in response to these identity demands and tensions. We addressed these research questions by: (1) showing that a sense of calling, identity expectations, and strong situations work together as intense identity demands on members of a challenging occupation; (2) demonstrating how the tensions of overidentification, identity intrusion, and lack of identity transparency are associated with these intense identity demands; and (3) documenting a wide range of tactics that differentiate or integrate the individual and occupational identities, or otherwise facilitate the search for optimal balance.

Our approach has allowed a thick description of an interesting population and has provided a foundation upon which to develop a more comprehensive theory of identity work. We discuss the implications of our research in the following sections.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

A model of identity work. We used grounded theory techniques to create a conceptual model that explains how individuals engage in identity work. We drew upon Lewin's field theory to illustrate the dynamics of the model. Lewin argued that any field is in a continuous state of adaptation and that "life is never without change, merely differences in the amount and type of change exist" (1948: 199). Lewin used the term "quasi-stationary equilibrium" to indicate that although a field may experience some stability, it is always subject to change. We propose that optimal balance in identity is a type of quasi-stationary equilibrium, and our conceptual model illustrates how individuals respond to changes in an identity field to maintain that equilibrium. For example, individuals' different responses to identity demands will be based on how they frame a potential imbalance. In one scenario, an individual who perceives too much identity tension toward the collective (e.g., a threat toward overidentification) would be more likely to engage in identity work by employing differentiation tactics. These types of tactics are invoked to counteract the overidentification, identity intrusion, and/or lack of transparency and counterbalance a need for inclusion. This approach is illustrated by those priests in our study who acknowledged the greediness of the priesthood and had taken steps to create/maintain a clearer sense of self. As occupation is but one target for social identification, we can envision a similar response in reaction to other types of social identities encroaching upon an individual, such as a business organization, a church, a family, or a club that is demanding too much of the person's identity.

In another scenario, an individual who perceives too much identity tension toward individuation (e.g., underidentification) would engage in identity work by invoking integration tactics. These tactics are invoked to further integrate the occupational identity with the personal identity. This approach

was illustrated in our study by those priests who did not perceive the priesthood as overly greedy and therefore took further steps to more fully embrace and integrate the priestly identity into their own. A similar reaction could take place for other types of social identities, as well, such as a person throwing him- or herself more fully into a charitable organization in the community, in response to not feeling a part of something more meaningful in life (underidentification). Our theory of identity work, then, illustrates how individuals react when they perceive a particular social identity to be too intrusive or not intrusive enough. We argue, therefore, that although our focus was occupational identity, the mechanisms of identity work toward optimal balance will be similar for other social identities. Specifically, we offer the following propositions to summarize the predictive value of our conceptual model:

Proposition 1. As identity demands toward the collective (e.g., strong situations) exceed optimal balance, differentiation tactics of identity work are employed.

Proposition 2. As identity demands toward individuation (e.g., culture of individualism) exceed optimal balance, integration tactics of identity work are employed.

Proposition 3. As identity tensions toward the collective (e.g., overidentification) exceed optimal balance, differentiation tactics of identity work are employed.

Proposition 4. As identity tensions toward individuation (e.g., identity transparency) exceed optimal balance, integration tactics of identity work are employed.

Relationships among tactics. An as yet undiscussed issue is how the various tactics in our model might relate to one another. Let us first consider the tactics as sets—an integration and a differentiation set. We believe that, as sets, they are not mutually exclusive but are invoked to counterbalance unwanted increases in identity demands and/or tensions. We argue that the same individual can use either set of tactics at different times, according to which direction the imbalance in identity is tending toward at that moment. Indeed, our data support this assertion. Thirty-nine priests in our study reported using both integrating *and* differentiating tactics at different times. That switch from one set of tactics to another might occur fairly quickly and/or often (as frequent negotiation of the balance), or gradually over time (as movement toward one set of tactics during a career).

Second, let us consider the tactics within any given set (differentiation or integration). We believe that people can use specific tactics in a set cumulatively, so that when the utility of one tactic is exhausted, they can invoke another one. For example, if an individual has infused as many self-aspects into work as is deemed possible, he or she may then try casting him-/herself as an emblem of the social identity as a supplemental tactic. Several of the tactics have logical limits—for instance, one can only enact so many ephemeral roles or set so many limits. Therefore, the use of other tactics within a set will provide further force in that direction on the identity field.

