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Declining Legitimacy and Social Mobility: A Study of Why Colleges Left the NAIA for the NCAA

Author(s): Marvin Washington

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MARVIN WASHINGTON

## Declining Legitimacy and Social Mobility

### A Study of Why Colleges Left the NAIA for the NCAA

**Abstract:** *Organizations in an association derive social identity by virtue of their membership in the association. They also obtain social identities from membership in lower-order groups in the association and cross-cutting groups in the association formed by shared demographic attributes. When peers leave the association to join a rival association, members of the association may find their social identity disconfirmed by such defections. A study of why colleges left the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and joined the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) shows that colleges were simultaneously influenced by defectors from a lower-order category (athletic conference) and from cross-cutting categories (historically black colleges and religious denominations). The results also indicate that defectors from an athletic conference were more influential than defectors from the same religious denomination or racial group. Implications for the study of multiple social identities are outlined.*

Social-identity theory emphasizes that actors categorize themselves as group members, and at other times, they think of themselves as unique entities. The first is referred to as social identity and the latter as personal identity, and both are central to a self-concept (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1985). When extended to organizations, this line of reasoning implies that organizations have a unique identity

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Marvin Washington is an assistant professor of management at the Rawls College of Business at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas (e-mail: [mwashington@ba.ttu.edu](mailto:mwashington@ba.ttu.edu)). Special thanks are due to the University of Iowa, which provided funds for data collection and coding while I was there as a faculty member. The author also thanks Huggy Rao, Kim Boal, Wei Chen, and Karen Patterson for their generous time spent in helping to prepare and improve this article.

built around their central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics (Albert and Whetten 1985; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Elsbach and Kramer 1996). However, they also acquire social identity from membership in groups defined on the basis of common attributes or common bonds (Ashforth 2001). For example, the American Cancer Society may have a unique organizational identity as fighter against the cancer enemy, but it also derives a social identity from its membership in the category of public-health advocacy organizations.

To date, researchers have emphasized unique organizational identity but have devoted little attention to the social identity of organizations (Gioia and Thomas 1996; Elsbach and Kramer 1996; Gioia 1998; Rao, Davis, and Ward 2000). Moreover, researchers have glossed over the significance of multiple social identities for individuals (Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997; Pratt and Rafaeli 1997) and even more so for organizations. Just as individuals possess multiple social identities by belonging to several groups defined by task interdependencies or shared characteristics, such as gender or professional background, organizations simultaneously belong to multiple categories and have multiple social identities. In the scant literature on multiple identities, researchers studied organizations with hybrid identities, such as religious colleges, and concentrated on the management of identity conflicts within such hybrid organizations (Pratt and Foreman 2000).

However, multiple identities may coexist when organizations belong to a lower-order or higher-order category that is institutionalized in a formal social system and in cross-cutting demographic categories (Ashforth 2001; Ashforth and Johnson 2001). Demographic categories are instances of “cross-cutting groups”—that is, a collection of actors who categorize themselves in terms of the same social-category membership but who do not necessarily interact with other members *qua* members (Turner 1985). In a sense, demographic categories cut across other social categories. For example, race as a category would cut across the social categories of class, party affiliation, and status. At the organizational level, the cross-cutting category of manufacturing companies would cut across regional groupings (Silicon Valley) or membership in the NASDAQ or NYSE. By contrast, higher-order categories and lower-order categories are “social groups” encoded into the formal social structure and are characterized by distinct roles, interdependencies, and interactions. For example, individuals from Paris would be a lower-order category as compared to individuals from France or Europe. At the organizational level, companies in a particular subindustry (automobile) would be a lower-order category when compared to the higher-order category (transportation).

An important research question is whether multiple social identities obtained from lower-order groups and cross-cutting groups are simultaneously salient for focal organizations? Likewise, is membership in cross-cutting groups more salient as a source of social identity than membership in lower-order categories for organizations (Thoits and Virshup 1997; Ashforth and Johnson 2001)? Both questions are crucial for the understanding of multiple social identities, but they have been neglected in the literature (Ashforth 2001).

