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Running Identities and Interaction Ritual Chains

Jonathan Malonzo Dial

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

RUNNING IDENTITIES AND INTERACTION RITUAL CHAINS

Jonathan Dial

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

        This thesis links two theories, Interaction Ritual Chains (IRC) with Identity Control Theory

(ICT), through a multi-method study of group training programs for beginning runners. First,

group training programs are identified as IRCs. Second, we see that IRCs produce identities

within individuals which reflect the IRC's activities and its group members. Third, we look at

how IRCs of varied strengths produce identities of varied strengths. Fourth, we compare

different types of group training programs and their abilities to develop identities. Finally, we

conclude that IRCs are mechanisms which individuals are able to use as part of the self-

verification process.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Luz Benigna Avelino Malonzo Dial. Thank you for being

my patron and encouraging me to think.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Introduction:

Running is commonly believed to be one of the most effective forms of exercise in terms of cardiovascular activity, and marathons are considered to be the "holy grail" of running. This is because training for marathons is an extensive, extremely demanding process which requires high levels of motivation and commitment. The long distance covered in a marathon (26.2 miles) is by no means easy to complete, and it almost always requires a training period of four months to a year. Typically, marathon training programs require half-an-hour to several hours of running per day, four-to-six days per week. In addition to the long hours actually spent running, other considerations include changes in diet, the cost of equipment, medical care (if necessary), race fees, and (often) the cost of travel and accommodations. There are also social costs. For instance, hours spent running are hours spent away from family, school, or work. Training for marathons can also be psychologically taxing. Regardless of how well someone has prepared for a marathon, many unforeseeable factors can force her or him to be unable to attend the race or cause a poor performance at race time. Failures of this nature have the potential to cause people to give up their efforts and can even send them into a state of depression.

Despite these costs, marathon running is one of the fastest growing sporting events in the United States. Running USA, an organization dedicated to marathons, provides statistics on

their website, www.runningusa.org, which follow the growth of marathons from 1976 –

2009: in 1976, there were only 25,000 recorded marathon finishers; by 1980 there were

143,000; 1990 brought 224,000 finishers; 1995 had 293,000; 2000 had 353,000; 2005 had

395,000; and 2009 had 467,000 finishers. There was a 9.9% jump in race finishers between

2008 and 2009. This equals more than the combined growth from the previous four years. In

other words, 42,000 more people finished marathons in 2009 than did in 2008. Also, 2009 saw

the addition of more than 30 new marathons inside the United States alone. In 1999, only 45

marathons had over 1,000 finishers. In 2008, 77 marathons reported more than 1,000 finishers.

In 2009, 88 marathons reported more than 1,000 finishers. There are no signs that this growth

trend is slowing.

Note, however, that this growth rate is specific to the number of actual marathon finishers.

It does not include the possibly even larger number of people who set out to finish a marathon

but were unable to do so. Considering these numbers, it is not that far of a stretch to claim that

the number of people training for a marathon today is probably higher than at any other point

in history.

There have been studies that analyze the motivations of marathon runners (Masters and

Ogles 1995, 1998; Havenar and Lochbaum 2007, Jeffrey 2010). Masters and Ogles (1995) found

that most marathon runners are motivated by *physical* (health and fitness) concerns,

achievement (competition with one's self or others), *social* (recognition and affiliation)

concerns, and *psychological* (self-esteem) issues. They also found that veteran marathoners

developed a "marathon identity" which became a major source of motivation for them to

continue running marathons. Regardless of their reasons, we can be sure that people who run

marathons *are* motivated to do so; and, more people are doing it than ever before.

There are many types of training programs for runners, but not all of them focus on

marathons. For instance, most high schools have a track and cross-country team. Colleges and

universities also have those programs but on a much more competitive level. There is even a

professional level of training for "elite" runners. Those are people that you might see on

television breaking world records.

Now, there are also training programs for adults who have never been runners or who have

fallen out of the habit. These programs are usually designed for people who want to start

running but do not know how. There are a wide variety of training programs, such as 5k (five

kilometer) training, 10k training, half-marathon training, marathon training, and even triathlon

training.

There are charity groups such as the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's *Team in Training*

(TNT) who offer marathon training, professional coaching, and a social support network in

exchange for help with raising funds for their fight against cancer. While charity programs have

proven to be successful in both fundraising and training runners, they are not the only type of

organizations which offer group training for people attempting to become runners.

Take RunTogether (a pseudonym for a company in the Mid-South) as an example. We will

closely examine RunTogether later. Although this company offers many of the same things as

TNT, it does not require participants to raise money for a charity cause. Instead, runners pay a

fee directly to the company in exchange for a marathon training program which includes

coaching and a social support network. Thus, the major difference is that RunTogether and its

clients, rather than having to focus on fundraising *and* training, focus entirely on training for a

marathon.

The typical dropout rate of people from exercise programs within the first six months is

around 40-50% (Dishman 1982). However, this rate does not indicate the intensity or duration

of the exercise programs. In an interview I conducted with Mike Madsen (a pseudonym), a

cofounder of RunTogether, I learned that the company boasts a success rate of around 60%.

Although RunTogether's success rate seems to match the expected dropout rate, if we consider

the high costs associated with training for a marathon, it seems that the company is more

successful than could be expected.

Although there are many types of training programs for runners, each is effective to varying

degrees. Take, for example, the training program offered by In Motion (a pseudonym), an

exercise equipment and service company in the Mid-South. I will show that their training

program, like that of RunTogether, is an interaction ritual chain. However, by closely examining

the differences between the *ingredients* and *outcomes* of both of these training programs, we

will be able to see that one is *stronger* than the other. My question, then, is why are some

training programs more capable than others at making runners out of non-runners? One

possible answer is that each training group is designed with different objectives in mind; thus,

each program leads to different *outcomes*.

In this study, adopting a multi-method approach, I gathered data from interviews with training group members, running coaches, and program directors; participant observation in a half-marathon training program; and from a survey of half-marathon and 5k racers. First, I will use this data to show that training programs for runners are interaction ritual chains by analyzing RunTogether's marathon training program. We will see that RunTogether is a strong interaction ritual chain which results in strong running identities. Then, I will compare RunTogether's program with In Motion's half-marathon group training program. This will show how interaction rituals of different strengths lead to differing outcomes. Next, I will compare several different types of training programs, including solitary training rituals, for runners. This will add further support to the claim that interaction ritual chains of varying strengths lead to varied types of identities. I will also argue that online interactions can be considered interaction rituals; they are merely *weaker* forms of them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Exercise Programs and Identity:

Much of the past research exercise motivations comes from the fields of exercise science and psychology and focuses on specific types of motivation, how motivation affects individuals' willingness to begin and maintain exercise programs, and intervention strategies (Nigg et al 2008, Masters and Ogles 1995). More recent studies have focused on the role that personality plays in determining exercise patterns (Lewis and Sutton 2011, Wininger 2007). These studies have adapted a self-determination approach (Deci and Flaste 1995, Deci and Ryan 1985, Ryan and Deci 2002) which assumes that individuals' behaviors are self-determined, or self-motivated. While this is a useful line of inquiry which incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation, it is heavily focused on the individual's internal needs (i.e. competence, autonomy, and relatedness) and tends to look past the role of society in determining people's identities and behaviors.

Other research has shown that exercise programs have the ability to affect their participants' identities (Adamsen et al. 2009, Lawson 2005, Masters and Ogles 1995, Sabiston et al. 2007). For example, Lawson (2005) studied the effects of sport, exercise, and physical

education programs (SEPE) on individuals and communities. He found that these types of programs have the ability to develop personal empowerment within individuals and collective identities among program participants. "The essence of SEPE work lies in liberating and empowering people, enabling them to eliminate terror, find joy, maximize their freedom, and improve their health and well-being" (Lawson 2005:158).

Adamson et al. (2009) studied young athletic cancer victims. The authors found that the subjects' perceptions of the value of their own bodies and physical abilities dropped significantly as they became more ill and during cancer recovery. However, they also found that the young athletes with cancer were able to recapture some or all of their once high self-esteem through participation in a six-week long exercise intervention program.

Sabiston et al. (2007) studied breast cancer victims and the role of their participation on Dragon Boat teams, which are intended specifically for breast cancer victims) in the recovery process. (Dragon Boats are human-powered boats similar to those used in crew racing.) The authors found that participation on these teams allowed the individual cancer victims to enter a supportive community of women with the same problems. This community enabled these women to cultivate self-empowerment, overcome physical challenges, and develop new athletic identities (Sabiston et al. 2007:419).

Masters and Ogles (1995) studied the motivations of marathon runners with varying levels of experience. They found that beginning runners are more motivated by concerns with health and fitness; mid-level runners are more motivated by a desire for psychological "rejuvenation" and achievement; and veteran runners are motivated by competition, achievement,

psychological rejuvenation, and physical concerns. Furthermore, they found that veteran marathon runners, who have repeatedly successfully completed marathon training programs and races, develop and are also motivated by a "marathon identity" which incorporates all of the previously mentioned sources of motivation with social interaction.

While these studies suggest that there is a connection between exercise programs and identity, they do not explicitly show the mechanism through which training programs affect their participants' identities. This thesis attempts to do just that by demonstrating that individuals use group running programs as a means of developing runners' identities.

Identity Control Theory:

This implies that people are able to *control* their own identities in some way. Indeed, a relatively recent contribution, *identity control theory*, to sociological theories of identities claims that individuals actively create and maintain their own identities. Identity control theory comes mostly from the work of Peter J. Burke (Stryker and Burke 2000, Burke and Tully 1977, Burke 2004, Stets and Burke 2006), but in many ways his ideas are very similar to those of Sheldon Stryker (1968, 1980, and 2004).

Stryker and Burke both focus on the role that social structure plays in determining the behavior and identities of individuals. Both also believe that there are many different social structures in which individuals are involved. Thus, people must develop multiple identities to correspond with the characteristics and demands of differing, specific structures.

These multiple identities are set within a *hierarchy of identities*, and the identities which are more likely to be invoked in multiple types of situations are considered to be more *salient* than others. For instance, the gender identity is involved with most or all situations; thus, gender identities are *very* salient. In his more recent work, Stryker (2004) brings emotions to bear on identity theory by claiming that individuals are more likely to be committed to their social networks if the members of those networks have similar emotions. Thus, *stronger emotional commitment* to the group with *shared emotions* creates *stronger outcomes*, i.e. identities within individuals.

Rather than focusing on the ways in which people are committed to social networks or social structures, Burke focuses more on the role that individuals play in creating their *own* identities and behavior, but he does not completely throw out the role of social structure either. Indeed:

> What is important about [*identity control theory*] is that instead of seeing behavior as strictly guided by internal self-meanings [or by social structures], behavior is the result of the relation between the two. It is goal-directed in that there is an attempt to change the situation to match perceived situational meanings with meanings held in the identity standard [i.e. the self-meanings of an identity], that is, to bring about in the situation the meanings that are held in the standard (Stets 2006: 97).

The role of *commitment* is a key topic within identity control theory (Burke and Reitzes 1991), and may also be what leads individuals into which actions/behaviors they choose. When the idea of commitment first entered into sociological thought, it was seen as a way to study the process in which active individuals initiate and sustain *lines of activity* (Becker 1960, 1964,

Foote 1951, Stets 2006). Other theorists saw commitment as being more about *individuals'*

connections to other individuals (Stryker 1968, 1980) or their *connections to organizations*

(Kanter 1968, 1972). However, Burke and Reitzes (1991) contend that people are not

committed to "lines of activity". Instead, they are committed to a particular *identity standard*

which leads to the maintenance of *consistent lines of action* over time with other *individuals*

and *organizations*.

Burke defines *identity* as "the sets of meanings people hold for themselves that define

'what it means' to be who they are as persons, as role occupants, and as group members"

(Burke 2004a:5). These *meanings* are *perpetually changing* as a result of constant cultural (or

structural) input and comprise an *identity standard*, which serves as the reference point that

individuals compare to the meanings which they acquire in interaction settings. Another way to

say this is that individuals compare the identities to which they are committed (i.e. *identity*

standards) with alternate perceptions of their identities which are acquired in different

situations.

If a situation produces meanings which indicate to the individual that their actions are fully

aligned with their *identity standard*, the individual's identity is verified, or confirmed, and no

changes in behavior are required. However, if a situation causes someone to perceive meanings

which indicate that his or her actions are not completely aligned with their *identity standard*,

identity control theory predicts that the person will take action to "restore the match in

meanings between perceptions and standard" (ibid). Burke claims that this *self-verification*

process is the basis of identity control theory.

All of this is focused mostly on the individual and, as such, seems to be more psychological than sociological. Indeed:

> [Identity control theory] is very individualistic in its formulation: individual actions to change individual perceptions to match individual standards. What makes [the theory] sociological is that identities are tied to positions in the social structure; these positions in turn are defined by our culture. Culture makes available the categories that name the various roles and groups which, from one point of view, make up the social structure. People, as occupants of these positions, apply to themselves (as well as to others) these names as well as the meanings and expectations associated with them, as identities. These meanings (as identity standards) define the identities, as well as constituting the goals that someone located in a particular position obtains and maintains through the mechanism of identity verification. (Burke 2004a:6)

In other words, social structure and culture provide the meanings that comprise the *identity standards*, which *are* actually the *goals* which individuals set for themselves and strive to maintain.

However, Burke is more concerned with the *content* of the goals than with the *means* of achieving them (Burke 2004a:6). His attention to the accomplishment of identity verification is limited to a view of goals as a *process* in which many small goals accumulate to comprise an overall, long-term goal. This implies that individuals are involved in *chains* of identity verification. That is, people move from one small goal to another in the larger process of overall goal achievement/identity verification. However, although Burke claims that the identity verification process is divided into small goals which cumulatively change a person's identity, he

does not devote much attention to *how* these goals are achieved. Instead, he looks more closely at *what* the goals are and how individuals settle on their identity standards.

Interaction Rituals:

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to suggest that *interaction ritual chains* (Collins 2004) are a *mechanism* used by people as part of the *identity verification process*. That is, individuals attempting to make their *perceived self-identity* match their *identity standards* can use interaction ritual chains as a tool in that process; because interaction ritual chains have the ability to change a person's perceived self-identity.

The history of interaction rituals begins with Durkheim's (1912) ideas on ritual and religion found in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. He believed solidarity among individuals is what holds society together, and that this solidarity is a result of religious rituals which produce *shared moments of reality* through shared experiences and sacred objects (or symbols). He considered religion and rituals to be the functions that create and maintain the bonds of solidarity in society (Durkheim 2008: xxxii).

When we look at the work of Erving Goffman (1967), we can see that his approach to studying interaction rituals removed the religious element by focusing on the context, or the situation, in which interactions occur. He saw the *situation* as central to interactions, and he studied the *functional requirements* of situations, or those things which are necessary for

interactions to be successful (Collins 2004: 16). For example, Goffman saw deference as a crucial component of ritual interactions. He believed that we can see how power is played out in relationships between actors by identifying who shows deference to whom. This makes sense in interactions which are set within *social situations* in which individuals have varying levels of power. Thus, we can see that the characteristics of the *situations* in which interactions occur determine the ways in which those interactions are played out.

In *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), Collins agrees with Goffman that in attempting to understand interaction rituals, we need to begin by analyzing the *situations* in which rituals are located (Collins 2004: 22). What is it, though, that distinguishes any situation from an interaction ritual? Collins answers this question by stating that interaction rituals all share a list of *ingredients*: *group assembly*; *barriers to outsiders*; a *mutual focus of attention*; and a *shared mood* (Collins 2004:48).

Group assembly is defined as a situation in which "two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not (ibid)." *Barriers to outsiders* "are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded (ibid)." A *mutual focus of attention* occurs when "[people] focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other's *focus of attention* (ibid)." Finally, a *shared mood* occurs when group members "share a common mood or emotional experience (ibid)." Each of these *ingredients* is required for a situation to be labeled as an interaction ritual.

When combined, the *ingredients* of the interaction ritual (especially the *focus of attention* and *shared mood*) create a *feedback loop* which reinforces itself and leads to *collective effervescence*, or the process in which the ritual's participants are drawn into a *collective consciousness*. "What Durkheim called collective consciousness is this micro-situational production of moments of intersubjectivity" (Collins 2004: 48). Thus, the fans at a sporting event are drawn into a collective consciousness by the shared oohs, aahs, boos, and clapping which accompany the emotional ups and downs of being caught up in the competition. Fans observe the exhilaration building in others and, in turn, grow more excited themselves. Hence, for a brief period, all of the fans are experiencing the same reality.

The *outcomes* of interaction rituals are: *group solidarity* (a feeling of belonging/membership); *emotional energy* in individuals (long-term emotions such as confidence, depression, and initiative in taking action); *symbols or sacred objects* which individuals associate with the group, value, are willing to defend, and which can be used by individual group members to cognitively invoke the group and the interaction ritual; and *standards of morality* (social pressure or rules) which pertain to the appropriate behavior towards the group and its *sacred objects* (Collins 2004: 49). *Emotional energy* is different from *dramatic*, or short-term, emotions. A person's *emotional energy* is the long-term emotions which serve as the baseline from which individuals react to outside stimuli. For instance, if a person with a high level of positive *emotional energy* (i.e. a happy or confident person) goes to a funeral, their *dramatic* (or short-term) *emotions* may turn toward sadness or grief, but it is unlikely that this person will remain sad without subsequent stimuli which maintain that

emotion. This is because his or her long-term *emotional energy* has been affected by long-term positive stimuli through repeated interaction ritual chains.

As noted above, interaction rituals can exist in any situation which contains the necessary *ingredients*. This seems to imply that interaction rituals are everywhere, and they very well may be. However, not all interaction rituals have the ability to hold people's *attentions* for long. If they were, it is likely that no one would be able to stop doing whatever it is that they are doing. Examples of strong interaction rituals can be found in social activities such as sexual activity, cigarette smoking (Collins 2004), fighting (Collins 2008), eating together (Visser 1992) conversation (Bellah 2003), Sacred Harp singings (Heider and Warner 2010), and even playing chess (Puddephatt 2008).

Weak vs. Strong Rituals:

Some interaction rituals are *weaker* than others because they contain *weaker ingredients*. Conversely, *stronger ingredients* lead to interaction rituals with *stronger outcomes*. Thus, *strong interaction rituals result in more defined identities than do weak interaction rituals.* Consider that some group discussions are much more engaging than others. For instance, a conversation in a park about the weather between strangers is not likely to be as engaging as a conversation among sociologists at a conference about the causes and effects of social inequality. That is because the interaction between the people talking about the weather probably has *weaker*

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ingredients than does the interaction between the sociologists and, thus, leads to less defined *outcomes* (including *identities*).