Other forces in the field. As our model derived from an occupation in which identity demands are strong, the bulk of our data deal with forces toward *integration* of identities. However, other occupations (indeed, other social identities) may consist of more forces toward *differentiation* of identities. Hence, in addition to the tactics we have outlined from our data, we explore here how other factors will play into the type and intensity of the identity work done by individuals. We suggest here two examples of these other forces, which are representative of potential themes, not exhaustive, and meant to round out the theory-building aspects of the paper. The first is a culture of individualism. All of our priests were embedded in American culture, which is known for its strong individualism (Hofstede, 1984). An individual's cultural background has been shown to be a key source of self-concept and can influence work behavior (Erez & Earley, 1993). Therefore, we argue that the culture in which one is embedded likely affects the perceived level of optimal balance, and therefore, the type and intensity of identity work.

An individual's need for uniqueness also likely affects our model. Previous conceptual and empirical work has demonstrated that individuals vary in their need for inclusion, identification, and/or uniqueness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer, 1991; Glynn, 1998; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). In our data, we found that individuals varied in their preferences for integration or differentiation of their personal and social identities. We speculate that these preferences will affect how identity tensions such as over- or underidentification are experienced and subsequently dealt with via identity work tactics. Specifically, in our model, we argue that a desire for more uniqueness would lead to differentiation tactics, whereas a desire for more inclusion would lead to integration tactics.

Contribution to existing theories. Our study and the conceptual model derived from it add value to several existing theory streams. First, we add to the

rich literature on identification processes. We do this, in part, by detailing more closely the relationship between personal and social identities. Although it has long been accepted that an individual must negotiate various social identities with respect to his or her personal identity, little has been known about the process of doing so, as organizational researchers have focused more on the *state* than on the *process* of identification (Ashforth, 2001; Pratt, 1998). Our model demonstrates a wide array of means used to negotiate identity (differentiation, integration, and dual-function tactics) in response to multiple demands on and tensions within individuals. Further, by interweaving dynamics at both the intraindividual level (personal identity) and the interindividual level (social identity), our work provides a useful nexus where treatments of personal and social identity meet.

In addition to uncovering and classifying the specific tactics from our data, our model offers insights into the very process of identification itself. Specifically, we have articulated the often tenuous nature of identification and many ways that individuals wax and wane with regard to embracing a social identity. An important shortcoming in much existing work on identification is that it typically focuses on *choosing* a social identity (or set of identities), without adequate attention to either (1) how an individual *negotiates* his or her relationship to that identity or (2) the conditions under which that negotiation occurs. Yet, in reality, the identification process does not stop after a social identity is claimed, nor does it occur in a vacuum. Our model demonstrates contextual forces that affect how an individual negotiates social identities, thereby helping researchers understand identification in more detail. This look at forces in an identity field provides a more dynamic view of individuals' search for an optimal balance between personal and social identities. Further, a frequent assumption in extant work in social identity is that individuals can take on and abandon social identities fairly simply, as if they are readily available and easily forgotten. Yet individuals often make considerable investments of time, energy, and more in social identities. These invested individuals may not realistically have the option of simply abandoning a given identity and choosing another. Rather, individuals make occupational and organizational decisions with long-term implications that bind them to a given identity, barring dramatic changes such as retirement or career switching. Our research has provided another perspective on this struggle for optimal balance—one that illuminates an option for individuals who desire or are compelled to remain with a strong social identity (e.g., volunteers in an organization with a strong ideology, or professionals with many years of "sunk costs" in their vocation).

Our findings also extend the interesting but underdeveloped research on identity work. Previous research has tended to focus on externally oriented identity work, work people do to preserve their images with other people. Our work has also looked inward, moving inside the elusive black box of cognition to illuminate the complex ways that individuals work within themselves to manage identity. Further, although there have been piecemeal discussions of the notion of identity work, heretofore, no cohesive, coherent model of identity work had been articulated. We have presented such a model.