A useful context in which to explore both questions is when a focal organization that is a member of an association is confronted by defections of peers to a rival association. Such defections constitute identity-discrepant cues, because they imply that something is wrong with the association to which the focal organization belongs, and they induce the focal organization to join the rival association. The discrepancy is derived from the fact that the focal organization's identity might be linked to behavior of a peer (defection from an association) that is different from the focal organization's behavior (staying in the association). Teenagers understand this phenomenon well when it comes to joining social clubs. As members from a club leave to join another club, their leaving produces identity-discrepant cues for the individuals that stay in the club. In this paper, the interest is not in the original reason for the defection, but in the impact that the initial defection has on subsequent defections. Do decision makers in the focal organization simultaneously accord significance to defections based upon lower-order categories and cross-cutting categories? Are defections from cross-cutting categories more consequential than those involving defectors belonging to lower-order categories, or vice versa?

I investigate these questions in a study of why U.S. colleges defected from the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and joined the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA, through a variety of strategies, implemented a plan to delegitimize the NAIA (Land 1977; Washington 1999). My argument is that prior defections from the NAIA are identity-discrepant cues for current members of the NAIA and can be clustered by cross-cutting categories such as race (historically black versus others) and religion (Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, and Presbyterian). They can also be clustered by membership in a lower-order category within the NAIA, such as an athletic conference (Frontier Conference, Hoosier-Buckeye Conference, etc.). An athletic conference is a collection of colleges, usually geographically proximally located, that compete with each other. For example, in a typical 28-game basketball schedule, a focal college would play 20 games against teams in their same conference and eight games against teams outside of their conference. All of these identity traits (historically black, religion, and conference affiliation) are salient to colleges. One only has to look at a college Web site to find mention of its religious affiliation (see, for example, Notre Dame, Pepperdine, or Baylor University), conference membership (members of the Big Ten, Pacific Ten, or Ivy League), and historically black status (Howard University, Tuskegee University). In addition, many college ranking guides provide rankings based upon identity traits, such as the best historically black colleges, the best religious schools, and the best liberal arts colleges. These traits also form the basis for other college associations (the college football championships give special invitations to members from six conferences, while the United Negro College Fund is a scholarship fund for schools that have a historically black affiliation).

I test whether schools, identified by race, religion, and athletic conference, that leave the NAIA in an early time period are significant predictors of schools with a

similar identity leaving in a later time period. In short, are historically black schools more likely to leave the NAIA after other historically black schools previously left (similar for religious category and for schools from the same conference)? I also test if the effect from historically black colleges is stronger (or weaker) than the effect for religious colleges. In the section that follows, I describe how the declining legitimacy of the focal association (the NAIA) provides the motivation for organizations to look for cues (in this case, search if the NAIA is still a legitimate association for membership) that might lead to social mobility.

### **Declining legitimacy as a reason for social mobility**

The fact that organizations develop practices and processes for legitimacy reasons is one of the core insights of institutional theory (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Scott 1995). Recently, scholars began to examine how organizations compete for legitimacy. Lawrence (1999) calls this “institutional strategy.” He identified institutional strategy as being distinct from organizational strategy: “*Institutional strategy* demands the ability to articulate, sponsor and defend particular practices and organizational forms as legitimate or desirable, rather than the ability to enact already legitimated practices or leverage existing social rules” (Lawrence 1999, 163). Lawrence described two generic institutional strategies: initiatives to set membership rules and procedures to establish standards of practice.

Many projects examined the institutional strategy among competing interest associations in the U.S. collegiate athletic field (Washington 2004; Washington and Ventresca 2004; Washington et al. 2005). Interest associations provide unique environments in which to examine legitimacy, identity, and reasons why firms defect, as interest associations “compete over symbolic resources and legitimization (such as acceptance by field participants that are needed for membership or survival) more than material resources and, therefore, may compete differently for environmental resources than other organizations” (Galvin 2002, 677). In the work on collegiate athletics, it was shown that the National Collegiate Athletic association developed a set of institutional strategies aimed at enhancing its status and legitimacy in the U.S. collegiate athletic field at the expense of the other associations (Washington et al. 2005). While those projects examined the conflicts in collegiate athletics from an organizational field perspective (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), this project examines the impact of the associational struggles on its focal membership.

The core argument is that associations provide their members with a sense of status and legitimacy. However, if that status is weakened, the identity of the member of the association becomes threatened. This could result in the delegitimized association losing some of its members. As members start leaving the organization, this produces more threats to the members that stay, as their identities become furthered threatened.