For example, the *barriers to outsiders* for the sociologists include whether or not someone has completed the rigorous professionalization process of becoming a sociologist, membership in the association which is holding the conference, and possession of the specialized knowledge which is relevant to their conversation on inequality. *Barriers to outsiders* for the strangers in the park are limited to whether or not someone is at the park, in possession of general knowledge about weather, and are willing to talk with strangers about it.

We can also compare the *mutual focus of attention* between our two example cases. Within the group at the park, the individuals are likely to have a weak *mutual focus of attention* because the only thing which is really bringing them together is the fact that they are all in the same park. One person might be preoccupied with problems from work and seeking people to talk with in order to distract herself. Another may simply enjoy talking with strangers about any topic. Someone else may actually be wishing that these other people would stop talking to him, but is too polite to leave the conversation. However, if we consider the sociologists, we can assume that their *mutual focus of attention* will be *stronger* because they are all participating in the discussion because it is relevant to their professional and personal interests.

Furthermore, we can compare the *shared mood* among the cases. In the case of the people in the park, one woman is attempting to distract herself from negative emotions related to her work, the other is after the positive emotions she gets from talking with strangers, and the man is growing irritated. When we look at the sociologists, though, we would likely see that they

share a mood which is characterized by feelings of necessity, achievement, competition, and curiosity.

With these differences in the *strength* of the *ingredients* in mind, we can predict that the interaction ritual occurring between the sociologists will probably have *stronger outcomes*. Since the people in the park are not members of a group with rigidly defined *barriers to outsiders*, do not have a *mutual focus of attention*, or share a *common emotional state*, they are not likely to experience high levels of *group solidarity* and *emotional energy* or produce *sacred objects* and *standards of morality*. However, when we consider the sociologists, we could expect their multiple *barriers to outsiders*, *mutual focus of attention*, and *shared mood* to lead to strong *group solidarity*, strong *emotional energy* within individuals, the development (or maintenance) of *sacred objects*, and strong *standards of morality*. This is because the *ingredients* of the interaction ritual are responsible for the *strength* of the *collective effervescence* which occurs among the participants.

In other words, the sociologists are more able to create a *shared moment of intersubjectivity* than are the people in the park because they have more in common with one another. The sociologists all have similar professional and educational backgrounds, interests, and feelings which allow them to have a *strongly defined shared reality*. They are wrapped up in the conversation because it is significant to all of their shared interests and emotions. This well-defined shared reality, in turn, leads to the *affirmation of* the academics' *identities* as sociologists. In contrast, the people in the park do not have much in common except for the fact that they are all in the same park and are talking about the weather. Thus, the *weak shared*

reality which they create does not lead to the development of a defined identity within and among the strangers in the park.

We can see that different types of *group assemblies* with varying strengths and weakness lead to stronger or weaker *outcomes*. Collins directly addressed the role of technology in *group assemblies*. As we now know, he defines *group assemblies* as situations in which "[two] or more people are *physically* assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not" (Collins 2004:48). He also discusses modern technology such as video representations which people can use to communicate (Collins 2004:54). He acknowledges that these technologies may have the ability to "generate mutual focus and emotional entrainment", but he suggests that they should be systematically studied in order to understand how effective they are as communication tools. He states, "Without bodily presence, it is hard to convey participation in the group and to confirm one's identity as member of the group. Especially lacking would be the micro-details of the experience" (ibid). I suggest that gatherings mediated through modern technology are *group assemblies*; they are merely *weaker* versions of group assemblies than are physical gatherings; *group assemblies* conducted through technology do not allow individuals to observe one another's bodily reactions and/or communicate their emotions with each other as well as they could in physical gatherings.

Sociological research on mediated interaction, or interactions which occur through forms of technological media, has shown that conversations through media are shaped by and follow interactional norms (Rettie 2009). Communication technologies such as video conferencing

have made it so that long-distance communications almost seem as if they are happening right in front of us. While this is surely not the same as actually being in the same room as someone else, it does allow people to communicate their *attentions* and *moods* to one another through bodily actions, consciously and unconsciously. Thus, we can think of video chatting as a *weaker* form of *group assembly* than physical gatherings, because people are more able to detect one another's minute physical reactions when they are within each other's physical presence than they are while video chatting. Since the *ingredient* of *group assembly* is *weaker* for interaction rituals conducted through video conferences than those which occur in person, we can expect their *outcomes* to be *weaker* as well.

There are also other technologies such as online social networks and blogs which allow people to *assemble* without physically gathering (or videoconferencing) and to communicate with one another. However, in these forms of *group assemblies*, people are not able to read each other's physical reactions at all, but they are still able to communicate their *attentions* and *moods* through the content and tone of their texts. Again, I am arguing that we can think of online gatherings as *group assemblies*; they are just a *weaker* version of *group assemblies* than are physical gatherings.

If an interaction ritual is able to provide an individual with his or her desired levels of *emotional energy*, it is likely that she or he will choose to continue with the interaction ritual. When this happens, interaction rituals become interaction ritual *chains*. Thus, every interaction ritual within an interaction ritual chain gives individuals either a *gain* or a *drain* on their *emotional energy*. These ups and downs accumulate over time, and if a person's *emotional*

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energy drops below the desired level, it is likely that she or he will decide not to continue with the interaction ritual chain and will search out another, more potent source of *emotional energy*.

This *process* of individuals being affected by emotional drains and gains through interaction rituals is how Collins understands motivations, which are "those forces that energize human action and interaction" (Turner 1994:20). Thus, we can see that *emotions*, or "those affective states that typify all human action and interaction" (ibid), serve as the connection between interaction ritual chains and motivation. There seems to be an element of rational maximization involved with interaction ritual chains, but Collins does not expect people to consciously think through this process. Indeed, he states, "Humans are not very good at calculating costs and benefits, but they feel their way toward goals because they can judge everything subconsciously by its contribution to a fundamental motive: seeking maximal *emotional energy* in interaction rituals" (Collins 2004: xii). We can see, then, that for Collins motivation to act is determined by a person's *emotional energy* which, in turn, is determined through interaction ritual chains. In this thesis, I suggest that emotional energy rises when an individual's identity standard is verified in an interaction ritual. Likewise, emotional energy wanes if an interaction ritual provides meanings which contradict a person's identity standard.

We cannot ignore the fact that there are many individuals who train for and successfully complete marathons (and other races) without being part of a training group. In fact, many people with whom I am familiar consider these individuals to be "real runners", while people that join training groups such as RunTogether are "not real runners". I believe that this view

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stems from a seemingly commonsense idea that running is an activity for individuals, since it is ultimately only the individual who decides whether to continue running or to stop. However, I feel that training for a competition is not wholly an individual act. In fact, I believe that *individuals who train alone for a marathon are actually participating in a weaker version of the marathon training interaction ritual chain* than are people who are training with a group for a marathon. This is because training for a marathon is an interaction ritual chain, *regardless of if it is done alone or with a group*. Group training rituals are more effective simply because group training rituals' *ingredients* are *stronger* than those of the solitary training ritual.

There is no marathon (or any kind of race) which is intended for just one person. (Some may argue that the original Marathon was just that, but it was not a race as much as one individual, Pheidippides, attempting to get somewhere as fast as possible in a time long before the advent of automobiles.) Indeed, the idea of organizing a marathon for a single person seems absurd. All marathons are intended to be competitions between multiple people and, as such, are inherently social activities. Therefore, even though some individuals train alone for marathons, they are actually training to participate in an interaction ritual.

The individual's marathon training program has different *ingredients* than group training programs. For instance, *group assemblies* in the individual's training program are limited to the interactions involved with a single race. Also, the individuals in the marathon might have a *mutual focus* (completion of the marathon), but they are unable to thoroughly communicate it to one another since they only *assemble* once. B*arriers to outsiders* are easily identifiable, as

only the marathon's participants can be considered members of the group. Finally, the *shared mood* among the marathon runners is likely limited to personal motivation and *achievement*.

Since the solitary marathon training ritual's ingredients are *weaker* than group training programs', it makes sense for the resultant *outcomes* to be weaker as well. This might account for the historically low number of marathon runners in the time before the recent meteoric rise of group marathon training programs. However, even though individual training programs are *weaker* interaction rituals than are group training programs, they still produce *outcomes*. For instance, there are *sacred objects* which arise from the individual's marathon training ritual. For example, the marathon event is associated with the entire group of marathon participants and is something which group members hold as valuable. We know this because the participants spend a considerable amount of time, energy, and money preparing for the races.

Training runs can also be considered a *sacred object*. The entire point of a training run is to prepare for the race event, which is a social occasion. Training runs, then, are part of the marathon interaction ritual for both the individual and group marathon training rituals. We know that they are *sacred objects* because they allow individual group members to interact with the marathon group without actually physically being with them. (We will return later to a closer examination of the individual training ritual with its *ingredients* and *outcomes*.)

Interaction Rituals and Identities:

Although Collins does not explicitly discuss identities in his work, he does tip-toe around the subject by talking about long-term emotions (*emotional energy*), such as motivation and confidence. For example, in *Violence* (2008) Collins shows that, in certain violent situations, there is a very small minority of individuals who become "violence specialists." They do this because violence is something which they can use to their advantage in order to dominate the situation and the people who are involved in it. As they become more dependent upon violence, these individuals begin to become more familiar with its use (Collins 2008:370). Hence, they become "violence specialists" as a result of their motivation to dominate others. Thus, individuals who engage in violent interaction rituals can become violent people (or victims of violent people).

This seems logical when we consider what *strong* interaction rituals do to their participants. Imagine that a friend who has been feeling depressed suddenly joins a church. Acknowledging that religions are one of the strongest forms of interaction ritual chains in existence, we can expect the church's rituals to produce high levels of *emotional energy* within its members. Now, our friend becomes caught up in the positive emotions which she gets from the church's rituals and its members. As a result, she becomes more motivated to attend church services and even starts attending extra-curricular church functions, such as Bible studies and luncheons. Over time, her level of *emotional energy* comes to match that of the other church members (*shared mood*) and she really starts to feel as if she belongs (*group*

solidarity). She also comes to share their values and views on appropriate behavior (*standards of morality*) and what symbols (*sacred objects*) to hold valuable, such as the Crucifix or the Bible. What has happened to our friend is that her motivation to maintain higher levels of *emotional energy* has led to her becoming a Christian. In other words, she has developed a Christian identity.

That is what the strongest interaction ritual chains do to their participants. They cause individuals to develop identities which emphasize (or maintain) the characteristics of the interaction ritual's activities. For instance, smoking interaction rituals create smokers, sexual interaction rituals produce sexual and gendered identities, and violent interaction rituals produce violent identities. Likewise, marathon training interaction rituals aim to create marathoners. However, as we have seen, not all interaction rituals are successful, or strong, and result in the formation of well-defined identities such as a marathoner. Indeed, some rituals are so weak that they do not affect identities at all. There are also interaction rituals which are not strong enough to fully define an identity, but they may be able to partially change a person's identities. For example, (as we will see later) a weak marathon training ritual may not create a *marathoner* identity, but it may lead to a *runner* identity.

At the outset of this project, I believed that identity was a fifth *outcome* of interaction rituals in addition to *group solidarity*, *sacred objects*, *standards of morality*, and *emotional energy*. However, I could not find any instances of Collins' directly addressing identity, and found only one article (Kudler 2007) which attempted to connect interaction ritual chains

directly to identities. Hence, I wrote to him to ask his opinion on the issue. His response cleared up some confusion which I did not realize I was experiencing:

> I confess to not having paid much attention to identities as consequences of [interaction ritual chains]. In part that is because I have been trying to dissolve noun-like entities into *situational processes*. But one could say that identity is a *sacred object* embodying the *solidarity* and *emotional energy* of successful interaction rituals, with an emphasis on the distinctiveness of that type of group and activity (Collins, personal communication: 2010, italics added)

Although Collins chooses not to include identities in his theory, we can see that interaction ritual chains have the ability to influence change in or the development of identities, or of individuals' *perceived self-identities*. His claim that identities are *situational processes* does not necessarily rule out the possibility of linking his work with identity control theory. Indeed, "The traditional symbolic interaction perspective, the *situational* approach, (in which identity control theory is embedded) sees society as always in the *process* of being created through the interpretations and definitions of actors in situations" (Stets 2006:88, original italics). Furthermore, identity control theory grew out of structural symbolic interaction, which sees individuals' identities as a reflection of society (Stryker 1980). We can see, then, that identity control theory is nicely poised to connect with a conception of identities as on-going *processes*, or projects.

Conclusion:

Identity control theory sees individuals as able to *control* (partly, at least) their identities and behavior. People get ideas, or meanings, about who they want or ought to be from culture and their positions in the social structure. These meanings are always changing and comprise the *identity standard,* which individuals use as the reference point that they compare to *alternative meanings,* which come from *situational settings*. If the *identity standard* matches the *alternative meanings*, the *identity standard* is verified, and the individual does not need to alter her behavior. Conversely, if there are discrepancies between them, individuals *modify their behavior* in a manner which is intended to align the alternative standards with the alternative meanings. This process is called *identity verification*.

However, identity control theory is focused on what goals people are trying to accomplish, rather than how they are supposed to be accomplished. Burke directly addressed this issue:

> … [We] need to focus on the goals and how they are set or changed. We must ask not '*How* do people accomplish some goal?' but '*What* goals are people trying to accomplish?' The focus must be on the goals, not on the means. A variety of means is always available to accomplish some goal, and if one doesn't work, we try another. (Burke 2004a:6)

He claims that we must focus on the *goals* because there is no way to perfectly predict what *means* a situation will require from people. Thus, we cannot know for certain (ahead of time) what means will be necessary for the identity verification process. However, I suggest that just because we cannot fully predict any situation does not imply that we should

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completely abandon any interest in the ways in which individuals go about the identity

verification process. There may be "a variety of means" (or mechanisms) available for

individuals to employ in the verification process, but Burke does not identify them. Instead, he

paints them as seemingly inconsequential.

I am arguing that mechanisms of identity verification should not be cast aside as

unimportant. I am also arguing that interaction ritual chains are mechanisms which people can

use in the identity verification process because they have the ability to change people's self-

meanings, or identity standards. We can see this by studying the *ingredients* and *outcomes* of

interaction ritual chains, especially the identities which individuals develop. By comparing

different types of interaction rituals, we can see that they lead to different identities because

they have different *ingredients*.

The following chapter will analyze RunTogether's group marathon training program. First,

we will see that this program is an interaction ritual chain. Then, we will see that the ritual's

strong ingredients lead to strong outcomes. Finally, we will examine the program's ability to

form the well-defined identity of marathon runner within its participants.

3.   RUNTOGETHER

In this chapter, we will look at RunTogether, a company which offers group training programs for beginning runners. Their programs range from 5k training to full-marathon training and are intended for "couch-potatoes". We will be examining the full-marathon training program, which takes non-runners through an extended group training process with the intention of creating "marathoners". Their service falls under the *paid-for* category of training programs for runners because RunTogether is a business whose objective is financial profit.

First, I will show that this program is an interaction ritual by identifying its *ingredients* and *outcomes*. Then, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of those *ingredients* and *outcomes*, especially the development of a marathon identity. This will allow us to later compare the RunTogether interaction ritual with other types of running interaction rituals, including another paid-for training program (i.e. In Motion's program), solitary training programs, charity programs, high school programs, college programs, and professional programs. I will also provide evidence that technologically mediated interactions are *group assemblies*, even if they are weak.

Data &Methods:

The data for this section are trends and examples picked out from transcripts obtained

from five semi-structured interviews. I used a non-probability purposive sampling method in

selecting a sample from the population of all people formally involved with RunTogether. Three

of the interviews were with clients, one was with two trainers employed by the company, and

the last was with a co-founder. I chose these interviewees because I felt that analyzing the

perceptions and experiences of individuals from different tiers (customer, employee, and

founder) of the company would provide a clearer picture than if I had interviewed only clients,

trainers, or founders. I recorded each interview using a digital audio recorder, then manually

transcribed them using Microsoft Word on my personal computer. Next, I coded the transcripts

for examples of themes that are indicative of interaction ritual chains. Note that the company's

name and all of the interviewees' names have been replaced with pseudonyms and any

identifying data has been removed. Table 1 lists the codes which I used while analyzing the

interview transcripts:

Table 1 – Codes Used for Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Group Assembly (GA)	"Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not." (Collins 2004:48)
Barriers to Outsiders (BO)	"There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded." (Collins 2004:48)
Mutual Focus (MF)	"People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other's focus of attention." (Collins 2004:48)
Shared Mood (SM)	"They share a common mood or emotional experience." (Collins 2004: 48)
Group Solidarity (GS)	A feeling within individuals of belonging/membership with a group (Collins 2004:49)
Emotional Energy (EE)	Long-term emotions such as confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action (Collins 2004:49)
Symbols/Sacred Objects (SO)	Objects/symbols associated with the group which group members are expected to hold valuable and defend (Collins 2004:49)
Standards of Morality (SOM)	Pertaining to the appropriate behavior of individual members in relation to 'adherence to the group" and the group's symbols/sacred objects (Collins 2004:49)

RunTogether's motto, "From couch-potato to marathoner in forty weeks", is a good indicator of their mission. The *for-profit* company provides its clients with a group training program that is designed to take individuals from sedentary lifestyles to active lifestyles. It should be no surprise, then, that many of RunTogether's incoming participants do not already have a marathon identity.

The company began rather accidentally as the result of a dare between Mike Madsen, a co-founder of the company, and a friend of his who was a marathon runner. Mike:

> You know, RunTogether really started out as a dare. I was talking with a guy that was an avid runner, a marathoner who would go out every weekend and run a marathon. And he was complaining about how no one in [our city] wanted to run marathons. And I made it very clear, I said, 'I don't think it's a matter of not wanting to so much as not knowing how to. Take me, for instance, I wouldn't even know what kind of socks to wear.' And he said, 'Madsen, I could take you and in six months have you finish a marathon.' And it was kind of one of those situations where I wanted to connect and have an impact on this person's life, and I kind of saw this as an entry point into this person's life and a chance to have some influence. So I said, 'Alright, we're going to do it. But,' I said, 'we're going to need nine months.' (Laughs) Let's train for… Chicago, not Alaska. And he said, 'If [you can] find five people here in [the South] who want to do it, I'll train you.' And he said, 'But you're not going to find them.' And I said, 'Oh, I'll find them.' And I went out and started asking people, my friends and my wife – and said,

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'Come do a marathon.' So it really started out – I was a couch potato, I wanted to get in shape. I looked for an opportunity to connect with somebody else, and through that process we gathered over twenty people to train and run. He gave us the basics of how to train and I worked as a therapist through the year, keeping everything straight. Through that process we took twenty-two people to the Chicago Marathon that first year. Two of those people completed half of the race, and that was their whole goal. They knew there wasn't a half-marathon race in the Chicago Marathon. And the other twenty all finished. And at that point we thought it was just one of those things to check off your list, but we fell in love with it. We came home; then, a bunch of people started asking, 'Are you going to do that again?' They had friends and family members wanting the experience, and we realized, "Hey, we need to do this." At that point we didn't charge anything. It was just, 'Hey, I'm going to do a marathon, and it'll be a whole lot easier if it's a party.' [Later,] we realized how much energy and time [it required from us], and so we began charging a fee for our time and energy; and it's just kind of exploded from there.