Finally, each of these findings contributes to the broader research area of identity management and negotiation. Our model integrates many previously disparate facets of identity research, allowing scholars to see links among important constructs, ranging from individual needs to situational factors and from cultural influences to intrapsychic conflicts. In addition, we have added considerable knowledge about the construct of overidentification, which had been previously theorized but not fully explored. Our work has shown how this process is manifested and how it can be managed. Further, we find great promise in our documentation of two new phenomena of identity tension: identity intrusion and identity transparency. We believe both constructs offer much potential for future research exploration. Understanding identity intrusion gives scholars a new window through which to study dysfunctional identity dynamics to gain new knowledge about how strong social identities encroach upon personal identities. Similarly, identity transparency helps explain the delicate balance between being "true to oneself" while trying to comply with identity demands and role expectations. So although identity intrusion focuses upon a strong situation encroaching upon a personal identity, identity transparency helps to explain varying perceptions of a person's freedom to display personal identity in a given situation—strong or otherwise.

Practical Implications

As mentioned, all occupations exert identity demands on incumbents to varying degrees. Understanding these demands and tactics for managing them has many practical implications. Our findings suggest that identity work tactics can be shared and taught. That is, because the tactics outlined here are applicable to a far broader pop-

ulation than merely priests, people in that broader population could also use them for more successful self-management.

Too often, management research focuses on either the individual level or environmental levels without acknowledging their dynamic interaction. A consequence of that approach to human behavior is that individuals can be seen as recipients of their environment rather than active contributors to it. Yet we found in our research that our interviewees were highly purposeful in molding their occupations. Bearing out Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) view of modern workers, we documented ways that individuals actively crafted their vocational reality rather than passively responding to their environment. Indeed, as one priest put it, being "more intentional and more conscious . . . [is] important to being me and not letting the priesthood swallow me up" (priest #21-F). So, even in the face of strong identity demands, individuals were able to *both* cognitively frame *and* behaviorally mold their vocation in a way that allowed personalization and role variation that preserved their own personal identities—often just enough to recapture their own sense of self while simultaneously losing themselves in their calling. An important contribution of our work is the evidence we have provided that both the cognitive and behavioral components can be enacted for rather radical changes in how individuals perceive and carry out their work.

Although at first glance overidentification might be seen as negative only for individuals, several negative consequences for organizations can also be considered. Dukerich and colleagues (1998), for example, noted that overidentification can impair decision making, engender corruption, and slow down organizational learning and adaptation. Preventing overidentification can therefore be seen as an important managerial goal, and our study offers insights into how this prevention can be managed. Our study also sheds light on two other tensions that are potentially damaging at the organizational level: identity intrusion and lack of identity transparency.

Future Research and Limitations

As is the case with all research designs, ours inherits certain limitations that bear examination. Although we consciously stratified the sample, we found the overarching themes of identity work to be more compelling than a detailed accounting of the differences between subgroups within the sample. That is, the broader study of how priests did identity work provided such rich material that we chose to focus on those higher-level theories and tactics over numerous subgroup comparisons. Future research, however, could examine in more detail various individual and group differences that affect identity work, such as personality profiles, gender, occupational and organizational tenure, and/or age.

It might well be argued that, to varying degrees, *all occupations are demanding and challenging*. Our research has documented the identity demands and responses to those demands in a *particularly* greedy occupation, but we believe that our window into this population has uncovered useful theoretical and practical insights for a far broader array of occupations. Hence, a fruitful line of research could be examining less identity-challenging occupations, or occupations in which incumbents have more varied perceptions of the strength of identity demands. Further, some individuals might consider it a great challenge to respond to work environments with weak identity demands. We speculate that when identity cues are weak or nonexistent, more integrating tactics will be employed. Indeed, we suspect that research in that area could unearth even more detailed integrating tactics and identity demands than our sample revealed. Our sample's chief issue was finding ways to preserve a sense of self; other occupations might push people to find ways to infuse themselves into their work. Or certain occupations might have a wider range of individual interpretation regarding identity demand strength. In terms of our model, the imbalance in the equilibrium would be perceived differently, thereby triggering the opposing tactics of integration rather than differentiation.

For example, the literature on meaningfulness in work may offer a promising starting point in researching how this search for optimal balance might occur in less greedy occupations or among individuals who construct their occupations as less greedy. Meaningfulness in work is an evaluation by individuals of the personal fulfillment found in the roles and tasks they perform (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). An interesting relationship can be drawn here with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) notion of "flow," or a state of total involvement in and extreme intrinsic motivation toward an activity or role. Using our terminology, flow represents an extreme state of the *infusion of self* into work roles wherein there is no meaningful separation between role and identity. Similarly, positive results of integration can be found in research on engagement at work, which has linked individuals' psychological presence in or focus on role activities to role performance (Kahn, 1990; Rothbard, 2001). Hence, whereas we have noted several pitfalls of high role

and identity infusion, it clearly has a dual nature, and the more positive aspects of this infusion can be more fully explored in future work.