*Social mobility and the salience of multiple social identities*

While associations might struggle for legitimacy, not all organizations will automatically leave. Therefore, the question is why do some organizations leave and others stay? One reason might be that organizations defect to the degree that similar others defect. Social-identity theory asserts that actors engage in categorization, identification, and comparison. When actors define themselves as members of a group, they perceive themselves to be interchangeable with other members of that group and distinct from members of other groups (Turner 1985). Actors identify with the groups that they perceive themselves as belonging to, and they compare the in-group (the group to which an actor belongs) with an out-group (a rival group). Members preserve their positive social identity by positively stereotyping their group and by negatively stereotyping others. But when negative feedback undermines these stereotypes and jeopardizes social identity, members respond to threats to their social identity by using the three basic strategies of social mobility, social creativity, and social change (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This paper focuses on social mobility, which means that actors can exit the in-group and join another group (or in my case, leave the NAIA and join the NCAA).

*Defections as an identity-discrepant cue*

Social mobility is especially interesting, because the exit decisions of group members are cues that undermine the social identity of a focal organization. To date, research on social identity theory presumes that threats to the social identity of an actor come from sources outside the in-group (e.g., feedback manipulated in experiments, external rankings, or the power of the out-group). However, the social identity of organizations can be jeopardized when group members defect to the out-group. Defections not only make the social identity of the focal organization salient but also undermine it. As the number of such identity-discrepant cues accumulates, actors find it difficult to maintain a positive social identity.

Defections by in-group members are signals that the boundaries of in-groups and out-groups are permeable. Krackhardt and Porter (1986) found that turnover in fast-food restaurants tended to snowball because individual exits undermined role identity. When members of the in-group abandon and join an out-group, decision makers in the focal organization are likely to infer that there is something wrong with their social group and, by implication, their own social identity (Rao, Davis, and Ward 2000). Recall that social comparison processes undergird social identity so that identity-discrepant cues in the form of defections make it difficult for in-group members to believe that their group is better than the out-group. The accumulation of identity-discrepant cues makes social identity salient and activates the concern of decision makers in the focal organization.

### **Hypotheses about the impact of lower-order and cross-cutting defections on subsequent defections**

As mentioned earlier, social-identity theory distinguishes between lower-order identities obtained from membership in categories that are part of the formal social system and cross-cutting identities obtained from belonging to racial, ethnic, and religious categories. A key question is whether both types of defections can be simultaneously salient as identity-discrepant cues.

Several writers proposed that multiple social identities can be simultaneously salient (Gaertner, Dovidio, and Bachman 1996). One part of the argument is that ambivalence may be a cause of simultaneous salience. Individuals seek similarity and dissimilarity at the same time, and hence, activating a given social identity may activate a counterdesire for a lower-order (more exclusive due to a smaller number of individuals with that identity characteristic) social identity (Brewer 1991; Deschamps and Devos 1998). By analogy, organizations can also desire similarity and dissimilarity at the same time and invoke inclusive and exclusive social identities. Ashforth and Johnson (2001) implied that lower-order and cross-cutting social identities can be simultaneously invoked when the identities are situationally appropriate and when they were cued in the past.

The second part of the argument is that the greater the overlap among identities, the more likely the triggering of one identity will make others accessible (Higgins 1996). A third and final part of the argument is that organizations are complex and diverse entities and, hence, can invoke multiple identities. These arguments imply that prior defections clustered by lower-order categories and cross-categories are simultaneously salient when they are available, recent, and situationally relevant. Therefore:

*Hypothesis 1: Prior defectors belonging to lower-order categories and cross-cutting social categories simultaneously increase the probability that the focal organization will join the rival group.*

### ***Are lower-order identities more salient than cross-cutting social identities?***

If salience varies by degree and if higher-order and cross-cutting identities can be simultaneously salient, then the question arises as to which one is relatively more salient than the others. One line of argument holds that lower-level identities are consequential because they are exclusive, concrete, and proximal (see Ashforth 2001). Lower-order identities are *exclusive* because they can be claimed by few actors (Kramer 1993). For instance, individual employees can claim organizational identity, but departmental identities derived from membership in product teams can be claimed by lower numbers of employees. Similarly, at the organizational

level, many colleges can claim membership in a college athletics association, but few actors can claim membership in a lower-order group such as an athletic conference. Another example would be the football (that is, soccer) clubs in England. All can claim membership in FIFA (International Federation of Football Association), but only a few can claim membership in the premiership league. Moreover, lower-order identities are *concrete*, because they encompass a small array of actors. Finally, lower-order identities are *proximal*, because their effects may be direct, whereas higher-order identities have effects.