Mike mentions that he "worked as a therapist through the year, keeping everything straight." He was not just speaking metaphorically; he actually is a practicing licensed therapist. He even teaches courses at a local seminary. Thus, he was a perfect candidate for tending to any psychological and/or emotional problems which might have kept members of his group from continuing with the training. That time with that first group is likely when Mike first began to develop a method for effectively creating marathoners from couch-potatoes, i.e. creating marathon identities. That method, in effect, is to raise the level of positive *emotional energy* within individuals by providing them with social support.

This means that the RunTogether program is designed to create marathoners by instilling confidence in trainees who feel as if they lack the confidence required to accomplish the *goal*

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which they set for themselves, i.e. becoming a marathon runner. In identity control theory's terms, the training program is a mechanism which helps individuals to align their *identity standards* with the *alternative meanings* which arise from interactions. That is, RunTogether's training program helps people to match their ideal identities, or their identity standards, with the self-meanings that they get from different situations. This is done by creating an atmosphere in which individuals with a *mutual focus of attention* and a *shared mood* (or emotional state) can support one another emotionally.

Craig and Laura Lyle, a husband-and-wife coaching team for RunTogether, talked about how building confidence without a support group can be very difficult for some people.

C: A big part of this program is physical. Truly physical, getting out there and…. That's why it's a forty-week program. It's slow and monotonous. You work yourself up to it, but fifty percent of it is mental.

L: Maybe more.

C: Maybe more, because even if you're a professional runner, once you get up to a certain mileage from that point on it's mental. You can always run that far, but can you tell yourself that you can run that far?

L: And you've exhausted all of your body's stores, emotionally and physically. And, you know, just because a wife is on the team doesn't mean that her husband is supporting her in that endeavor. We see that a lot. I think that Mike and Mary-Beth's [the co-founders'] slogan or whatever is basically, 'Did you have people laugh when you told them you were going to do this?' But you do. And it's the people you think that would support you. Your friends and family that you think would be the most supportive, and they're the ones that tear you down. And it's

just because you never believed you could do it and they don't believe that you could do it either until they see it.

C: We told people that we were going to do it, our family. They had that look on their faces like, 'Okay, what's next?'

The fact that Craig and Laura's families reacted incredulously when they told them that they were planning to run a marathon demonstrates that it can be difficult to build confidence outside of a peer group which emphasizes emotional and psychological support. Another excerpt from Craig and Laura further illustrates this point:

C: We've had two people on the team this year. I asked both of them, 'Hey, have you told your work?' No. We made one tell her work the week of the marathon. We told her, 'You tell them or we're coming up there.' And the other one, I ran into one of his employees and said, 'Hey do you know he's running a marathon?' He said, 'What?' I told him, 'You need to go ask him about it.' And, you know, a lot of the reason they don't say it is because they're afraid to be negative.

L: I think in the beginning they're afraid they'll fail, and they don't want somebody to know they've failed. I think that's part of it.

Laura believes that these individuals were so afraid of being seen as failures by their coworkers that they hid the fact they were training for a marathon. This may be because they were unsure of their ability to successfully complete a marathon. Not telling their co-workers about training for a marathon, in a way, is a form of a barrier to outsiders. The fact that these people joined the training group suggests that they believed that they would somehow gain the ability and confidence, i.e. *emotional energy*, to successfully complete a marathon from RunTogether's training program, and that is precisely what the company aims to do.

The first ten weeks of the RunTogether program are designed to be an orientation period for the rookie runners. The two key elements of this period are to impart knowledge of how to properly train for a marathon, i.e. how to train by following a schedule, and to foster a sense of *group solidarity* among the participants by teaching them to be friendly and positive. The importance of the training schedule suggests that it may be a *sacred object* to which individuals are expected to adhere, and the encouragement of supportive, positive behavior suggests that these mannerisms are *standards of morality,* which are major elements of the group atmosphere and training process. Mike says this about the initial ten weeks:

> What we do is, during the first ten weeks, we really work on the team dynamic – building-up group cohesiveness through different icebreakers and team-building exercises. There's the educational component; then, there's also the team-building.

These ten weeks are mostly spent in *group assemblies*, and informants reported 300-400 people at each one. In addition to running coaches, there are dieticians, nutritionists, and physical therapists present to answer any questions that clients might have. (Note that this type of information is intended for an audience of non-runners.) The educational component of the orientation consists of instructors providing technical advice on how to run, discussing diet and nutrition concerns, teaching what clothes and shoes are appropriate, imparting a sense of etiquette for running with large groups of people, and (importantly) teaching the structure and rationale behind the training schedule.

There are *sacred objects* which result from the RunTogether interaction ritual. Three things

stood out as being particularly related to the group and which individuals showed respect to or

were willing to defend: the training schedule, running/marathon identities, and the notion (or

sacred idea) that people have the ability to accomplish difficult tasks so long as they are self-

confident.

Some people might argue that the schedule is the key element of the training program.

Every trainee is expected to follow the schedule for the entire nine month period. If she/he

does so, they should be able to finish the final marathon at the end of the period, theoretically.

If they do not follow the schedule, it is expected that they will not be able to finish the final

marathon.

A comment from Suzy Rogers, a trainee, shows her commitment to the training schedule:

J: Did you ever not show up on a Saturday?

S: The only reason that I wouldn't show up on a Saturday is because I was out of
        town, but whenever I was I out of town I ran.

J: Did you feel guilty that you weren't running with your partner?

S: No, because I knew going in to it that to be in town every weekend – You know,
        it's the summer time. Everybody wants to go to the beach or something like that.
        [When I was out of town,] I would get up and run. I would have a little course
        mapped out, and I would run even if I wasn't there, so I didn't feel guilty because
        I was still getting in my run.

Suzy is demonstrating her view of the training schedule as a *sacred object* which is related

to the group and to which she should adhere. Although she was unable to attend the group

runs, she was still able to interact with the training group by interacting with a *sacred object*

(the training schedule) and feel positive emotions, rather than feeling guilty about not adhering

to the schedule.

We know that the runner/marathon identity, in Collins's terms, is another of the group's

sacred objects because it is associated with the group and is accompanied by a *standard of*

morality which prompts group members to defend it against interlopers and naysayers. For

example, a running group member would likely defend her or his running identity against

doctors or media reports which claim that running is bad for knees, hips, and feet. In defense of

his or her running *identity*, the group member would be quick to point out that other health

benefits, such as reduced levels of cholesterol and fat, outweigh any potential risk to their

knees or hips. A quote from trainer Laura Lyle demonstrates this:

The first time you get injured and you go to the doctor – not all of them, I'm not

generalizing, but a lot of them – they'll tell you right off the bat, 'You need to quit running.' And

you say, 'Okay, but this is helping my heart, my cholesterol, my blood pressure, my

osteoporosis. But you want me to quit running because I'm having knee pain?' You know, that's

frustrating. They don't all weigh it out. And every situation is different and every doctor is

different, but there's a lot of them will that will just tell you – Our doctor that we love and trust

and see for everything else tells us all the time, 'Ya'll have got to quit running. You wouldn't

have these problems if you'd quit running.' But we'd have twenty other problems.

This suggests that Laura is more committed to an *identity standard* that is characterized by

overall fitness and health than she is to an identity which is primarily concerned with not having

knee or joint pain. This is probably because the overall health and fitness identity is more *salient* than the identity which is concerned with avoiding pain. That is, the health and fitness identity is involved in more situations than is the pain avoidance identity. Thus, she chooses behaviors which will verify her identity standard as a fit and healthy person because it is more important to her than being someone who avoids pain. In other words, she chooses behaviors which verify her identity as a marathon runner because it verifies the self-meanings which she holds most valuable, i.e. being fit and healthy.

The idea that individuals have the ability to change themselves so long as they are self-confident also seems to be a *sacred object*. I say this because the group has *standards of morality* which defend that idea against negativity or pessimism from outsiders and wayward insiders. The co-founder, the coaches, and the clients whom I interviewed all shared this view. A comment from Suzy Rogers, another trainee, demonstrates the strength and utility of this *moral standard*:

> ...Somebody I was running with early in RunTogether said the reason that it will work, and the reason that it does work… is that it sets short-term goals all throughout, so [they] are easy to attain. It wasn't like – The first week we met they didn't give us our whole 36 week program and say, 'Okay, this is what you're going to be doing.' When people see the big picture and know what's going to happen in 36 weeks they just get overwhelmed and [are] like, 'There's no way that I'm going to be able to do it.' So when you look at it and say, 'Okay, so next week I'm going to have to able to run a mile,' you're like, 'okay, I can do this, because it's a short term goal'.

Suzy is showing that adhering to the training schedule is a method of protecting the *sacred ideas* of confidence and self-efficacy. This is achieved by breaking the daunting training

program into smaller, manageable goals which she claims are "easy to attain". Thus, the idea that individuals have the ability to accomplish difficult tasks if they have enough confidence to do so is a *sacred object* which is protected by *standards of morality* that urge team members to adhere to the training schedule (which is also a *sacred object*).

Team Building:

Team-building is the second component of the 10-week orientation period. This is done through ice-breakers and interaction exercises which encourage individuals to interact with one another. In the first years of the program, Mike also gave a speech to the entire group which was intended to motivate and inspire them. Another trainee, Edith Rogers, is Suzy Rogers' mother. She spoke about being affected by this speech during her first year with RunTogether:

E: So, there [were] 300-400 people there every week. I just think the number of people caused an excitement, and a crowd. Mike Madsen… had a very good delivery. I got as much out of what he said during that time – you know, I was kind of going through a difficult time just with some family issues – and I really just needed – I mean, what he said was very inspiring. I really needed that. You know, just at that point. You know, he's a counselor by trade, and what he said was just very uplifting.

J: What did he say?

E: You know, now I can't really remember. But it was kind of like… you know, 'You can do this!' …He just kind of told [us about] his life [and] things he'd overcome, just that sort of thing. I think that was very good, last year.

Although Edith could not recall Mike's exact words, she does remember feeling "uplifted" and "inspired" by them. These emotions echo the types of feelings which Collins refers to as *emotional energy*, i.e. elation, strength, and enthusiasm. That generally positive, inspiring message is the core of the *standards of morality* which RunTogether advocates in order to achieve an environment characterized by positivity and social support.

Of course, the effectiveness of Mike's speech was not intended for only one person; there were several hundred people listening to the same words. Thus, we can make the assumption that Mike was, in effect, using this *group assembly* as an opportunity to communicate *standards of morality* and to strengthen the *mutual focus of attention*, the *shared mood*, and the *emotional energy* among all the group members.

Edith talked more about her experiences in the orientation period during her second year with RunTogether:

This year, we only met together either once or twice, and then they divided us into… groups. We watched what they said, which was basically the same as last year, but it was on a DVD.

She did not say more on the subject, but her tone implied to me that the DVD did not inspire and uplift her in the same way the speech did the previous year. This suggests that changing from a live speech to a recording of a speech *weakened* the strength of the *group*

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assembly and the overall interaction ritual. This is because watching a recording does not fortify

the *mutual focus of attention*, *shared mood*, and *emotional energy* among individuals to the

same degree as does actually witnessing someone delivering an emotionally moving speech in

person.

We can explain this as the result of a *weak group assembly*. People are less able to detect

bodily signs which signify emotions and attention on a video than they are while watching

someone talk in person. Thus, Edith had a stronger emotional reaction to the live speech than

she did to the video, because she was better able to read Mike's emotions during the live

speech.

Another part of the team-building process is an introduction to an online social network

that was designed specifically for RunTogether's clients.

> M: The other thing that we do is, we've created a whole web system – kind of
> Facebook-meets-fitness – where our people can coalesce, support and
> encourage… each other online all throughout the week. And it goes with that
> part, I realized, if I'm going to be there, *this is more about relating than trying to
> get you to go that mileage*. [Italics added]

Clients are expected to "blog" about their running experiences on a daily basis. Once they

have done so, other group members and coaches are supposed to comment on those blogs and

give encouragement, support, or advice. RunTogether even offers a prize for the best blog and

the most comments in an effort to motivate clients to engage with one another on the online

network. The reasoning behind that pressure is to get people to form *group solidarity* and a

mutual focus of attention. Thus, we can see that RunTogether's online social network is a place where group members can and are encouraged to *assemble*, to communicate their *attentions* and *moods* to one another, and to build or maintain their *emotional energy*.

When I asked Craig Lyle, one of RunTogether's team coaches, how he goes about supporting the people in his group, he said that most of it happens on the online social network:

> J: What about working on the relationship aspect of the job? How do you support your people?

> C: Well, mostly the blog, like I said. The blog is divided up by team. We get on, and that's how most of the people get to know each other at first. They get on and see the pictures [of people in their groups], and they talk to them online. Then, they start meeting every Saturday, and they build a relationship. And we do the same thing.

Again, although the online social network used by RunTogether does not allow for physical *group assemblies*, it is still a forum in which group members are able to engage with one another, communicate and acknowledge their *mutual attentions* and *shared moods*, communicate and uphold *standards of morality*, and build *group solidarity*. This is done in a format of exchange on the social network which very closely resembles the turn-taking format of spoken conversations, which Collins himself argued are one form of interaction rituals because they create shared moments of intersubjectivity among the conversation's participants (Collins 2004:52 & 67).

I concede that communicating in *online group assemblies* may not be as strong as conversations in *physical group assemblies* (as a result of individuals not being able to read the emotional reactions of other participants), but people are still able to express their emotions and attentions to other group members through the content and style of their writing. Furthermore, RunTogether's online social network is intended to be used as a supplement to the physical gatherings. Thus, it is not expected to be the only group assembly in which group members are able to communicate their emotions and attentions to each other. Rather, it is expected to provide a forum for group members to "coalesce" and build group solidarity, since it is likely that trainees do not get the opportunity to talk much with trainees whose running paces are different than their own.

During the initial ten weeks, at the end of each *group assembly*, the actual running begins. Most people start with a half-mile or a mile, but the runs get longer as the weeks pass. By the end of the 10 weeks, everyone is expected to be able to run five kilometers (3.2 miles). Next, the participants are divided into groups based on where they live. At the time of my interviews, there were five groups in the city, and each one contained around 100 people. RunTogether now has more groups in multiple cities and states. Individuals spend the remainder of the 40 weeks with their group, gradually increasing mileage by regularly adding single miles to the long-distance group runs set for Saturdays. Weekdays are intended for several short-distance runs, rest, and cross-training (other forms of exercise). Methods of cross-training that RunTogether promotes include yoga, aerobics, spin classes (cycling), weight lifting, and

swimming. In another attempt to foster *group solidarity*, the company schedules group cross-training events, i.e. *group assemblies*, and urges clients to attend them together.

Each training group has its own coach or coaches, and they are responsible for organizing the long-distance group runs which happen every Saturday during the training period. This entails mapping out a route, setting out water and refreshments, and notifying group members. They are also expected to motivate and encourage group members, respond to emails, and communicate plans and events throughout the week. Mike and Mary-Beth Madsen, his wife and co-founder, usually pick the coaches from previous training groups. Mike: "We see their leadership, their passion to transfer their experience and motivate others, and we just pull them aside and say, 'We'd like to develop you into a leader.'"

Coaches Craig and Laura Lyle impressed Edith Rogers during her first year training with the program. They, like the other coaches, came up through the program. After participating as clients, they were approached by Mike and Mary-Beth about becoming coaches.

> L: Basically, we were just participants that first year. We did Chicago with the team, and then somewhere in that process Mike and Mary-Beth had asked us – Would we be interested… in being trainers next year? We said, "Sure, we would love to." But of course you feel inadequate, you feel unqualified, and all those things. And they say, 'That's what makes you usable and pliable, moldable.' And so we've been coaching now for two years, and we've learned something new every day. You know, we don't know all of it. We don't even know half of it.

> C: The big thing was that we knew the RunTogether program from start to finish. Because we started out – Within our first year we had run our first half

marathon, Marine Corps Marathon, and then we ran the full in Chicago. And so he wanted to bring us back to help… because the team was getting so large. He wanted to break it out into segments. We thought, 'We know the program. We know how to train. We've done two races, two significant races — and that we'd start in that way.' And then it's just fallen into place ever since.

Craig and Laura seem to be committed to their roles as coaches (i.e. their identity standards). This means that they choose behaviors which will *verify* their perceptions of their selves as good coaches who go the extra mile to help their trainees. Craig and Laura go out of their way to help foster *group solidarity* by organizing lunches for group members after Saturday runs. They even organize unofficial short- and mid-distance group runs during the week because they believe that group runs keep people motivated more than solo runs. Indeed, having more *group assemblies* most likely increases the *group's solidarity* and leads to higher levels of *emotional energy*.

J: How about the process of keeping people motivated? Can you tell me about that?

L: How do we do it? Um, I think there's probably two parts to that. I'll tell how we do, and I'll tell how we wish we could do to accomplish it. And we try to do that each year and improve on it. What we try to do is meet with them and fellowship with them. We try to get together with [them]. For the weekly trainings we give you a schedule, but technically you're on your own. But it's easier to do it if we have a group that meets. We have what we refer to as the unofficial group run. This is not our official Saturday training. It's just on Monday night when several of us are going to meet up at [a coffee shop] and start running from there, and we're going to do a mile or whatever. We try to do that which we've learned from the two years we've coached. It can be very, very

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motivating for us, as well as them, to have that weekly group run even though it's unauthorized, unofficial.

C: It's easier to run with other folks than it is to run by yourself. And we encourage others to form their own groups that maybe run in the mornings or lunch time or whatever.

Having multiple small groups within the larger group may seem to work against the goal of encouraging *group solidarity*. However, as long as there are *barriers to outsiders* which clearly delineate membership for the entire group, smaller internal groups should not detract from the overall level of *group solidarity*. I identified the payment of membership fees, access to the online social network, and whether or not someone actually attends *group assemblies* as the principal *barriers to outsiders* in the RunTogether program. I found no examples from the data which suggest that group members were ever unsure of these *barriers*.

Group solidarity is obviously a key element of RunTogether's program. It is the means by which individuals are expected to be ushered through the training schedule and meet the goals they have set for themselves. A comment from Joe Purvis, a client of RunTogether, demonstrates this point:

Most of the people going through the program are just starting to try to get in shape. So I think that maybe it would've been harder for them to keep running if they didn't have the other people out there doing it with them. Even if they weren't actually running *with* people the whole time, it was just the fact that there were all these other people out there doing the same thing. Everybody really supported each other. (italics added)

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We can see that Joe believes that running alone would be more difficult than running with a group of people who have a *mutual focus* of training for the same race and *standards of morality* which emphasize support and encouragement.