An important boundary condition stemming from our data is that, for our sample, the clergy (the "employees") and the Church (the "organization") are so central to each other that the occupational identity and organizational identity have considerable overlap. Thus, we decided that parsing out the occupation from the organization was not as instructive as was treating them as manifestations of the suprasocial identity of "priesthood." Indeed, although our focus was the occupational level as an example of a social identity requiring identity work, we believe our conceptual model holds great promise in explaining many types of social identities. Our model, though grounded in occupational data, should also have considerable value in predicting how identity work functions for a broader array of social identities.

Hence, another clear area for future research is to test the applicability of these identity dynamics with the *organization* as the referent for identity work, as opposed to the *occupation*, as we have done. Identity tensions and demands have already been documented with organizational targets (e.g., Dukerich et al., 1998; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), and we suspect the differentiating and integrating tactics we have identified are transferable as well. Similarly, as all of our priests were in the United States and were therefore embedded in a highly individualistic culture, future research could examine the impacts of a broader array of *cultural* contexts. Studies in other countries that lean more toward collectivism could yield new tactics and/or different emphases in the tactics we documented.

Another limitation of our approach is that qualitative data (generally) and interview techniques (specifically) don't lend themselves well to documenting the *prevalence* of phenomena. Hence, future research could examine the tactics we have generated here and subject them to empirical testing. For example, measures of these tactics could be devised and included in survey research that also measures identification and its individual and situational predictors. Further, our data have not allowed us to precisely match particular tactics with particular identity tensions. We were, however, able to link the broad sets of tactics with sets of identity tensions (i.e., integration tactics were used in response to an overabundance of identity tensions toward individuation, and differentiation tactics were used in response to excessive identity tensions toward the collective). By measuring specific tactics and tensions, future research could link them more closely. We believe that these links would offer considerable insight into the management of identity work under many conditions. That said, our method has allowed for a thick description of multiple phenomena by giving each interviewee the chance to speak in his or her voice. Our iteration between data and literature allowed for broad theorizing that has provided insights into the process of identity work.

We believe our study provides new insights about identity work, a phenomenon about which little had been known. It also provides a novel and fresh look at identity by viewing identity challenges in a demanding occupation. Finally, the study details conditions that can thwart and tactics that can promote optimal balance between personal and social identities.

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APPENDIX

Selected Questions from the Interview Protocol

1. What led you to become a priest?
2. Would you give me a few characteristic qualities of what you would consider to be a typical priest?
3. How would you compare yourself to those qualities? Do you think you are a fairly typical priest?
4. What was the transition from the seminary to your first church like?
5. How much does your vocation define you as a person? That is, is the priesthood something you DO or is it something you ARE?
6. Are there times when being a priest feels more like who you really are than merely what you do? What specific times does that occur?
7. Have your attitudes about this changed over time? (From what to what?) What kinds of things prompted that change?
8. To what degree do you feel you can "be yourself" within your vocation? Are there times you can't be the "real you?"
9. Is there such a thing as taking yourself or the priesthood too seriously? Too lightly? Do you know priests who do? Are there ways to prevent this from happening?
10. Are there times when the vocation asks too much of you as a person? Have you had to give up anything about yourself to be a good priest? Can it be too consuming? Does/can the magnitude of the calling sometimes overwhelm some priests? Has that happened to you? Are there ways to prevent it from happening, or is it okay?
11. Are there times when you feel more or less comfortable with people knowing your vocation?
12. What would you recommend to a brand new priest about managing the separation between him/herself and the priesthood?
13. What would you do if for some reason you could no longer be a priest?
14. Have you ever had mixed feelings about your vocation?
15. Have you ever felt apathy or neutrality toward the priesthood? The Church? When? How did you resolve that?
16. Are there times when you've wanted to distance yourself from the priesthood? (Or, have you been embarrassed by the priesthood or the Church?) The Church? When? How did you resolve that?
17. Are there times you wish you had done something else for a career? When do you think about that? Have you ever thought about leaving the priesthood either temporarily or permanently? When?
18. If your son or daughter came to you and said he/she wanted to become a priest, what would your reaction be?

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