Lower-order categories, as Ashforth and Mael (1996) remind us, are social groups characterized by task and goal interdependence in lower-order social groups that may facilitate a perception of “entitativity” (Brewer and Harasty 1996; Sherman, Hamilton, and Lewis 1999)—that is, of being group like—and a sense of shared identity and a commitment to the shared identity. In contrast, cross-cutting groups are psychological groups in which a common attribute binds members together, and there is little interaction and interdependence among members. When applied to how prior defectors influence social mobility, these arguments imply that prior defectors from a lower-order social group are more influential than prior defectors from a cross-cutting category. Therefore:

*Hypothesis 2: Prior defectors belonging to lower-order social groups have greater positive effects on the probability of the focal organization joining the rival group than do prior defectors belonging to cross-cutting categories.*

### **Research setting: defections from the NAIA to the NCAA**

I chose to test our hypotheses in the context of colleges leaving the NAIA for the NCAA for four reasons. First, the NAIA and the NCAA were rival associations. Second, defections from the NAIA to the NCAA represented a significant change in social identity. Third, colleges within the NAIA obtained a lower-order identity by belonging to athletic conferences, and also secured cross-cutting identities by virtue of their historically black origins or religious affiliations.

### ***Conflict between NAIA and NCAA***

The NCAA was founded in 1906 with only 38 member schools. By 1942, it had 314 schools, which included “nearly every college or university of importance in the country” (Stagg 1946, 81). Fueled by an increasing national interest in collegiate athletics, and borrowing from the financially successful professional-boxing contests (Issacs 1984), promoters from Madison Square Garden decided to develop the first postseason intercollegiate basketball tournament and introduced the National Invitational Tournament (NIT) in 1937. The NCAA started their tournament one year later. In order to determine which team was eligible to play in the tourna-



ment, the NCAA considered the school's record and the caliber of its opponents.

Smaller colleges were not invited to participate in either the NCAA or the NIT tournament. This issue became so severe that a group of small colleges founded the NAIA in 1937 to allow them to compete against schools that were similar to them. By 1966, the NAIA had grown to 517 members, an increase of 12 percent over 1959, while the NCAA had 536 members. In 1952, the NAIA was the first organization to recognize black colleges by allowing them to participate in its sponsored events. As the NAIA grew in numbers, it also grew in status. Thus, NAIA was invited to send a team to the 1940 Olympic basketball trial. In 1960, the NAIA team defeated Ohio State, the NCAA champion. This gain in status of the NAIA did not go unnoticed by the NCAA.

The NCAA responded to the increasing status of the NAIA by restructuring. In 1957, responding to the growing membership of the NAIA, the NCAA created two divisions: university (which included all of the original members) and college (which aimed at capturing some of the smaller colleges) (Land 1977). In 1973, the NCAA restructured again, changing from two divisions (university and college) to three: Divisions I, II, and III. The NCAA then began giving smaller and historically black colleges membership and allowing them to compete in NCAA-sponsored events. The NCAA also committed \$150,000 to supporting Divisions II and III. Second, the NCAA forced colleges to choose which institution they would support. Prior to 1974, colleges that were members of both the NCAA and NAIA could compete in either the NCAA or NAIA postseason tournaments. As early as 1955, the NCAA began scheduling its college-division postseason events at the same time as the NAIA's postseason events (Hoover 1958). This decision hurt the NAIA, because the NAIA needed their best teams to compete in their tournaments in order to generate revenue. However, the NCAA received most of its revenue from the university division and did not view the college division as a money-generating organization (Falla 1981). In 1974, the NAIA, hoping to reduce the uncertainty in its postseason tournaments, required its members to declare at the beginning of the season if they were going to participate in the NCAA's or the NAIA's postseason tournaments, thereby creating incentives for NAIA members to defect to the NCAA.

Defections from the NAIA to the NCAA entailed a change in the social identity of the organization. The NCAA was associated with prestige, whereas the NAIA was linked to the image of small schools (Land 1977; Washington 1999). The choice for colleges was whether to join the NCAA as an institution where prestigious schools play or stay with the NAIA which represented the smaller and more regional schools. Colleges that were members of the NAIA were influenced by the defections of their peers to join the NCAA. Between 1973 and 1996, the NAIA lost 196 members—over 30 percent. During this same period, the NCAA grew from 757 members to 996 members, an increase of 239 schools or more than 30 percent. A key factor influencing the decisions of NAIA members had to do with whether early defectors belonged to the athletic conference of the focal NAIA

college or shared the religious affiliation of the focal NAIA college or shared the racial background of the focal NAIA college.