A comment from Mike (co-founder) shows that he and the company are fully aware of the power of *group solidarity*:

> …For a lot of our population, many of them are shamed, and insecure, and hopeless. And many of them, they think to go to the gym. 'I've tried that, I've failed that.' Or to go to the gym and see the avid athletes and exercisers, 'I'm embarrassed.' And when we can create an environment where people who are thirty, forty, or fifty pounds overweight can say, 'But they are like me, and we are taking on this big, hairy, audacious goal together.' There's a transformative experience. The shame goes away because, 'I'm not alone'.

In this case we can see that the *group solidarity* which results from a *shared mood* and *common focus* impacts levels of *emotional energy* within individuals. The shame of being overweight which individuals feel when they are in groups with "avid athletes and exercisers" does not occur when they are in groups of people who share their obstacles and worries.

Another example, this time from Coach Laura Lyle, demonstrates the potential strength of *group solidarity* in supporting individuals:

> Some people build friendships that are life-long. One girl happened to hurt herself the night before, or two nights before, the [marathon]. She'd gotten sick and hurt herself. Her friends [from her training group] came over that night before the race and said, 'Don't worry. We'll train for the St. Ted [Marathon], and we'll run it together.' And the

girl says, 'I thought I was completely down and out for good.' But her team came over

and built her up, and they're running St. Ted on the fifth.

This particular training group had built up enough *group solidarity* that the individual group

members were inspired to commit to training for another marathon with their teammate, since

she was unable to complete the marathon for which they were originally training.

However, not every training group in the program produced the same results as that

group. Recall that Edith Rogers was more emotionally moved by her first year of orientation

than her second. In fact, the entire second year did not match up to the first for many reasons.

An excerpt from her interview reveals much of her dissatisfaction:

E: I'm not by any means criticizing our coach, but last year we had [Craig and

       Laura], and this year it was just a lady. And she said from the beginning, 'I'm not

       a cheerleader type', you know. And she didn't have that …. She was very

       committed to it. She was there every week. She was good about sending emails,

       but she didn't have that, you know, whatever it is. She was more concerned

       with the eating – what you ate. As one guy there said, 'I think I'm in a Weight

       Watchers group rather than a running group.' (Laughs) And a lot of the men fell

       off, that year. Last year, in July, August, we still had 50 or 60 people. This year,

       we had, nine, ten, twelve….

J: Why do you think? Because of the style?

E: I think it was. I think that had a LOT to do with it. I think you needed those men

       in that group to feel connected. The man is the leader and all that. And you

       know, the coaches [last year] did a whole lot more than that. I really was glad I

       had done it the last year. Truthfully, this year I probably would've been a little

       disappointed. And people I knew who did it this year didn't seem to be quite as

impressed. Also, last year we trained to go to Chicago; I think that made a world

of difference. I'm thinking, I've got to walk this twenty miles! I've got to make

this twenty miles! You know, I've got to practice because I've got to do it in

Chicago! But, I had decided when they were only going to do it here…, I was only

going to do the half because that's a lot on you to do a marathon.

It seems that at least one reason that Edith did not enjoy her second year was largely due

to the approach of her new coach. There are many more examples of Edith's displeasure with

her new coach which I have opted not to present. Let it suffice that she had grown accustomed

to Laura and Craig's style of coaching which emphasized more interaction through extra group

runs and social support. The fact that her new coach seemed to be more concerned with

maintaining an appropriate diet than getting together and running had adverse effects on more

group members than just Edith. The man's comment, that he felt as if he were in a Weight

Watcher's group instead of a running group, supports this point. The new coach did not have

that "whatever it is". In this case, those "whatevers" are the same *standards of morality* and

mutual focus as the members of her group. While the clients were concerned with running and

the training schedule, the coach was more concerned with diet and nutrition. This discrepancy

led to the loss of *shared mood* and, eventually, to the deterioration of *group solidarity*.

At the midway point of the training program, clients participate in a half-marathon which is

intended to give them a taste of what running a full-marathon is really like. Originally, the

midway half-marathon was an informal event where trainees simply ran 13.1 miles in the same

manner as the other training runs. The only difference was that they received a hand-decorated

medal made from a Mason jar lid. Since then, RunTogether has created a formal half-marathon that has become a race event in its own right.

I participated in that half-marathon on its first year and was very impressed with the superb organization of RunTogether's first official race. Not only was it very well organized, but it drew several hundred people on its maiden run and has only continued to grow since then. There were also hundreds of supportive spectators lining almost the entire race course. I can testify that atmospheres of this variety can be a great boon in helping to motivate runners to perform to their fullest potentials.

As impressive as RunTogether's half-marathon is, it cannot compare to the grandiosity of a full marathon. For the first few years of the company's existence, the Bank of America Chicago Marathon served as the final race. The Chicago Marathon is one of the biggest, most well-attended marathons in the world. In 2008, I ran it with over 45,000 other people, and it was one of the seminal achievements of my life thus far. Thus, as we can see from Edith's comments, preparing for Chicago helped her to stay motivated during her training.

However, RunTogether has recently created its own full marathon and substituted it for Chicago. I did not participate in its first year, but I did attend it. Unfortunately, it did not have the same gravitas as the Chicago Marathon or even the RunTogether Half-Marathon, and the first year that the company held its own marathon was the first year that they did not grow in terms of new participants or match their previous levels of success with first time marathoners. All previous years had a success rate of 60%-65% in the number of people who completed the program from beginning to finish. I believe that changing the final race negatively affected the

RunTogether program because it reduced the high level of *shared mood* (i.e. excitement, dedication, and anticipation) among group members that results from knowing that you are going to run a big, established marathon like Chicago. That is because the Chicago marathon, with all of its notoriety, has already risen to the level of sacred object in the marathon interaction ritual chain. Conversely, RunTogether's new marathon did not have a strong *sacred object* status because it was relatively unknown in the marathon interaction ritual chain.

Another possibility is that rather than lowering the shared levels of excitement, dedication, and anticipation among group members, the lower amount of financial investment required up-front from trainees did not inspire the same level of dedication which accompanies being heavily financially invested in something. Mike believes this to be the case:

M: Now this past year, about 65% at the halfway point were still active. At the full 40-week point, we were at about 40%. Now, we looked at that, to assess what was the difference between this year and other years past? And one of the big features that was different was that in the years past we've always gone to Chicago, and by May you have about $1000 in the game. And that was something that kept you going. So we're working at, how do you increase that level of investment? Buy-in, not necessarily monetarily, but emotionally, so you don't get to that halfway point and stop.

J: If you raised your fee do you think they'd have that same buy-in value that they had for Chicago?

M: I don't know. One of the things we're doing this next year is including, on the front end, registration for both races. So when you register in January, you're not only registering for the 40-week program, you're registering for the half- and

the full-[marathons]. And you can do a half and a half, or a half and a full. It's already paid for. It's done for. You're in. We're seeing if that will make a difference.

While this approach may eventually prove to be successful for RunTogether, it does not necessarily negate my point that decreases in *shared mood* are responsible for the downturn in the company's performance record. Being financially invested in a program seems likely to ensure that one would stay committed to that program, and is another form of a *barrier to outsiders*. I argue that dedication itself is a *mood* which can be *shared* by group members. Thus, I predict that Mike's plan will have effects upon the proportion of group members that complete the marathon but will not affect the decrease in new enrollment for the program. I base this prediction on my belief that the excitement of participating in a high-profile marathon was one of the main draws for non-runners that are considering joining a marathon training program. However, this research project was near completion by the time of the second year in which RunTogether held its own marathon, and I was unable to test this hypothesis.

Identity:

A major subject to address is i*dentity*, which I have suggested is an *outcome* of interaction rituals, specifically a *sacred object*. Because this set of interviews was done prior to my having decided to use interaction ritual chains as the centerpiece of this project, I did not ask questions

which pertained directly to the *ingredients* and *outcomes* of interaction rituals. Nor did I ask

specific questions about *identity*. However, I was able to find examples of *identity* in the data.

As noted earlier, RunTogether's motto, "From couch-potato to marathoner in 40-weeks,"

suggests that the company's agenda involves changing individuals from having a "couch-

potato" *identity* to a "marathoner" *identity*. Indeed, much of the dialogue in the co-founder's

interview pertains to this shift in *identity*. For example:

> This is not a marathon training program; it's a wellness program. We realize that to be
> well, you have to be well in body and spirit, and that occurs within the community. We
> become the combined average, in five years, of the five people we associate the most
> with. Associations of power are subtle. They will have us doing things we never
> imagined – from living within all kinds of self-limiting beliefs to really chunking all that
> and really going forward with your life. So, what we have found is that by facilitating
> that, these people begin to change in more ways than just that 26.2 miles. They're
> thinking differently about themselves. They're behaving differently in their
> relationships. They're relating self-confidence instead of insecurity. They are finding that
> there are other people that they can connect with. It's a life transformation; that's our
> ultimate goal.

Life transformation is the company's ultimate goal. This indicates that RunTogether is not

just concerned with one aspect of its client's lives, such as exercise, body weight, muscular

tone, or diet. Indeed, as Mike's comment declares, the company is concerned with all aspects

of people's lives. His comment, "We become the combined average, in five years, of the five

people we associate the most with", implies that the company's goal, at least in part, is to

change individuals' lives by providing them with new, supportive people with whom to

associate rather than with individuals who might contribute to the imposition of limits and negativity upon a person. This is the reason for having the *standard of morality* which protects people's self-efficacy and confidence.

A comment from trainee Edith suggests that RunTogether's training program is successfully creating "boutique marathoners", even if "real marathoners" do not agree:

> There was an article in the track club magazine the other day. This person had written an article talking about us [RunTogether participants] taking six hours to finish. [He was] saying, 'They're not *marathoners*. They're *boutique marathoners.* So we laughed about that! We're *boutique marathoners*! It's a trendy thing – just a fad or a rage. I told Suzy [Suzy Rogers is her daughter], 'We've never been on the cutting edge of anything! Running marathons is the popular thing to do now.'

Edith did not seem to mind the label of *boutique marathoner*. In fact, she seemed to embrace it as a positive thing. Thus, we can see that although some people might think that RunTogether does not create "real marathoners", they are definitely creating some form of *marathon identity*, regardless of the type.

Discussion:

In summation, the RunTogether group marathon training program is an interaction ritual chain that puts individuals with common goals (*mutual focus of attention*) and emotions (*shared mood*) into groups (*barriers to outsiders*) and situations (*group assembly*) which

produce: high levels of *group solidarity*; high levels of *emotional energy* (i.e. confidence)within individuals; *sacred objects/symbols* (marathon identities, training schedules, and a belief in self-efficacy); and *standards of morality* (positivity and encouragement) to defend the group and its sacred objects.

We know that the *ingredients* involved with the interaction ritual are *strong*. For instance, there are multiple types of repeated *group assemblies* (such as the initial 10 weeks of meetings, unofficial group runs, official group runs, cross-training events, and lunches and dinners) in which group members can interact, communicate their *attentions* and *moods*, and support one another. In addition to the *physical group assemblies*, RunTogether also bolsters group solidarity through *technologically mediated group assemblies* on their online social network. There are also high levels of *mutual focus of attention* (everyone is training for the same marathon) and *shared emotional states* (commitment to the schedule, commitment to personal goals, and positivity), and *barriers to outsiders* are rigidly defined by membership fees, online access, and participation.

We can also see that the interaction ritual has *strong outcomes*. For instance, there are numerous *sacred objects* which result from the training process, i.e. training schedules, training runs, the race event, and (importantly) *identities* which reflect the interaction rituals distinctiveness and activities. These sacred objects are accompanied by *strong standards of morality* which push group members to be positive and confident. There are also high levels of *group solidarity* (as demonstrated by the group of trainees who offered to train for a second

marathon with their injured peer) and *emotional energy* (confidence, enthusiasm, initiative, and pride).

We have seen that the RunTogether interaction ritual is usually successful in meeting its objective of making "marathoners out of couch-potatoes." Thus, in identity control theory's terms, we can say that the individual group members are able to successfully use the training program (or interaction ritual chain) as a *mechanism in the process of identity verification*. That is, people are able to use the RunTogether training program as a tool to iron out the discrepancies between their *identity standard* (the desired self-meanings) and the *alternative self-meanings* which they are exposed to in social situations. This is possible because the marathon training program helps people to develop the habits, qualities, and *meanings* which they associate with the identity standards, i.e. being marathon runners, which they aspire to develop or maintain.

Limitations:

I would like to point out that I initially conducted these interviews as part of an earlier project. Therefore, the questions which I asked the interviewees were not designed with this paper in mind. However, it was that project which ultimately led me to writing this thesis. While the data I gathered in those interviews may not have initially been intended for use in this manner, I was sufficiently able to code the information according to my current categories. However, if I had had the same focus with these interviews as I did with my other set of

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interviews, I most likely would have been able to gather stronger support for my argument that interaction rituals impact the identity verification process. In any case, I feel that I was able to demonstrate that the RunTogether training program is a *strong*, or successful, interaction ritual chain and that it leads to *strong outcomes*, especially the creation of marathon *identities*.

However, not all interaction rituals (or training programs for runners) are strong and successful. Indeed, there are many interaction rituals that are *weak*, or unsuccessful. What happens, then, to individuals attempting to use a weak interaction ritual to verify their identity standards? Originally, I intended to study In Motion's half-marathon training program as further evidence that strong rituals lead to identities. However, I found that the In Motion training ritual was much weaker than I had expected. This turned out to be fortuitous, though, as it provides us with an example of how identities are affected by weak interaction rituals.

The following chapter provides an example of an interaction ritual, In Motion's training program, which is not as strong as RunTogether's program. It is weaker because its *ingredients* are not as defined, numerous, or powerful as those found in RunTogether. With this comparison, we will be able to more clearly see the role of the strength and weakness of interaction ritual chains in the identity verification process.

4.   IN MOTION

In this chapter, we will be examining a half-marathon training program conducted by In Motion (a pseudonym), a fitness oriented company in the Mid-South. Like RunTogether, In Motion's training program falls under the category of *paid-for* training. However, In Motion's program was intended to train individuals for a half-marathon, rather than a full marathon. Also, In Motion was just beginning to develop its training program when I was studying it. Therefore, their program seemed to be more ad hoc, or less defined, than RunTogether's. By comparing the two programs (and the strengths and weaknesses of their *ingredients* and *outcomes*) we should be able to see how interaction rituals with varying intensities lead to differing effects on the identity verification process.

First, I will show that the In Motion program is an interaction ritual by identifying its *ingredients* and *outcomes*. Next, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of those *ingredients* and *outcomes*, especially the development of a marathon identity. Then, I will move to a comparison between the In Motion interaction ritual and the RunTogether interaction ritual. I will also continue to examine the role of technology within group assemblies.

Data & Methods:

The data for this section are trends and examples picked out from transcripts obtained from five semi-structured interviews. I used a non-probability purposive sampling method in selecting a sample from the population of all people formally involved with In Motion. Four of the interviews were with clients, and the other was with Mandy Sanchez (note that all of the participants and staff's names are pseudonyms), co-owner of In Motion, who serves as the coach for the group training. I chose these interviewees because I felt that analyzing the perceptions and experiences of individuals from different tiers (customer, coach/co-founder) of the company would provide a clearer picture than if I had interviewed only clients or trainers. Informants ranged in age from early-20s to mid-40s. Four of the interviewees were female; the fifth was male. All informants are White and have at least an undergraduate degree. Lloyd Bigg is a medical doctor, and Mandy Sanchez has a Ph.D. in exercise science. Ava Green and Betty Dawkins are students, and Lesley Harwell is an elementary school teacher. The interviews occurred in different locations between February 27th and March 6th, 2011. I recorded each interview using a digital audio recorder, then manually transcribed them using Microsoft Word on my personal computer. Note that the company's name and all of the interviewees' names have been replaced with pseudonyms and any identifying data has been removed.

In addition to interview transcriptions, I will be drawing data from field notes which I took during the eight weeks of participant-observation I spent in the 16-week long training program. Although I intended to complete the entire program, I unfortunately sustained a foot injury which did not allow me to finish the training period. Regardless, the field notes which I

accumulated during that period provide data which are useful to this study. I immediately

recorded my field notes onto my personal computer using Microsoft Word after solo and group

training runs. I used the same coding categories (see Table 1) for this data set as I did with the

RunTogether interview transcripts.

Findings:

In the beginning:

In Motion is a family owned and operated company that specializes in athletic equipment.

Mandy Sanchez, one of the owners, organized and led the training program. As noted, her

educational background is in exercise science, but she now works as a professor in a

department which focuses on nutrition and hospitality management. She claims to have started

running regularly during high school, at the age of sixteen. Since then she has run numerous

marathons, half-marathons, 10ks, and 5ks. She has been the director of a 5k/10k race event in

her city for several (14) years and recently started a half-marathon as well. This half-marathon

was only in its second year at the time of my study.

Mandy decided to start the training program in response to numerous requests from

individuals who wanted to run the races which she organizes, but felt that they did not know

how or have the ability to do so.

Every year I have people emailing or calling to meet about how train for this or that kind of race. So, I've been sending lots of emails or meeting with people individually, and so I just decided to do a group and see if we could cut down on my individual time and be more efficient. But also to just get people connected with other people who might run their pace or who they might be able to then branch off and have a running partner. Because in my experience with running, I think people continue it better if they have someone to go with. Most people like it from the social aspect. And when you're supposed to meet someone at five or six in the morning, it's hard to stand them up too many times – so, for accountability reasons. That was part of the objective – to get people introduced to other people.

The initial meeting of the In Motion training program also served as the first group run. On that day, Ava Green (my partner) and I arrived at In Motion and met three other participants: Lloyd Bigg, Lesley Harwell, and Betty Dawkins. Of course, Mandy was there as well. Although there was a possibility that other people might appear later, the six people at that opening meeting comprised the entire training group. Initially, I was surprised at the low number of participants, but I had hopes that the small group could provide more opportunities for participants to interact with one another and, thus, lead to stronger *group solidarity*.

While we waited to see if more people would arrive, we had a group conversation about each of our running experiences and goals for the training program. Lloyd's and Lesley's goals were simply to finish a half-marathon, as neither of them had previously done so. In my interviews with each of them, they both reported *physical* (health and fitness) concerns as their initial motivations for wanting to run.

Ava already had much experience with running long distances as she had run track and cross-country in middle school, high school, and college. She had also already run four half-marathons and one full-marathon. Her motivation for running comes from health and fitness concerns, a desire to improve on her previous race performances, and a belief that running is just something that she does (i.e. runner's identity).