### ***Multiple identities in the NAIA***

Colleges within the NAIA belonged to lower-order groups, such as athletic conferences that were part of the formal structure of the NAIA. These athletic conferences were small and exclusive organizations, and they provided a concrete and proximal source of social identity, because the focal college gained standing by competing with rivals in the conference. For example, the American Mid-West conference in the NAIA subsumed Columbia College of Missouri (a Christian Missionary College), Harris-Stowe State College (a historically black college serving the needs of St. Louis, Missouri), Hannibal-La Grange College (a Baptist college), McKendree College (a private liberal arts college), Missouri-Baptist College and Williams Baptist Colleges (both Baptist colleges), and William Woods University (affiliated with the Disciples of Christ). As this example shows, colleges could also be clustered by cross-cutting demographic categories, such as race (historically black) and religious affiliation. Small colleges, some of which were historically black, and several of which were affiliated with different religious orders, had founded the NAIA (Land 1977).

## **Data and methods**

### ***Data***

I analyzed the fates of 500 colleges and universities that were members of the NAIA in 1973. The observation window begins in 1973, as that was the year that the NCAA expanded from two divisions (university and college) to three divisions (Divisions I, II, and III) and forced schools to decide which tournament they would support. The subsequent year, the NAIA also forced its member schools to decide. The observation window ends in 1999. Of the 500 colleges in the data set, 255 schools left the NAIA and joined the NCAA.

### ***Independent variables***

*Conference member*, a dummy variable, was created to denote whether a focal college was a conference member or not. Not all colleges were members of conferences. Because a lower-order category should be part of the formal social structure (Ashforth and Johnson 2001), I treated defectors from athletic conferences as defectors from a lower-order category, because conferences were part of the formal structure of NAIA. I operationalized defectors from a lower-order category as the *number of defectors from a focal college's athletic conference* in the prior year.

I then multiplied the number of schools from a focal college's conference with the conference membership dummy to test whether defectors of peers from a lower-order category were salient.

Because race and religion are two common demographic cross-cutting categories (Ashforth and Johnson 2001), I used defectors from a focal college's religious category and racial category as defectors from cross-cutting categories. Because the NAIA included historically black colleges, I computed a dummy variable for historically black origins. I computed the number of historically black college or university defectors in the prior year and multiplied them with the historically black dummy. I also coded religious affiliation as a dummy variable for colleges with Baptist, Methodist, and other affiliations. When a focal college did not have a religious affiliation, it was set to zero. I then computed the number of defectors from a focal college's specific religious affiliation in the prior year and multiplied it with the religious affiliation dummy. For example, for Baptist colleges, this meant that only defectors from Baptist colleges would be interacted with the religious affiliation dummy, and for Methodists, it meant that only Methodist defectors would be interacted with the religious dummy. Each of these variables was lagged by a year.

### ***Control variables***

I also included several control variables. First, *size* measures the school's enrollment. This controls for the argument that once schools increase in size, they leave the NAIA and join the NCAA. Second, *number of sports participated in 1972* measures the number of total sports a school played in 1972. One could argue that the more sports a school competes in, the more the school has a sports logic (Friedland and Alford 1991) and, thus, the more likely they are to move to an institution that has a more visible sports presence. Third, I wanted to account for defections of nonconference members to the NCAA. So, I included the *number of independent colleges defecting to the NCAA* in the prior year as a control. Fourth, I included the *number of nonreligious schools defecting to the NCAA* as a control. Both of these variables were logged. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics on my variables.

### ***Dependent variable***

The dependent variable, *defection to the NCAA*, was the probability of a NAIA college joining the NCAA, and it was coded as one when a college joined NCAA and zero otherwise. To use time-varying independent variables, the history of all sample colleges was split into one-year records or spells, with all spells except the year of defection being coded as right-censored. Note that the specification implies that I am constructing discrete hazard-rate models rather than continuous-time models (Tuma and Hannan 1984).