Betty also had a long history of running as she was a member of a cross-country team during high school. She had also previously completed one half-marathon and claimed that her main goal was to improve on her previous time. She wished to improve on her past race performances as well.

Although I did not start running regularly until I was in my mid-twenties, I had completed three half-marathons and one full marathon prior to joining this program. I hoped to improve on my previous performances, but I was more concerned with studying the group training process than improving my run times.

We can see from the differing motivations for joining the training group that the members did not have much of a *mutual focus* other than a common desire to complete a half-marathon. Ava and Betty were focused on improving on their past achievements. Lloyd and Lesley just wanted to be able to finish a half-marathon, and I was more interested in studying the training process than in actually training.

After that initial discussion, we set out on our first group run, a three mile jog around town. Most of the participants had similar paces. Thus, we were able to remain close enough in

proximity to one another that we were able to talk during the run, and we were able to

maintain conversations until we grew tired and began to drift apart. Although Lloyd claimed

that he was only just starting to become a runner, his pace was much faster than the rest of

ours. As a result, he was not able to participate in our conversations. At first, Mandy matched

Lloyd's pace, but she eventually ran back to run with the rest of us. By the end of the run, we

had all drifted apart from one another, and we each arrived back at In Motion separately. In

hindsight, this first group run could be considered a microcosm of the entire training program:

We met. We started together. We separated.

Training Knowledge:

Once we arrived back to In Motion's building, Mandy provided refreshments and gave each

of us three printed-out training schedules. I wrote about them in my field notes:

> Mandy had printed out three schedules (novice, intermediate, and advanced). She is not
> assigning a specific routine for everyone as she feels that some people will wish to train
> harder than others. By not having everyone follow the exact same schedule, individuals
> will be better able to focus on their personal goals. Mandy also hinted that she might
> change the schedules to fit our individual goals (Field Notes: 11/13/10).

These schedules resembled other half-marathon and full-marathon training programs with

which I was already familiar. Although there were three different schedules for us to choose

from, they all centered on a general strategy of several short-distance runs during the week and

a long-distance group run on the weekend. As the weeks go on, the distances suggested on the

schedules for each weekend's long run gradually increase, until the appropriate mileage has been met. The differences between the three schedules pertained mostly to proper distances, speeds, and rest days for each level of runner. However, while I saw the logic behind Mandy's choice to use multiple training schedules, I was somewhat wary of not having a common set schedule for the entire group to focus on as I saw it as a crucial target for our *attentions to mutually focus* upon and for creating the *group solidarity* which I considered to be the most helpful aspect of group training programs.

The problem with having multiple training schedules to choose from is that the group members are not *mutually focused* on the same schedule. Thus, the *collective consciousness* among the group members is not as cohesive as it could be. This *division of attentions* lowers *group solidarity* by not allowing any one training schedule to be raised to the level of a *sacred object*. This means that *individual training runs* called for by the training schedules are *not* sacred objects which are strongly related to the training group. Thus, when trainees go on individual training runs, they are not cognitively interacting with the group through a sacred object. Instead, they are interacting with a sacred object associated with their individual training rituals. Also, the low level of mutual focus does not allow for the development of strong *standards of morality* pertaining to the group and its sacred objects.

Although most of us dropped out due to injuries, I believe that the *ingredients* of In Motion's training program were not able to produce the *outcomes* which the group members sought, i.e. completion of a half-marathon. I believe that if the *ingredients* had been stronger, there is a possibility that the group members would not have injured themselves. For instance,

if the training schedule had held *sacred object* status and was accompanied by appropriate standards of morality, the trainees may have adhered more strictly to the training schedule and (possibly) could have avoided over-training and the resultant injuries. A comment from Betty demonstrates this point, "I think that if I had followed the guidelines closer – and probably eaten better (laughing) – I probably wouldn't have ended up where I am now, [injured from over-training and unable to complete the race]".

It seems almost counter-intuitive that a problem for some of the group members was over-training. Indeed, it seems as if most people would suffer from under-training. However, the high level of commitment that the trainees had to verifying their identity standards caused them to work too hard. Again, if the training schedule had been more strictly followed, these injuries may have been avoided, and the group members may have been able to complete the process of identity verification.

Mandy would likely not agree that having a stronger focus of attention on the training schedule would lead to less injuries and be better for group solidarity. Indeed, she explained her reasons for choosing to offer multiple possible schedules to the group members:

> The problem with everybody starting at the same point is that if the running base is different, then the increased risk of injury is there if people start on a level that they're not on. If their goal is just to finish because they've never done that distance before, then I think that starting off with that beginner's schedule is better. If their plan is to do a certain time, then you've got to up the training requirements…. [But] there are some downsides to it, for sure.

Those downsides include: a *weak mutual focus of attention*; a *weak shared mood*; and *weaker* levels of *group solidarity* and *emotional energy* than if the group had had more of a *mutual focus of attention* and a stronger *shared mood* in relation to a *sacred object*, i.e. a common training schedule. While it is definitely important to be aware of individuals' goals, levels of physical ability, and the possibility of injuries, perhaps elevating a common set schedule to the level of *sacred object* would have been more beneficial for the group members overall.

In fact, the closest thing to a *sacred object* pertaining to the training schedules which I was able to identify from the interviews and participant-observation was the idea that training should consist of a gradual build-up of mileage over the course of the training period. A comment from Ava demonstrates her *lack of focus* on and dedication to a set training schedule:

J: How did you feel about trying to maintain a training schedule?

A: It was kind of a drag, and it was really loose. I wasn't sure how much I was supposed to be running each weekend. In the beginning, I didn't do very well because I already knew that I could run five or six miles, so I didn't maintain during the week with my short-runs because I knew that I could still come in and make the five on Saturday. And that was bad because when we tried to go up [in mileage], my legs didn't have the strength, especially on these hills. I got too tired because I had just taken a bunch of time off during the holidays when [I was] out of town.

Although this is not an example of over-training, we can see from this quote that the *lack of focus* on a set training schedule as a *sacred object* had detrimental effects on Ava's experience

with the training program. She was unsure of what mileage to attempt each week because she felt that she had enough previous running experience to allow her to forgo the relatively short-distance training runs without negatively affecting her overall training. Thus, she was physically unprepared for the long-distance runs later in the training schedule. If she had been more focused on and dedicated to following the training schedule, she might have maintained the short-runs and been able to handle the long runs.

I had this problem as well:

> I felt that perhaps pushing a little further and faster would slightly make up for the two weeks of not running. In truth, I know that is not the case. The purpose of the training regimen is to gradually build runners up to the point of easily being able to run long distances. I know that the two weeks of no running set me back in this respect. I do feel, though, that as a result of my previous marathon training experiences, I will easily be able to make up for the lost runs. In fact, my body was rather easily able to handle today's run regardless of the fact that it was the longest distance I've run in at least over six months. I do hope, though, that pushing hard today will not hamper my long group run (five miles) scheduled for this coming Saturday (Field Notes:12-2-10).

This excerpt shows that I was affected by a lack of dedication to the training schedule. I felt that my previous running experience kept me from having to follow the schedule as closely as I should have done. There is a possibility that my foot injury was a result of jumping directly into long-distance runs without first completing the short runs. This is because the short runs would have given my foot the opportunity to build up the support muscles within my foot and ankle. Thus, had I been properly adhering to the training schedule as a *sacred object*, my foot may have been strong enough to be able to handle the long-runs and avoid injury.

Team Building:

Two days after the first meeting, Ava and I met with Lesley in the evening for a short-distance run around town. We had traded contact information during our first meeting, and we communicated with each other through text messages in order to coordinate a time and place for us to meet. This turned out to be one of only three instances in which I ran with a group member other than Ava on days which were not specifically assigned to the long-distance group runs (Saturdays).

I specify "other than Ava" because she and I have had a long history of running together before we joined this program. Thus, most of my runs were with her. She and I had trained for and completed three half-marathons and one full-marathon together prior to joining this training group. Although we were training together for the same race, it was difficult for us to think of each other as members of a training group.

In hindsight, I feel that my and Ava's established personal relationship with one another may have kept us both from forming stronger relationships with the other group members and from depending more on them for support. Over the next several weeks, there were only two other instances, aside from Saturday group runs, in which I ran with other group members. Once, Ava and I ran with Lloyd, and he and I ran together on a separate occasion. However, none of the trainees reported developing a significant relationship with any of the other group members. Thus, perhaps my pre-existing relationship with Ava did not have much negative impact on the group's ability to form substantial relationships, i.e. *group solidarity*.

The only times I saw the whole group were on our long-distance runs on Saturdays, and I was only able to attend five of these sessions before I was injured and forced to withdraw from the training program. Surprisingly, only Lesley Harwell successfully completed the training program and half-marathon. Lloyd, Betty, and I were each injured to the point of not being able to continue the program, and Ava quit the program once she realized that I would be unable to continue. In an interview with Ava, she reported not feeling much *group solidarity*:

J: Did you feel that you were actually part of a group…? Did you feel like you belonged?

A: Not really. I think I missed too many practices. At the beginning I thought it was nice. I thought it was going to be a good group, but it sort of fell apart for me within the next couple of weeks. Then, [you] and I left town over the holidays for more than a month. All the group really had to hold it together were those Saturday runs, and that's just once every seven days. That's not really enough [for me] to feel accountable or like I'm a necessary part of the group.

Ava's comment seems to suggest that the training group did not have enough instances of *group assembly* for her to develop a sense of belonging to the group, i.e. *group solidarity*. Lesley provides another telling example:

J: Did you feel that you were part of a group during all of this?

Le: Umm, I did at first, but then everybody just started dying out. If there had been more people and certain things wouldn't have happened, I think it would've been better. I really just felt like I had a running coach. That's really what it ended up being. You know, Mandy was kind of the only person that I ever ran with, truthfully. So it was more like I had just hired a running coach, actually, than more of a group.

This comment demonstrates that Lesley was not able to form any significant relationships with any of the group members other than Mandy. She credits this to the low number of group members and to "certain things" that happened during the training program. (She does not expound on those "things", but she was likely alluding to the fact that so many of the participants became injured.) As a result, Lesley felt that her training was more of a *one-on-one* training experience than a *group* training experience.

In the In Motion program, *group assemblies* were limited to the group discussion during the first day, the planned Saturday group runs, and the occasional informal short-distance runs which group members organized for themselves during the week. Also, on another occasion Ava and I met with Mandy in order to use the BodPod, a device which measures body fat. All of the group members used the BodPod, but this was done individually under Mandy's guidance. The idea behind using the BodPod was so that we would be able to track the changes in our bodies as we progressed through the training schedule. While I feel that this is a good way to keep up individuals' motivations pertaining to health and fitness, I do not feel that it did much for creating *group solidarity*.

All of the group's members, including Mandy, reported a desire for more opportunities for group runs (or *group assemblies*), as most people's work and personal schedules kept them from being able to attend group runs. That is, the *focus of attention* among the group was not unified. This led to a further breakdown in *group assemblies*, *emotional energy*, and *group solidarity*. For example, Lloyd works as an emergency room physician:

J: What do you think could have made that program better?

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L: It was kind of – Well, my schedule varies so much, with work and all. It's difficult to make it to all the group meetings. I guess that's understandable. I'm working some days, working some nights. It's hard to keep a set routine as far as running. I don't know, it's kind of difficult to say – could have improved on the schedule.

J: If there had been more group runs?

L: Yeah, that would've helped. More times to meet, or different times. I guess Saturday was the big day, and I'm not off every Saturday. If there had been more group runs during the week – that would have helped.

Lesley provides more evidence of a dearth of *group assemblies*:

J: What do you think could have made the training program better?

Le: I would say – I don't think that it's anything that anybody could do, but during the week I had a lack of accountability because everybody's schedules were so different. It was hard to get on track with anybody. So during the week I had to be a lot more independent and make sure that I did it on my own. It wasn't an option of whether you wanted to do it or not because you know the long-run was coming up on Saturday. So I guess that's just the best thing, or the worst thing, about it was the scheduling. It was hard to get everybody together at the same time.

As a result of the group's lack of a mutual focus on the training schedule, Lesley experienced "a lack of accountability" which led to a *decrease* in her level of group solidarity. She also spoke of a desire for more participants. She seems to believe that if there were more participants, there would be more opportunities for *group assemblies*:

J: What if there had been more opportunities for group runs throughout the week?

Le: Yes that would've been better, more opportunities. And I don't think it was anybody's fault. It was just their schedules, but that would've been helpful to have more opportunities for group runs that we could pick from during the week.

J: How about if we had had more people?

Le: Yes, definitely more people because then if somebody can't show up, you've still got at least a few people to run with.

Mandy understands that *group solidarity*, or feeling like part of a group, is a major part of the training program:

J: So how important is it that [members of] a training group feel that they are part of a training group?

M: I think it is really important. And, I think that dynamic is 'I'm contributing.' And contributing to that group makes us feel like we're more a part of it. You think about a graduate class – There's that student that talks, and students that never say a word. The student that is engaged gets more out of it. And I think it's the same with a training group. A person that is hanging back and following, versus that person who is contributing, I don't think they have that sense of being a part.

This comment reveals that Mandy expects the group members to contribute to the training process. Indeed, in a *strong* interaction ritual we would expect the group members to be contributing their individual emotions and attentions to the shared emotions and attentions of the entire group. Recall, however, Ava's comment about not feeling as if she were a "necessary part of the group". This suggests that the In Motion training ritual was *unsuccessful* in creating

group solidarity by making individuals feel "necessary". When I asked Mandy how individuals contribute to the group, she responded:

> I think by bringing their thoughts, their personalities, their jokes, just being engaged. And that was something that we didn't do a lot, because of the size. But I think that's a part of it. And I think some people don't find a connection between exercise and fun. We think, 'Happy Hour, that's fun. And, I've got to go do this exercise thing, that's not fun.' But if exercise becomes fun, then we start looking more forward to that, and it becomes an okay social thing. It falls into our social schedule, instead of, 'Oh, my gosh! I've got to keep to this exercise schedule'. That's where I remember [that] I switched from being that person who was running for fitness and then it became, 'I do this because it's my social outlet. If I don't do this, then I don't have a social outlet'. You know, not that every run should be relaxing and fun, but I think in general it's got to be a little fun or people won't stick to it.

We can glean from this statement that Mandy acknowledges the fact that the group members were not "engaged" with one another. She credits this to the small size of the training group. However, we can see that individuals are expected to bring a "relaxing and fun" attitude in order to "engage" themselves with other group members. Mandy is revealing a belief that viewing running solely as a form of exercise is not as motivating to individuals as viewing it as a "social outlet". This is a *standard of morality* which is expected of the group members, and it is expected to result from a *mutual focus of attention* (completion of a half-marathon) and a *shared mood* (running is "fun"). It is also expected to increase *solidarity* among the group members.

Theoretically, this will happen as individuals engage the group in a fun way and other group members adopt a similar attitude. This will lead to a snowball effect of engagement which turns individuals' motivations to run from a focus on fitness to a focus on running as a source of positive social interaction and a feeling of belonging with the group.

A quote from Ava suggests that she did not experience the training group as a fun "social outlet":

J: So even though you didn't necessarily join this program because you were unsure of your ability to run a half-marathon, what did you expect to get from [it]?

A: Well, I still expected it to help me even though I didn't need the help. I thought in a way that it would. And I expected it to be really fun socially, but it turned out that we had a really small group. There wasn't really any one person that I really bonded with. I think that if we had had a bigger group and there had been a better chance of me meeting somebody my own age, or even not my own age, but that had a similar pace and a similar outlook on running and was as into training as I was – someone to really buddy-up with – it probably would've gone much better for me.

Keep in mind that Ava was already familiar with the general scope of my research when I interviewed her. However, she was not familiar with Mandy's comments about the training group as a "social outlet". Thus, we can be fairly sure that her comments were unaffected by any previous knowledge of Mandy's approach to the training program. We can see from her comments that, had there been more trainees for Ava to choose from, she believes that she might have been able to forge a relationship with someone who would have been able to help

her train better. Had she been able to, perhaps she would have accepted the *standard of morality* which claims that the group training process is fun. However, the group was small, and there was no one with whom she could connect. Even though Ava and I had previously trained together and continued to do so, even I was not physically on the same level with her or "as into training" as she was. Thus, the interaction ritual was unable to provide Ava with the *group solidarity* which she sought and, apparently, was necessary for her to complete the training program.

As a result of my earlier interviews with RunTogether, I was already aware of the role of their online social network in encouraging interaction and fostering a sense of community among members of the training group. With this in mind, I asked the In Motion participants how they believe they would have been affected by having a similar service. Every group member reported that they would have benefitted greatly from it. For example, Lloyd:

J: If there had been a social networking service, like Facebook but specifically for this group, where you could blog about your runs and keep up with other people's stuff and just mingle, do you think that would have helped?

L: Oh yeah, definitely. That would be something that I think would help throughout, not just for this race but throughout any kind of training –just to see what your friends are doing, or what they ran today, or what their planning on running, what upcoming races, stuff like that.

J: How would that affect you, seeing that stuff?

L: I think it would motivate me – seeing what your friends are doing. It's like, 'I've

        got to get out there and start running! I've got to keep up with them. They're

        doing that race? I need to do that one!'

J: Would having that kind of service be the same as seeing those people and talking

        about those things in person?

L: It would be close to it, but it wouldn't be quite the same. It'd be very similar,

        though. I guess it's similar to texting versus talking, you know. It'd be convenient

        to see what other people are doing at whatever hour of the day.

We can see that Lloyd was very receptive to the idea of using a social network to help with

the training program. His claim, "It'd be convenient to see what other people are doing at

whatever hour of the day," suggests that an online social network could have helped him to

develop a higher level of *mutual focus of attention* and (consequently) more *solidarity* with the

other group members. He was definitely not the only group member to feel this way. When I

questioned Mandy on the topic, she replied:

J: How do you think it would change your training program if you had something

        similar [to RunTogether's online social network]?

M: I definitely think it would get people more engaged. My biggest challenge is

        juggling a lot of things, so I'd have to have somebody help me do that. [But] I

        think that just growing the program – and adding something like that —would

        definitely get people more engaged. And so many people are into social

        networking sites. [People are] just on them all the time.

J: Do you think it would be the same as… more "face time," yet not actually face-

        to-face?

M: Yeah, it would increase the connectivity of the group outside of just running. It's

a good idea.

It seems, then, that the training group members believe that an *online forum* can provide

many of the same opportunities for group members as actually assembling in *bodily co-*

presence. It would give them a chance to engage with one another, plan runs, communicate

about their progress, etc. The difference, however, between online *group assemblies* and bodily

group assemblies is that individuals are not able to witness the physical reactions of other

members. However, since they are able to communicate their *attentions* and *moods* through

the content and tone of their text, the *online assembly* is still an instance of *group assembly*; it

is merely a *weaker* form of group assembly than are physical gatherings.

A crucial element of being able to feel group solidarity, or feeling as if one belongs to a

group, is being able to identify *barriers to outsiders*. In Motion's *barriers* are defined by whether

or not someone paid the program's fee, if they attended the first and only group meeting aside

from long-runs, and if they showed up for the long-distance group runs on Saturdays. However,

some participants reported that people who had not paid the fee or attended the initial

meeting were running with the group on long-distance runs later into the training period. One

of those people was a woman who did not attend the initial meeting or the subsequent five

weeks of group runs but whom Mandy discussed as following the same schedule as ours and

(more-or-less) being a part of our group. Although I heard about this woman on several

occasions, I never once saw her. Lesley reported feelings of ambiguity about whether or not

that lady was actually a group member:

L: There were a few weeks when we had long runs when different random people were showing up that really weren't part of the group. And that was good, but I think it would be good to start with the same group and continue with those people because you grow together – and if you can find somebody that's kind of on your speed and pace and everything. There was a lady towards the end – I don't think she was actually part of the group, but she was at my pace and my speed so we ran together. And that was good because Lloyd was more of Mandy's speed, so they were usually – We would start out running, and they would always get out ahead of me, obviously. I never tried to keep up, so I kind of felt for the first few miles that I was running by myself, but Mandy would always come back and run with me.

At first, Lesley claims that there is a benefit of "growing together" (*group solidarity*) which accompanies starting and staying with the same group. However, she also reports that having a running partner which closely matched her pace "was good", regardless of the fact that she was not one of the original group members. Lesley's emotions toward this woman were mixed because she did not start off with the group, but Lesley was still glad to have someone who matched her pace. Thus, Lesley began to build *solidarity* with someone from outside of the group, rather than with a group member.

Identity:

As previously noted, the strongest *mutual focus of attention* which I found in the In Motion group was the shared goal of completing the half-marathon at the end of the training program; likewise, the closest thing to a *shared mood* was each individual's commitment to achieving the verification of their independent identity standards. For instance, I was *committed to an identity standard* in which I was a good student. Lloyd and Lesley were *committed to identity standards* in which they were fit, healthy, and successful half-marathon runners. And Ava and Bethany were committed to maintaining and improving their visions of themselves as successful half-marathon racers. Unfortunately, the commitment to achieving those identity standards was really the only *common emotional state* among the group members.

Mandy suggests that what most people gain from joining training programs is the ability to overcome a fear of failure:

> J: I [already] asked you about the most important aspect of a training program, but what do you think that most people actually get from being in [one]?
>
> M: Just a sense of accomplishment, I think. Doing something they've either never done or never done as well as they've wanted to, but in this case, just something they've never done. Or maybe they're even a little fearful of it. You know – a fear of not doing it or of not being able to finish.
>
> J: So, would you say that something like this helps people get confidence to overcome that fear?

M: I think so or maybe also to overcome other things. I know that for me when I first

finished a marathon, I was just like, 'You know, I think I can pretty much handle a

lot of things that I didn't think that I could handle before that because I just did

that, and it was hard.' So, I think once you've pushed yourself a little bit and

realized, 'Well okay, I can do that. Well, wait a minute. Maybe I can do these

other things that I've been afraid to do for a long period of time.'

We can see that Mandy believes that marathon training programs help people to overcome

a fear of failure and that training programs provide confidence (a positive *emotional energy*).

She also displays a belief that overcoming this fear of failure can give individuals more

confidence to deal with fears of failure in their other endeavors and in other areas of their lives.

This makes sense if we look at it from the perspective of identity control theory. Individuals are

committed to an *identity standard* in which they are successful people. However, the

alternative meanings (i.e. that they are scared rather than confident) which they get from their

interactions in social settings indicate that they may not actually have the qualities of successful

people. Therefore, they alter their behaviors in order to develop those qualities (i.e.

confidence). The data show that this is precisely why the trainees joined the training program.

That is, they joined the training program because they believed that it would help them to

develop the qualities of successful people. Thus, individuals are using interaction ritual chains

as a mechanism in their identity verification processes.

Collins sees fear as "a kind of social cringing before the consequences of social actions"

(Collins 2004:129). In other words, individuals are frightened of the social consequences of their

actions. In this example, fear stems from the individuals' anxiety over being seen as failures.

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Collins claims that successful interaction rituals build *emotional energy*, or feelings of confidence and "initiative in taking action" within individuals, and these feelings are the outcome of *strong, successful* interaction rituals (Collins 2004:49). Thus, a successful half-marathon group training interaction ritual is expected to build confidence within its group members. This is why the trainees are able to successfully use interaction rituals to verify their identity standards.

A quote from Lesley shows that she agrees with Mandy's belief that the training program is a source of confidence:

Le: Before I started the group training, I guess I developed the attitude that you can do anything that you put your mind to, but I still wasn't that confident that I could do it on my own. That's, obviously, why I paid the money to join the group. In the beginning, I thought – I couldn't visualize or envision how I was going to make it to 13 miles. I knew I would. I didn't think about it. I just took it one step at a time, really – or one week at a time, rather. Each time I would make a new mileage goal I thought, 'Well, okay!' And that would boost my confidence level. You know, 'You just did eight miles; you can do ten.' But there was one week where I missed a long-run. That really messed with my head. I thought, 'Oh my gosh! I've missed a week. Am I going to be able to keep up next week? How far behind am I?' – that kind of thing. I was really anal about hitting all of those [long-distance runs]. I was so worried that if I didn't hit every long-run I was going to fall behind and never make it to the end.

J: Were you scared or were you feeling guilty? What was the emotion there?

Le: It wasn't guilt. It was literally a lack of confidence in myself. I mean, I could've run seven miles, missed a week, and then had to run the next week and still have

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been, 'Am I still going to do this?' – And just because I had been lazy that week. And, 'Would I have the energy or strength or whatever?' And it was just every week, every time I met a new mile it was a boost in confidence.

We can say that, prior to joining the training program, Lesley was unsure of her ability to complete a half-marathon. Another way to say it is that Lesley was scared that she would not be able to finish a half-marathon. She joined the group because she saw it as a way for her to gain the confidence necessary to overcome that fear. Thus, she joined the training group because she believed that it could give her the confidence which she felt that she lacked. From her comment, we can see that she got this confidence as a result of *gains of emotional energy* which she received from each long run. That is, the success that she experienced in the separate interaction rituals (i.e. the group's weekly long-distance runs) within the overall training interaction ritual chain boosted Lesley's confidence in her ability to complete the half-marathon (and to achieve identity verification).

However, not all of the trainees successfully became half-marathon runners. Indeed, Lesley was the only one to finish the half-marathon. That does not mean, though, that the training ritual did not build confidence or affect people's identities. Take Lloyd for example:

J: How about your confidence during all of this? Did you know from the beginning that you were going to be able to do it?

L: I wasn't a hundred percent sure. I felt like if I did the training plan I could do it, but I certainly was not confident when I started this. I guess that's one of the reasons why I joined the program – because I wanted to make sure that I could do it, and I guess to build some self-confidence.

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Recall that Lloyd works as an emergency room physician. In order to get to that point in his career, he surely had to overcome many situations in which failure would have prevented him from progressing further. Since we know that Lloyd eventually became a physician, we can safely infer that he developed the confidence necessary to overcome any fear of failure. However, his success in that endeavor did not provide him with enough confidence to attempt a half-marathon without joining a training group. This is because, although Lloyd successful completed his medical training and verified his vision of himself as a doctor, that confidence was not linked to an identity which pertained to running. Thus, Lloyd joined the program specifically to build up his confidence in regards to running, so that he could successfully complete the half-marathon.

Even Ava, who had previously successfully completed several half-marathons, hinted that she could have used some confidence building from Mandy and the training group:

J: So does training with a group affect your confidence or motivation to run?

A: Yes, and it affects how hard I push myself. Um, I would've done better if I had had someone that was more on my level and on my pace, and if there had been someone who had been just a little bit better than me that I'd started out running with. It would've motivated me to run more and given me more confidence that I could do the mileage. Mandy was, um, too busy, maybe. She had a lot of people to worry about, and I didn't want to take up too much of her time because I already know how to run, so I didn't need her support. [At least,] I thought I didn't need her support as much as some of the slower girls did, but now that I think about it, it probably would've helped a lot.

Indeed, although Ava had already run several half-marathons and a full marathon as well as trained with high school, college, and paid-for training groups, she was unable to complete this particular half-marathon. While much of the reason for her failure may be due to a lack of *group assemblies, barriers to outsiders*, *mutual focus,* and a *shared mood* with the training group, she seems to think that a low level of confidence derived from the lack of support from the group could have played some part in her failure to complete this training program and half-marathon. Thus, rather than maintaining her identity standard, her experiences with the training program may have actually given her alternative meanings which suggest that she is *not* a confident, successful half-marathon runner.

As already noted, I was unable to directly question the RunTogether participants about identity, but I *was* able to directly question the participants from In Motion about having a runner's *identity*. They reported having different levels of a runner's identity before and after the program. Lloyd:

J: So, before this program did you consider yourself to be a runner?

L: No.

J: Do you consider yourself to be a runner now?

L: I guess so. I think so. I've enjoyed it and gotten in better shape. I hope to keep doing (laughing).

J: You said that you started running to get in better shape and get more cardio-vascular exercise. Has your motivation for running changed since being in this program?

L: I guess I'm kind of competing with myself. I want to get better from – You know, I ran some 5ks last year. I certainly want to do better than I did last year. I want to go longer distances, you know, longer distance races, 10ks. And I'd like to do at least one full and a couple of halves. I guess the motivation has changed a little bit. I want to stay in shape – plus get faster and improve, you know, on what's been done so far.

We can see that although Lloyd has not successfully developed a half-marathon identity, he has been able to develop a runner's identity as a result of the training ritual. He has shifted from being motivated by a focus on health and fitness (*physical* motivations) to also being motivated by competition with himself (*achievement* motivations). This shift parallels the differences between rookie and mid-level runners found in the study by Masters and Ogles (1995). The authors show that rookie runners are motivated by health and fitness concerns, while mid-level runners focused more on improving their previous performances. Advanced runners exhibit a social runner's *identity* which is characterized by recognition, affiliation, health, and competition. While Lloyd may not yet have internalized all of these characteristics, it seems that he is set on a course to do so. Another excerpt illustrates this point:

J: What was the most helpful part of the training program?

L: Um, I think just getting out there with other people and doing it, you know, and getting out there and running. Before, I was in that mindset, you know, 'get out there and run three miles'. And I never really pushed myself to do any farther distance than that. And you know, I think getting out there with other people that can do a lot farther, and there were a lot more veteran runners, that helped a lot.

Lloyd realized that being around veteran runners would "help a lot," and he pushed himself harder than he ever had before in order to keep up with them. Had he been strictly adhering to a training schedule, he might not have done so. Also, if he had felt more solidarity with the training group, he may not have attempted to keep up with veteran runners who were not a part of his training group. However, he did push himself too hard and eventually picked up an injury which did not allow him to run the final race; this only served to stoke his motivation to complete a half-marathon.

J: So now are you more or less motivated to run a half-marathon?

L: I think I'm more motivated (laughing). Just because I didn't get to do it, you know. Yeah, definitely.

J: Do you ever plan on running a full [marathon]?

L: Yes. I'd like to run one in the fall if all goes well. We'll see.

Now that he has gone through the training ritual, he has the knowledge of how to train for long-distance races, the social connections to mid-level and veteran runners for group runs, and the confidence to complete a half-marathon. That is, he has developed a mid-level runner's identity. Thus, there is a good chance that he will be able to cultivate his newly garnered runner's identity into a half-marathoner's identity, with or without another training group.

Lesley also demonstrates that the training program caused a shift in her runner's identity:

J: Before you joined the training program, did you consider yourself to be a runner?

Le: Yes, not an advanced runner, a beginning runner, but yes, I considered myself a runner.

J: What kind of runner?

Le: One that does it more for enjoyment and to meet a personal goal or accomplishment.

J: But do you consider yourself more of a runner now than you did before?

Le: Yes. I don't feel like a competitive runner, or anything, I don't do it to compete. Like I said, it's more for just self-satisfaction. Yeah …I'll never do it to compete or anything. I'll set my own personal goals. Like, my personal goal was to run the half-marathon under two hours and thirty minutes. I would like to have made it in under two hours and thirty minutes, but I didn't. But I'm glad I finished this time. I'm actually thinking about doing another one later this month. It's a lot less, not as many hills – an easier course, because I'd like to make that time. I'm still kind of hard on myself about it. I want to do another one, just to see if I can beat my time.

J: So, you want to do another half. Do you want to do a [full-marathon]?

Le: Right now I don't want to do a [marathon]. I might, I just can't think about it right now. I'm tired of the training and everything. I'm kind of getting burnt out on it again. So I need to just rest and do it for fun. And I'm switching it up, with this new guy I'm working out with. And if I work out with him, that won't really allow me – for my short-runs and stuff during the week. I'm just going to take it easy with the running. I'll still go on jogs, a couple miles, three or four miles, but nothing like I'm doing right now. I do plan on running the 10K in the spring. … My first 10K, last year … was difficult because of the hills here in [our town]. [The second one] was a breeze. It was a month later, and it was flat. That was nice. Same thing I want to do with the half – go for an easier course and just see if I

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can make a better time. Everybody I've talked to says this was like the hardest half they've ever run. So, I guess doing that for my first one, I should just be satisfied that I completed it.

Although we can see that Lesley demonstrates the qualities of rookie and mid-level runners, she does not seem to be developing a half-marathon or marathon identity, or even a runner's *identity* to the same extent as Lloyd. I believe that the reason for this is that when Lesley came into the training program, she was already more committed to an identity standard which is characterized by a generally healthy lifestyle than to an identity standard in which she is a runner.

This makes sense if we consider Collins's claim that *emotional energy* is the long-term emotions which serve as the baseline for individuals' reactions to outside stimuli. That is, prior to joining the training program, Lesley had developed a high level of emotional energy pertaining to her desire to be fit and healthy. We do not know how she did this, but we know that she did. Thus, when she began the training program, she was already committed to the identity standard which was linked to that positive emotional energy.

In the conversation Lesley and I had as we ran together on the first day of the program, she told me that she had lost over 100 pounds in the previous two or three years. That much bodily change usually requires extreme changes to one's lifestyle and identity. I broached the topic again during our interview:

J: How important is health and fitness?

Le: Very important, but it's only become important in my life over the past two or three years. I used to be very over-weight and very unhealthy, and never exercised and never paid any attention to my health. Like I said, about three years ago I started paying attention and got a bunch of weight off and running was just another form. I like to switch up my exercise, and it was something else that I could do and mix in with other stuff that I was doing.

Thus, we can be sure that she was more committed to being a healthy and fit person than to being a runner. However, even though Lesley was not on the same track as Lloyd in developing a runner's *identity*, she still felt that the training group moved her from a novice runner to a mid-level runner. We may also assume that this shift was congruous with her commitment to her identity standard as a fit and healthy person.

Discussion:

In summation, we can see that the In Motion training program has the *ingredients* which are necessary for it to be labeled as an interaction ritual. *Barriers to outsiders* are whether or not someone paid the fees for the program, if they attended the first and only group meeting aside from long-runs, and if they showed up for the long-distance group runs on Saturdays. *Group assemblies* were limited to the opening meeting and Saturday group runs. The *mutual focus of attention* focused on completing the half-marathon. And the *shared emotional state* among the trainees was characterized by each person's commitment to their own goals.

The *outcomes* of the In Motion training ritual were somewhat limited. For instance, *group solidarity* was almost non-existent. *Sacred objects* were limited to the race event, a general belief in the efficacy of training schedules, and the *identities* which the group members developed or maintained over the course of the training period. The s*tandards of morality* which I was able to identify from the group were that trainees should contribute to the group, and they should also see the training process/group as "fun". Finally, *emotional energy* was identified as the confidence (or lack of confidence) which people acquired throughout the program.

We can also see that the trainees expected the training program to be able to help them in the identity verification process. That is, prior to joining the program, the trainees were committed to certain identity standards, and they believed that the program would help them achieve those standards. Thus, they were using the training ritual as a mechanism in that process.

When we compare In Motion's training ritual with RunTogether's training ritual, we can see that In Motion's program was not as successful. This is because In Motion's *ingredients* were not as *strong* as those found in RunTogether. For example, In Motion's *group assemblies* were less effective because they were too rare and did not have enough participants. On the other hand, RunTogether had a *high* number of group assemblies over a longer period of time, such as formal group runs, informal group runs, cross-training sessions, dinners, and lunches. In addition, RunTogether also had the online social network which supplemented their physical gatherings.

We can also see that the *barriers to outsiders* found in the two programs were unequal. On one hand, In Motion's barriers consisted of whether or not someone paid the fees for the program, if they attended the first and only group meeting aside from long-runs, and if they showed up for the long-distance group runs on Saturdays. However, as we have seen, there were non-group members who trained with the In Motion group and caused some confusion about who was actually a group member. On the other hand, RunTogether had more rigidly defined barriers as evidenced by high membership fees, online access, and participation in the many available group assemblies. Also, none of the trainees from the RunTogether program reported any confusion about not knowing if someone was a group member or not.

There was also a lack of *mutual focus of attention* among the In Motion group members, other than on the race event itself and their common focus on their individual goals. We also saw that the In Motion group members did not have a single training schedule to focus their attentions upon and that this may have adversely affected the trainees. Conversely, the RunTogether program was able to elevate the training schedule to the level of a *sacred object* and attach it to *standards of morality* which encourage members to adhere to it. Thus, the RunTogether group members were not only all focused on completing a marathon and achieving their personal goals, they were also all focused on adhering to the plan laid out by the schedule. This allowed individual group members to interact with the group by interacting with the training schedule alone, i.e. solitary training runs. This heightened mutual focus allowed the RunTogether group members to create a more defined *shared reality*; whereas the In Motion members were more individually oriented.

We have seen that a *shared mood* was almost non-existent in the In Motion training group. That is, it was limited to each person's commitment to achieving their own goals. However, when we look at RunTogether we find that group members shared an emotional state which was characterized by a high level of commitment to the training schedule, commitment to personal goals, and positivity. These common moods allowed the RunTogether members to experience a well-defined shared reality, as opposed to the more ambiguous shared reality found in the In Motion program.

If *strong ingredients* lead to *strong outcomes*, and *weak ingredients* lead to *weak outcomes*, we can expect the RunTogether program to lead to more powerful *group solidarity*, *emotional energy*, *sacred objects*, and *standards of morality* than the In Motion program. For example, the numerous group assemblies, large number of participants, and rigidly defined barriers to outsiders found in the RunTogether program allow group members to easily identify who is a group member and to develop meaningful relationships with each other. The numerous common emotional states and honed-in mutual focus of attentions which the RunTogether members have also allow them to experience a *strong shared reality*. Those relationships and the shared reality lead to high levels of group solidarity and emotional energy, and to the development of powerful sacred objects and standards of morality.

Contrariwise, the low number of participants, poorly defined barriers to outsiders, and lack of group assemblies found in the In Motion program did not allow members to build relationships with other group members who were easily identifiable as such. Also, the weak mutual focus of attention and the low level of common emotional states among the individuals

did not allow for the development of a strong shared reality among the group members. This led to weak sacred objects, standards of morality, group solidarity, and emotional energy.

If we look specifically at the ability of each program to affect individuals' identities, we can see that both programs did indeed lead to changes in those identities. However, as we can see from Edith Rogers' embracing of the label of being a "boutique marathoner", we can see that the stronger RunTogether program was more successful in its goal of making "marathoners" than was the In Motion program in creating "half-marathoners". This is because, as Collins claims, those *identities are actually sacred objects* which result from the interaction ritual. Since the RunTogether ritual was more powerful and successful, it makes sense that the identities/sacred objects which it creates would be stronger, or more defined, than the identities/sacred objects created by the In Motion ritual.

We have seen, though, that even though the In Motion program was not able to create "half-marathoner" identities within most of its group members, it was still able to make "runner" identities. This point is supported by Lloyd Bigg's and Lesley Harwell's claims that they felt more like runners after the program than before the program. Therefore, we can say that while In Motion's ritual might not have been powerful enough to successfully create half-marathoners out of all of its members, it was definitely able to impact their identities, or the sets of meanings which indicate to a person "who they are". Thus, we can see that interaction ritual chains are a mechanism which individuals can use in the process of identity verification; because they directly affect the meanings which make up people's identities.

Limitations:

My study of In Motion's group training program may have been hindered by the low numbers of participants in the group. If there had been more participants, I might have been able to gain a more precise understanding of the group's dynamics through my participant-observation. I say this is because there would have more people for me to observe. As Lesley and Ava pointed out, there were not enough group members for every individual to be able to find someone on their physical level or as "into training" as they are. However, as we have seen, the low number of group members actually helped my study because it allowed me to use In Motion as an example of a *weak* training ritual. Without being able to compare a strong ritual with a weak ritual, we would not be able to observe the effects that each has on individuals' identities.

Also, my study was hampered by the injury I received early on in the training period. If I had been able to continue with the participant-observation, I might have been able to more thoroughly understand the group's dynamics from an insider's perspective. However, as we have seen, my injury may have been related to the strength of the interaction ritual, especially the low level of mutual focus of attention on a training schedule. Thus, my getting injured actually provided more evidence for the claim that In Motion's training ritual was weaker than that of RunTogether. In addition, my presence as a researcher may have altered the dynamics of the training group. Thus, those dynamics might have shifted to a more natural state after I quit the program.

I also believe that Ava's presence in the training program may have kept me from becoming more involved with the other group members. Had I been able to do so, my experience with the group may have been much different than it was. However, we also saw that none of the other group members developed significant relationships with one another. Thus, we can assume that the ritual was not able to create a sufficient level of group solidarity. This is also demonstrated by the fact that, after I became injured, Ava chose to quit the program. If the ritual had been able to create more group solidarity, a stronger mutual focus of attention, and a shared emotional state, there is a possibility that she would have chosen to continue with the training program.

Finally, it is possible that the trainees developed runners' identities simply by running, rather than from participation in a group training program. However, as previously discussed, there is the possibility that training individually for a race is actually an interaction ritual. Unfortunately, the data gathered from the RunTogether and In Motion training groups does not allow me to address this issue. However, in the next chapter, using data gathered from a survey of racers, we will compare the ability of different types of training programs, including solitary training programs, to affect the identities of their trainees. This will provide more definitive evidence that individuals use interaction rituals as mechanisms in the identity verification process.

5. SURVERY OF RACERS

This chapter will compare group training experiences (i.e. high school programs, college-level programs, professional programs, charity programs, and paid-for programs) with each other and with solitary training programs. This will allow us to compare the specific *outcomes* of each type of program in terms of the "runner's identity". As noted previously, although solitary training programs are a *weaker* form of the marathon training ritual than are group training programs, they *are* a form of training interaction rituals. They are weaker because group training rituals' *ingredients* are stronger than those of the solitary training ritual. These comparisons will also allow us to make more general statements about the relationship between interaction ritual chains and the identity verification process.

Data & Methods:

I conducted an anonymous survey at the race event which served as the climax of the In Motion training program. There were actually two races at the event: a 5k race and a half-marathon race. The event organizer, Mandy Sanchez, allowed me to set up a small table near the registration and awards ceremony area before and after the race. There were a total of 133 survey respondents. Sixty-seven of them were 5k racers, and the remaining sixty-six were half-

marathon racers. Informants were not asked for any information which could be used to identify them and were told that participation was completely voluntary. The survey was designed to identify: sex; running experience; marathon running experience; group training experience; how often respondents run with other people; and motivations for running.

I analyzed the data using the chi-square (X^2) distribution to determine the strength of the relationships between variables. The original response categories were Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. However, during analysis I collapsed the response categories of the motivation measures into two categories: Agree and Do Not Agree. I did this because many of the respondents indicated neutrality for many of the motivation measures. Selecting the neutral/middle response category is a documented trend in surveys with multiple (five or more) answer categories for questions designed to measure individuals' attitudes (Kieruj and Moors 2010). Since I am more interested in positive (Agree) responses to the motivation measures than negative (Do Not Agree) or neutral responses, I felt it was appropriate to merge the neutral answers with the Do Not Agree category. This allows me to focus on the individuals who felt strongly enough about a particular type of motivation to respond positively, rather than indicating neutrality or a negative response. Doing this changed the significance of the correlation between variables in some cases, but I chose to focus only the analysis of the collapsed categories for the sake of uniformity. I will address this issue again in the Limitations section of this chapter.

Findings:

Chapters Three and Four showed that group training programs for runners *are* interaction ritual chains (IRCs) and suggested that they lead to the formation of runner's identities. The trends found in the survey data provide further support for the claim that these IRC's (or training programs) lead to the development of runners' *identities*.

Table 2 – *Relationship Between Identity & Any Group Training*

		Any Group Training (N)		
		Training	No Training	Total
Identity	Agree	50	42	92
	Do Not Agree	14	27	41
	Total	64	69	133
		Any Group Training (%)		
		Training	No Training	Total
Identity	Agree	78%	61%	69%
	Do Not Agree	22%	39%	31%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: X^2 (4.0) is significant at 0.05 alpha with 1 degree of freedom.

Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between *identity* and *any type of training*. This implies that people who have had some type of *group training* are more likely to agree with *identity* than are people who have never experienced *any group training*. Thus, we can assume that group training will likely lead to the formation of runners' identities.

However, we can see that 61% of informants with *no group training* agreed with *identity*. Indeed, most racers (69%) agreed with *identity* as a source of motivation for running, regardless of whether or not they had any group training. This suggests that *solitary training rituals* also cause individuals to develop runners' identities. This makes sense, though, if we recall that *solitary training rituals* are also interaction rituals which result in runners' identities. They are simply a *weaker* form of the training ritual than are *group training rituals*, because their *ingredients* are not as strong.

Although the relationship between a*ny training* and *identity* is significant, when we look more closely at the *specific types of group training*, the data indicate weak relationships between *identity* and *high school training*, c*ollege-level training*, *professional training*, and *charity training* are all insignificant. This suggests that these training rituals were not strong enough to instill a runner's identity. However, common sense tells us that many runners get their starts in high school. Then, why is it that the data indicate otherwise? Perhaps, it is because each of these types of training programs has objectives other than simply making runners out of non-runners. (We will return to this topic shortly.)

Table 3 – *Relationship Between Identity & Paid-For Training*

		Paid-For Training (N)		
		Training	No Training	Total
Identity	Agree	10	82	92
	Do Not Agree	0	41	41
	Total	10	123	133
		Paid-For Training (%)		
		Training	No Training	Total
Identity	Agree	100%	67%	69%
	Do Not Agree	0%	33%	31%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: X^2 (4.82) is significant at 0.05 alpha with 1 degree of freedom.

In contrast, the relationship between *identity* and *paid-for training* is significant (See Table 3). Indeed, 100% of people with *paid-for training* exhibit a runner's identity. This implies that people with p*aid-for training* are more likely to agree with i*dentity* than are people without *paid-for training*. The fact that this is the only t*ype of group training* that showed a significant correlation with i*dentity* may be the result of contextual factors.

For instance, *paid-for training groups* such as RunTogether claim that their mission is to create marathoners, while other t*ypes of t*r*aining groups* may have other primary objectives such as fund-raising or education. However, not all *paid-for training programs* are able to fully transform non-runners into half-marathoners (or 5k runners, marathoners, etc., depending on the case); but, as we have seen in the case of In Motion, they may be able to move people from a *non-runner's identity* to more of a *runner's identity*.

Table 4 – *Identity & Frequency of Group Runs*

		Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Almost Always	Always	Total
		Frequency of Group Runs (N)					
Identity	Agree	7	11	13	6	4	41
	Do Not Agree	4	26	40	16	6	92
	Total	11	37	53	22	10	133
		Frequency of Group Runs (%)					
Identity	Agree	64%	30%	25%	27%	40%	31%
	Do Not Agree	36%	70%	75%	73%	60%	69%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: X^2 (7.08) is insignificant at 0.05 alpha with 4 degrees of freedom.

As noted, group training rituals are not the only way to form running identities; solitary training rituals also lead to the development of runners' identities. When we look at the *Relationship Between Identity and Frequency of Group Runs* (Table 4), we see that there is not a significant relationship between the two variables. This implies that how often the informants run with other people does not necessarily affect *identity*. Thus, we can assume that people who run alone more often than with other people are *not* any more or less likely to develop a runner's identity than are informants who run with people more often than they run alone. This supports the claim that solitary *and* group training programs are both interaction rituals with lead to the development of runners' identities.

Table 5 – *Relationship Between Identity & Years of Running*

		Years of Running (N)						
		0 y	1 y	2-5 y	6-10 y	11-20 y	21+ y	Total
Identity	Agree	3	4	27	38	14	5	91
	Do Not Agree	7	9	19	3	1	2	41
	Total	10	13	46	41	15	7	132
		Years of Running (%)						
		0 y	1 y	2-5 y	6-10 y	11-20 y	21+ y	Total
Identity	Agree	30%	31%	59%	93%	93%	71.00%	69%
	Do Not Agree	70%	69%	41%	7%	7%	29%	31%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: X^2 (33.16) is significant at 0.001 alpha with 5 degrees of freedom. Also, there is one missing case.

By comparing *years of running experience* with i*dentity* (see Table 5), we can see that they have a very strong relationship. This suggests that people with *more running experience* are much more likely to agree with *identity* than are people with *less running experience*. Indeed, it would seem strange if individuals with many years of *running experience* did not display a *runner's identity*. However, while this indicates that more *running experience* is connected to the development of a runner's *identity*, it does not rule out the possibility that *group training* programs lead to runners' *identities* as well. Thus, we can still claim that solitary training programs *and* group training programs are interaction rituals which form running identities. Again, group training programs are more successful at creating those identities because their *ingredients* are *stronger* than those of solitary training rituals.

Also, note in Table 4 that the rate which respondents agree with *identity* as a source of motivation rises as *years of running experience* increases. However, the rate drops for

individuals who have had 21 or more years of running experience. We can explain this trend if we recall that that the *outcomes* of interaction rituals begin to wane as participation in the rituals decreases. Individuals who have been running for 21 or more years may be growing older and experiencing more wear on their bodies, becoming more *focused* on interaction rituals (such as their families or work) other than training rituals, or they might just not be as "into" running as they once were because it does not provide the strong *emotional energy* that it previously did. Thus, these people do not exhibit the runner's identity as strongly as they once did because the interaction ritual is not providing them with the same strong *outcomes* which it once did.

Discussion:

Training Groups & Runners' Identities:

As we saw in Chapters Three and Four, *group training rituals* have the potential to have strong *ingredients*. For instance, members of RunTogether's marathon training program attended numerous *group assemblies*, had rigid *boundaries to outsiders*, and were able to develop high levels of *shared emotional states* and a *common focus of attention*. Those *strong ingredients* led to the development of *strong outcomes*. That is, the numerous group assemblies, rigid barriers to outsiders, and powerful states of shared moods and attentions led to extended and well-defined *moments of shared reality*, or *collective effervescence*. This, in

turn, led to strong *group solidarity*, high *emotional energy*, strong *sacred objects,* and well-defined *standards of morality*.

Also, we have seen from the survey data that people who have gone through *some type of group training* are more likely to agree with *identity* than are people *without any group training*. This supports the contention that group training rituals are more powerful than solitary training rituals (assuming that solitary training programs are interaction rituals). However, when we look at the specific types of training groups, we see that *high school*, *college-level*, *professional*, and *charity training groups* all have a weak relationship with the runner's identity*. Paid-for training* is the only type of group training that does have a significant relationship with *identity*.

This makes sense if we think about it through the lenses of interaction ritual chains *and* identity control theory. Paid-for training groups are the only type among all of the groups which are specifically intended to take people from one type of lifestyle and identity (sedentary and unfit) to another (runner and fit) for a fee. In other words, the interaction ritual's *focus of attention* (or objective) is directed at creating runners' identities. As we have seen, identities are an *outcome* of interaction rituals, and Chapters Three and Four showed us that this is precisely why people join these *paid-for training programs*. That is, individuals have these ideas of themselves (i.e. identity standards) as runners, and they are consciously searching for ways to *verify* those *identities*. They somehow recognize the paid-for training programs as *mechanisms* which they might be able to use in that process. Thus, they decide to join the paid-for group training programs specifically because they want to become runners.

Other types of training groups have other agendas, or different *foci of attention*. For instance, high schools are supposed to be primarily focused on educating people (theoretically, at least). They are in a position to create runners out of non-runners, but their primary objective is education. Thus, they are more *focused* on making graduates than runners; consequently, their interaction rituals are not as effective at producing the runner's identity as are paid-for programs. That is not to say, though, that high school training programs do not create runners. Indeed, this is where most runners get their start. I am merely arguing that high school programs are not as successful at making runners as are paid-for programs, because their attentions are not completely focused on making runners.

The same holds true for *college-level training programs*. While the focus of attention of college track or cross-country teams may be aimed more at creating excellent runners, it is likely that not all of the team members are fully focused on becoming better runners. Some of them might actually be more concerned with their educations and only using the running program as a way to pay for it. However, there are many college athletes who do hope to become professionals. Individuals who have made it to the college level in any sport are probably already going to have developed the appropriate type of identity. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine someone walking onto a college football team without already being a football player. The same holds true for college-level track and cross-country teams. Thus, the *barriers to outsiders* automatically exclude non-runners. Hence, college training programs are not making new runners; they are making good runners into even better runners.

Charity training groups are in the business of making runners from scratch, but participants are expected to raise a certain (usually high) amount of money for the charity. This *focus of attention* on fundraising erects *barriers to outsiders* which limit the available participants to people who are able to raise the money, and it may take away from the overall strength of the interaction ritual. For instance, what would happen if someone was unable to raise the required amount of money? Would they be allowed to continue training with the group? If so, how would that affect their relationships with other participants? Would they feel alienated from the group? I do not propose any answers to these questions, but these types of issues could seriously hinder *group solidarity, emotional energy*, and the development of *sacred objects*, i.e. *identities* (running *identities*, in this case) which emphasize the characteristics of that specific type of group (a running group).

A professional training groups' *focus of attention* is probably at least as concentrated on the runner as are paid-for training groups. The difference, though, is that professional runners, like college athletes, will most likely already exhibit a strong runner's identity. Thus, *barriers to outsiders* are very strong and exclude non-runners. Professional training groups aren't making runners from scratch; they are making very good runners into excellent runners.

My point is that since dissimilar running programs have different objectives, or *foci of attention*, they design their interaction rituals in varying ways in order to accomplish their goals. If the RunTogether program gives any indication, the interaction rituals of paid-for training programs are specifically intended to change people's identities "from couch-potatoes to marathoners". Thus, the strength of the running rituals must be high enough to be able to

create running identities, i.e. *sacred objects*. If it is not (as in the case of In Motion's program), it is likely that group members will choose not to continue with the interaction ritual.

Solitary Training Programs as Interaction Rituals:

I wish to return now to the topic of solitary training programs as interaction rituals. The general thrust of this thesis has been that group training programs are interaction rituals that lead to the development of runners' identities. In Collins's terms, we can say that the identities developed by group members are actually *sacred objects,* which reflect the characteristics of their group (runners) and its activities (running). However, if this is true, then how do we account for the individuals who have never trained with a group but exhibit a runner's identity?

As we have seen, individuals *with* some group training are more likely to agree that a runner's identity is a source of motivation to run, than are people *without* any group training. This suggests that group training leads to the development of runner's identities. However, a majority of the people with *no* group training (61%) also agreed with *identity* as a source of motivation. This implies that solitary training rituals also develop runners' identities. Thus, solitary *and* group training programs lead to runners' identities. This is because *both* of these types of programs are interaction rituals.

We can discern if the *process* of training alone for a race is actually an interaction ritual by identifying its *ingredients*. We can take solitary marathon training programs as an example.

First, *group assembly* for the solitary marathon training ritual would consist of the actual race

event and the pre- and post-race gatherings. Big marathons such as those in Chicago and New

York typically have an "expo" where racers register for the race, but not all of the racers are

there at the same time. Thus, this *group assembly* is not as powerful as the actual race event.

There are usually vendors of all varieties peddling their wares and services, and racers can mill

about and interact with one another. After the race, there is an awards ceremony which serves

as the final *group assembly*. Afterwards, all that is left is for the individual racers to return

home to their respective towns, cities, or nations. The interaction ritual is finished; that is,

unless they choose to run another marathon.

Barriers to outsiders in the solitary marathon training ritual are somewhat tricky to define.

For instance, all people in the race are participants in the *marathon race* ritual, but, there are a

limited amount of group assemblies. Thus, solitary trainees would not be able to identify

members of her or his marathon training ritual (the marathon group members) prior to the race

event. At the event, it is generally easy to identify racers because they will be wearing running

shoes, running clothes, a race bib (or number), and they will actually be running the race. This

includes racers who have been training in groups. Also, prior to the race, it would be difficult for

solitary trainees to identify other individuals who are training for the same race.

If we recall that interaction ritual chains are combinations of multiple interaction rituals, we

can see that the *marathon race ritual* is only one interaction ritual in both the solitary and

group training *ritual chains*. Thus, all of the marathon group members are members of each

other's' ritual group. However, all of the training period for the race is spent before the race

event. Although the group trainees are involved in the solitary trainee's *marathon race ritual*, they are not members of the solitary trainee's *training ritual* except for at the race event. In contrast, group trainees interact with the entire marathon race group at the actual event *and* with other trainees on a regular basis during training. Since the solitary trainee does not have the same opportunities to repeatedly interact with the marathon group as does a group trainee with his group, the solitary training ritual's *group assemblies* are weaker.

Mutual focus of attention is easily demonstrated by the solitary trainee's dedication to his or her training programs. Running a marathon is not something that most people can do without extensive training. Even though they are training individually, they are part of a group of all of the racers who are also training for the same thing. Thus, the all of the individuals in the marathon group share a *focus of attention* on their individual training regimens and the actual marathon race event. However, because of the very limited amount of group assemblies in the solitary training ritual, solitary trainees are not able to effectively communicate this focus of attention to one another and create an *extended shared reality* in the same manner as group trainees. Thus, the *shared focus of attention* for solitary training rituals is *weaker* than for group training rituals.

Shared mood is closely related to that *focus of attention*. Again, most people must be committed to their training programs if they expect to be able to complete the race. It is safe to say that commitment is an *emotion* which is *shared* by all of the racers, because commitment is something that people *feel*. That is, people do not *think* that they are committed; they *feel* committed (Collins 2004:106). Of course, attempting to run a marathon is generally not

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something which people do without a reason. Thus, we can also say that all of the individuals *share* the motivation to run a marathon, even if those motivations stem from different sources. Motivation, then, is also a *mood* which is *shared* by the racers. However, as a result of the limited amount of group assemblies in the solitary training ritual, the individuals are not able to communicate their shared moods with each other in the same manner as group trainees. Thus, *shared mood* is *weaker* for solitary training rituals than for group training rituals.

While identifying these *ingredients* allows us to see that solitary marathon training programs are interaction rituals, they are not the only things that we can look for which demonstrate that point. As we know, interaction rituals take *ingredients* and produce certain *outcomes* through a process of *collective effervescence*, or the process in which participants in the ritual are drawn into a *collective consciousness* (i.e. a momentarily shared reality). By identifying those *outcomes*, we are able to provide more evidence for the claim that training alone for a marathon is indeed part of an interaction ritual.

For example, anyone who has run a marathon will likely agree that *group solidarity* is strong at marathon race events. Of course, every race has its elite runners (people who actually have a chance of winning), and they are generally very serious about doing their best. Hence, they do not spend much time interacting with other racers. However, elite runners are nearly always a small minority when compared to average and novice runners. The atmosphere among the majority of the runners at these events tends to be very open and welcoming for all participants. Everyone is excited about running a race for which they have likely been training

for several months. Thus, there is a friendly excitement that permeates the marathoners and leads to *group solidarity*, regardless of how fleeting it may be.

However, solitary trainees only have one or two opportunities to interact with the marathon group. In contrast, group trainees interact with more members of their entire marathon training group on a regular basis. Thus, it makes sense that solitary trainees would experience lower levels of *group solidarity* than would group trainees.

The same excitement which results in group solidarity is connected to the *emotional energy* of the racers. Participants have been following training programs for several months before a marathon race. Thus, their emotions at the time of the race are likely to be comprised of excitement, nervousness, determination, etc. As the race occurs, the runners are receiving constant emotional stimulation from other racers, spectators, and the competition itself. If the individuals received a boost in their levels of *emotional energy* from a positive marathon experience, it is likely that they will choose to do another marathon. The marathon interaction ritual, then, becomes a marathon interaction ritual chain. However, if the individual receives a negative drain on their *emotional energy*, she or he will likely move on to a different type of activity which can provide the desired levels of *emotional energy*.

If we compare the solitary training ritual with the group training ritual, we can see that solitary trainees are likely to receive *less* positive *emotional energy* than group trainees. This is due to the fact that group trainees are constantly interacting with their group members. Conversely, solitary trainees only directly interact with their group members (the marathon

racers) on a very limited basis. Thus, we can claim that solitary training rituals produce *lower* levels of *emotional energy* than do group training rituals.

In the case of solitary trainees, *sacred objects* are the most common way for trainees to interact with the marathon group, because of the low amount of group assemblies. *Sacred objects* from the solitary training ritual include the race event, *imagined* other racers, and training schedules (including training runs). It is probably with *imagined* other racers that solitary trainees are interacting with the most when they are running alone. In this way, they are able to motivate themselves to train harder in order to be successful against the *imagined* opposition. However, it is likely that imagined racers are not as powerful of a sacred object as actual racers. Thus, the *sacred objects* which solitary trainees have to interact with are not as powerful as those of the group trainees.

Finally, *standards of morality* are taken from the marathon group by individual marathoners. These *standards* determine how members are expected to behave toward the group (racers), its activities (running), and its *sacred objects* (the race and training schedules). As we have seen, in the group marathon training ritual, these *standards* can be numerous and well-defined. However, solitary trainees are only directly exposed to their group's *standards* a very limited amount of instances. Thus, solitary training programs develop less rigid standards of morality than do group training programs.

Now back to the question: Is training for a marathon part of an interaction ritual chain if it is done alone? All of these *ingredients* and *outcomes* suggest that the answer to our question is yes. This conclusion helps to explain the survey data which show that many respondents agreed

that a runner's *identity* is a source of motivation for running, even if they have never been a member of a training group. Instead of developing that *identity* with a group training interaction ritual, it was developed through participation in a solitary marathon training ritual. All of this supports the claim that solitary and group training rituals are both interaction rituals which lead to the development of running identities. Group training programs are simply more powerful versions of the marathon training ritual than are solitary training rituals, because group rituals' ingredients are stronger than those of solitary training rituals.

Limitations:

As previously noted, I collapsed the response categories for the motivation measures from five groups (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) to two (agree and disagree) groups. Doing so changed the statistical significance of the relationship between three comparisons of *types of training* and *identity*. Those three comparisons are between *identity* and *any type of training*, *identity* and *college training*, and *identity* and *paid-for training*. In the case of *identity* and *any type of training*, the change goes from insignificant to significant. In the case of *identity* and *college training*, it changed from significant to insignificant. Finally, in the case of *identity* and *paid-for training*, the change was from insignificant to significant. In the comparisons between *identity* and *high school training*, *identity* and *charity training*, and *identity* and *multiple types of training*, significance did not

change. If I had designed the survey without a neutral response category, it is likely that I would not have had to collapse the categories.

Although the respondents to the survey were almost evenly divided between people with some *type of formal group training* (64) and people without any *group training* experiences (69), the number of individuals with each particular *type of group training* experience was very small. For this reason, I was unable to use a multivariate test to determine which of these types of programs is more likely to influence the development of runners' identities. Larger samples of these variables would likely allow me to do so.

This chapter was also limited by the fact that I did not add a question to the survey about whether or not respondents were members of training groups at the time of the survey. If I had done so, I would have been able to make more direct statements about the relationship between group training programs and runners' identities.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that training programs (including solitary training programs) for runners are types of interaction ritual chains. Furthermore, it shows that those running programs lead to the development of runners' identities within participants. This allows us to suggest that all interaction rituals lead to the formation of identities within individual participants. However, some interaction rituals are stronger than others; thus, some are more able to create identities than are others.

We have also seen that new forms of communication technology allow interaction rituals to occur without or in combination with physical gatherings. Since technologically-mediated group assemblies do not allow individuals to be as aware of one another's physical and emotional reactions as do physical gatherings, they are not as powerful. Thus, interaction rituals with *only* online group assemblies are likely to be weaker than interaction rituals with *only* physical gatherings. But, as we saw in the RunTogether program, the *combination* of physical and online assemblies can be a potent method for building group solidarity.

This has implications for online programs such as online schools and support groups. For example, an online support group could greatly increase the solidarity of the support group by including physical gatherings to their agenda. This, in turn, would strengthen the effectiveness

of the online gatherings because group members would have been able to form stronger

relationships with one another.

Online schools could also benefit from incorporating physical gatherings into their

curriculums. While this seems to defeat the point of taking classes online, a few meetings in

person would strengthen the relationships between the teacher and the students. Thus,

students may feel more accountable to the teacher than before. That accountability, in turn,

might lead to a higher quality of work from the students.

Collins sees his theory of interaction rituals as a theory of motivation (Collins 2004: xiv). He

sees people as being motivated by a drive to acquire the highest possible levels of *positive*

emotional energy, and interaction rituals are the source of that emotional energy. But, what is

it about certain interaction rituals that allow them to produce higher levels of emotional energy

in some people than others?

This thesis shows that different interaction rituals are better suited to different people

because people are actively searching out ways to verify their different identity standards.

Thus, rituals whose outcomes include the types of identities which certain individuals are

attempting to verify will be more attractive to (and successful for) those individuals who desire

those types of identities, because the successful verification of identity standards leads to

higher levels of emotional energy within individuals.

According to identity control theory (Stryker and Burke 2000, Burke and Tully 1977, Burke

2004, Stets and Burke 2006, Burke and Reitzes 1991), people are motivated by a desire to verify

their identity standards. That is, individuals are committed to visions of themselves with specific

identities (or sets of self-relevant meanings), and they choose their activities and interactions in order to verify (i.e. form or maintain) those identities. However, as Burke noted, he is more interested in *what* goals individuals are choosing, not on how they go about developing them (Burke 2004a:6). Thus, this thesis helps to fill this gap in identity control theory by showing that people are able to use interaction rituals as a mechanism in the identity verification process.

Acknowledging this connection has many implications. For instance, self-determination theory assumes that a person will not do something as well as they could if they feel no autonomy in the situation (Deci and Flaste 1995:2). That is, they do not focus on an activity if they have no personal desire to do so. Take, for example, an alcoholic with a desire to stop drinking. This person has an identity standard which is characterized by a vision of himself as someone who no longer drinks. If he is highly committed to that identity standard, he will likely adjust his behavior accordingly.

But, what options are available to him? The most obvious is to join Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), an organization whose mission is to provide a social support network and activities which assist individuals with the struggle to stop drinking. I do not wish to delve into the intricacies of AA at this point; that is another project for a later day. Suffice it to say, though, that if we were to look closely at the structure of AA, we would likely find all of the *ingredients* (i.e. *group assemblies*, *barriers to outsiders, shared moods*, and *mutual foci of attentions*) which comprise an interaction ritual. Thus, we can assume that our alcoholic friend with the good intentions would be able to use AA as a mechanism in the process of verifying his identity standard,

because (as we have seen from this thesis) interaction rituals are able to affect people's identities.

All of this supports self-determination's belief that a sense of autonomy is crucial in determining people's reactions to situations. It is likely that our alcoholic friend would not successfully stop drinking if he were not autonomously committed to verifying his identity standard. That is, if he did not want to stop drinking, it is probable that he would not. Of course, this does not hold true for only alcoholics. We could substitute our alcoholic friend with drug addicts, sex addicts, cigarette smokers, gambling addicts, etc. The rub, though, is that they have to want to change themselves. If they do not, it does not matter how powerful an interaction ritual and its ingredients are, because the individuals are entering the rituals with a weak focus of attention and their mood does not match that of the other group members.

The connection between identity control theory and interaction rituals could be useful in the prison system as well. An objective of many prisons is to socially rehabilitate prisoners. There are different curriculums such as prison ministries, academic programs (i.e. classes towards the Graduate Equivalency Degree), vocational programs, and substance abuse programs which are available to prisoners. However, there has been a general trend in the United States to decrease funding for rehabilitative prison programs (Taylor 2005). As a result, prison officials must be very selective about who gets into which program. The ability to determine the identity standards of prisoners would help prison officials better decide which prisoners to place into specific programs (or interaction rituals), if any at all.

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We can continue this train of thought in the field of exercise science as well. Recall that many studies in this field are focused on how to get people to start and maintain exercise programs. Considering the fact that interaction rituals are most able to affect identities when the participants are committed to verifying their identity standards, it would make sense for exercise intervention and maintenance programs to begin by attempting to provide individuals with examples of positive identity standards. In other words, these programs should show individuals that they can be fit and healthy people if they work to achieve (or verify) it. Without this vision of themselves (or identity standards) as such, it is unlikely that the program will be successful.

Now, back to the original question: Why are more people than ever now attempting marathons? Although this thesis does not directly address people's reasons for wanting to become runners, I believe that an increased focus on body image is at the heart of the growth of the popularity of marathons. However, we can also explain the recent boom in marathoners by looking at the accompanying boom in paid-for group marathon training programs. Without these group training rituals, it is likely that the amount of marathon runners would not climb as drastically as it has. This is because, as we have seen from the data presented in this thesis, group marathon training programs are more successful at creating marathoners than are the traditional solitary marathon training programs.

Limitations:

While I have employed a multi-method approach which pulled data from several different sources, I feel that this study is limited by its focus on long-distance training programs. I did not have the opportunity to closely examine the other types of running training programs, i.e. high school, college, professional, charity, and solitary running programs. I believe that doing so would have provided more concrete evidence about the objectives (i.e. focus of attentions) of these programs. This would give us better indication of specifically what type of identities (if any) these programs are developing.

Furthermore, as I have noted, the amount of respondents in the survey who had experience with specific types of training programs was very small. Thus, I was unable to perform a multivariate analysis of the relationship between types of training and runners' identities. Future studies could focus individually on these other types of programs in order to understand the dynamics within each of them. Then, we could compile the findings of those individual studies in order to see the overall picture of how running programs affect individuals' identities.

Also, by only examining running programs, I am only able to make specific statements about running identities and running programs and general statements about interaction rituals and identity control theory. If I were to study types of interaction rituals other than running programs, it would provide support (or negate) those general statements and allow me to make specific statements about other types of rituals.

Further Research:

Realizing these limitations leads to several ideas for future research. For example, as we have discussed, we could analyze the structure of Alcoholics Anonymous in terms of identity control theory and interaction ritual chains. This would allow us to determine which aspects of the program are most effective for producing non-drinkers. Thus, we could make suggestions on how to improve the program by removing or altering strategies that are ineffective, by increasing the prominence of strategies which are effective, and by suggesting new strategies. The same holds true for other types of rehabilitative programs, such as Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, anti-smoking programs, and prison rehabilitation programs.

Acknowledging that interaction rituals are mechanisms which individuals can use in the identity verification process suggests that we should be able to determine which interaction rituals are more effective at producing specific types of identities. We could do this by measuring individuals' perceptions of how effective specific interaction rituals are at creating, maintaining, or changing their identities.

We could also look at which interaction rituals draw the most people. For instance, are sports interaction rituals, such as attending soccer or football matches, as common as religious interaction rituals? If so, why are they so common? And, what identities do they develop within individuals? Answering these questions could help us to better understand why our society is structured the way it is.

We should also be able to test individuals' reasons for selecting the interaction rituals in which they participate. In other words, what is it about interaction rituals that attract people? Are they conscious of the rituals ability to affect their identities and emotions? If so, how did they become aware of this? If not, why not? Understanding this would help to build a better model of how motivation is played out in society.

We could also see if specific interaction rituals affect people more depending on their age, sex, race, and social class. For example, do sports rituals attract and alter men more than women? Or, how and why do sexual rituals differently affect men and women? Or, how and why do sexual rituals differently affect heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, and transsexuals? How and why do the rituals found in predominately Black churches affect their group members differently than do the rituals in White churches? Understanding the connection between interaction rituals and identity control theory could provide answers for these questions which may not have been considered before or were overlooked.

We could also examine what happens to the identities of people who are participants of multiple interaction rituals which seem to clash with one another. Does one of those rituals over-power the others? Or, do they find some state of equilibrium? Why does this happen? What makes some rituals and their identities compatible with other rituals but not others? I do not propose any answers for these questions; I am merely pointing out that we could answer them by studying the connection between specific interaction rituals and identities.

I could probably continue in this vein indefinitely, because the topics of identities and interactions are so ubiquitous. That is because interaction rituals are everywhere and everyone

has multiple identities. It is plain to see, though, that understanding the intersection of

interaction ritual chains and identity control theory can potentially help us to understand what

people do, why they do it, and how they are actively constructing their own identities.

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8. CURRICULUM VITAE

411 Beauregard Circle, Oxford, MS 38655
(601) 954-6794
Dialjonathan@gmail.com

Education

2003 – 2011   **University of Mississippi**, University, MS
M.A. in Sociology and Anthropology (2011)
Thesis: "Running Identities and Interaction Ritual Chains"
B.A. in Sociology and Anthropology (2007)

2001 – 2002   **Holmes Community College,** Ridgeland, MS

Specialty Areas

Introduction to Sociology	Social Psychology
Race & Ethnicity	Culture
Gender	Qualitative Research Methods

Articles in Progress

"Running Programs and Runners' Identities"

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, University of Mississippi, University, MS 2009 – 2011**:**

SOC 101: Introduction to Sociology
SOC 301: Sociology of the Family
SOC 411: Environment, Technology, and Society

Teacher Training

SOC 635: Teaching Sociology – This seminar was taught by Dr. Ross Haenfler, recipient of the University of Mississippi's College of the Liberal Arts Teacher of the Year award in 2009. Dr.

Haenfler designed this course specifically to train sociology teachers at the college level. The course focused on planning courses and preparing lesson plans, facilitating group discussions, creating and evaluating assignments, and how to handle students and exigent circumstances in the classroom. Major assignments included: teacher observations, in-class training sessions, and teaching practice in undergraduate seminars.

Awards

2010   **Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association Second Place Winner**, Graduate Student Paper Competition. February 2010.

Conference Presentations

2010   **"RunTogether and the Fitness Field: Emotional Labor and Social Solidarity in Marathon Training."** Presented at the annual meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association. February 2010.

Professional Associations

American Sociological Association, Member
- Social Psychology Section
- Sociology of Culture

Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, Member.

References

John Sonnett
Assistant Professor of Sociology
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848
Phone: 662-915-7316
Office: Leavell 207
E-mail: sonnett@olemiss.edu

Ross Haenfler
Associate Professor of Sociology
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848
Phone: 662-915-7338
Office: Leavell 204
E-mail: ross@olemiss.edu

Kirsten Dellinger
Chair, Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Associate Professor of Sociology

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848
Phone: 662-915-7323
Office: Leavell 203
E-mail: kdelling@olemiss.edu

David Wharton
Assistant Professor of Southern Studies and Director of Documentary Projects
Center for the Study of Southern Culture
255 Grove Loop
University, MS 38677-1848
Phone: 662-915-5993
Office: Barnard Observatory 217
E-mail: dwharton@olemiss.edu

Jay K. Johnson
Professor of Anthropology
Director of the Center for Archaeological Research
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677-1848
Phone: 662-915-7339
Office: Leavell 211
E-mail: sajay@olemiss.edu