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive statistics for analysis predicting a college's decision to defect from the NAIA to the NCAA**

Variable	Avg.	Standard deviation	Correlations											
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Defect to the NCAA	0.04	0.19												
2 Number of defectors from focal college's athletic conference x conference member dummy		0.18	0.53	0.30										
3 Number of defectors from focal college's specific religious affiliation x religious dummy		1.75	3.76	0.01	0.15									
4 Number of historically black college defections x historically black dummy	0.23	1.90	0.15	0.18	0.18									
5 Number of defectors from focal college's athletic conference	1.74	3.65	0.12	0.00	0.21	0.12								
6 Number of defectors from focal college's specific religious affiliation	3.11	4.88	0.16	0.33	0.64	0.27	0.34							
7 Number of historically black college defections	2.12	5.16	0.14	0.39	0.45	0.32	0.48	0.74						
8 Number of independent colleges defecting to NCAA	1.33	0.83	0.14	0.28	0.40	0.20	0.48	0.60	0.63					
9 Number of nonreligious colleges defecting to NCAA	1.43	0.89	0.15	0.32	0.43	0.20	0.42	0.64	0.64					
10 Conference member	0.65	0.48	0.01	0.25	0.03	0.02	0.54	0.06	0.01	0.77				

11	Religious affiliation	0.64	0.48	0.11	0.07	0.35	0.03	0.03	0.09	0.08	0.00	0.00
12	Historically black	0.09	0.28	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.39	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.03
13	Size	1875.40	1946.90	0.13	0.05	0.18	0.00	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.08
14	Number of sports in which participated in 1972	5.89	2.34	0.10	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.05
											0.04	0.08

Notes: Correlations > 0.03 or  $\leq 0.03$  are significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ . 500 schools, 255 defections, 8,301 school years.

### Methodology

The effects of the explanatory variables were estimated by using logistic regression with a logit function:

$$\log(P(t)/[1 - P(t)]) = a + \sum b_i x_i + \sum c_j x_j(t)$$

where  $P(t)$  is the probability of joining the NCAA,  $b_i$  is the set of coefficients for explanatory variables  $x_i$  that do not change over time,  $c_j$  is the set of coefficients for explanatory variables  $x_j(t)$  that change with time, and  $a$  is a constant. I used the STATA® package to estimate logit models of the hazard of joining the NCAA. Because the dataset consisted of school-year data, there is within-cluster dependence of schools, and a robust estimator was used to obtain the results (White 1980). The robust estimator increases the standard error of estimates and, therefore, provides a more conservative test of the hypotheses.

### Results

I began my analysis by conducting tests of collinearity. A measure for collinearity in regression models is the variance inflation factor (VIF), which should be smaller than ten for all variables (Belsey, Kuh, and Welsch 1980). This criterion was easily met for all variables, because the tests indicated a mean variance-inflation factor of 2.05 with the highest being 3.69. I then proceeded to construct logit models of the probability of defection from NAIA to NCAA.

Table 2 presents the results of the two logit analyses. Model 1 presents the results of the control variables along with the historically black, religious, and conference member dummies, and the number of defectors from various sources. As expected, resources are a significant predictor of defection, the more students there are on a school's campus, the more likely that school is to defect from the NAIA to the NCAA. The more sports in which a school participated in 1972, the more likely that school is to leave the NAIA and join the NCAA. Being a historically black college is a significant predictor of defection. The results also show that religious affiliation has significant negative effects, while conference members are significantly likely to defect to the NCAA. The number of prior defectors from a conference significantly increases defections, as does the number of religious defectors. The number of historically black defectors has significant negative effects on defections, but the number of nonreligious defectors significantly increases exits to the NCAA.

Model 2 tests the hypotheses by interacting the number of conference defectors with the conference dummy, the number of historically black defectors with the historically black dummy, and the number of religious defectors with the religious dummy. The number of conference defectors  $\times$  conference dummy interaction is significant and positive. Thus, defectors from a lower-order category are salient

identity-discrepant cues. Schools that left the NAIA from a focal conference had a significant impact on other schools defecting from the NAIA that were members of the same conference. Moreover, the number of historically black defectors  $\times$  historically black dummy is also significant and positive, indicating that defectors from a cross-cutting category are also salient. However, the number of religious defectors  $\times$  religious dummy is significant, but negative, thereby, indicating that colleges with religious affiliations were less vulnerable to the pressure of prior defectors. On balance, because defectors from a lower-order category (athletic conference) and cross-cutting category (historically black) increase the probability of a focal college joining NCAA, Hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

The “Lincom” procedure in STATA was used to test whether the coefficients for defectors from an athletic conference were significantly greater than the coefficients for defectors from the cross-cutting categories of race and religion. The Lincom procedure provides the difference between two coefficients: the standard error (s.e.) of the difference and a z-statistic denoting whether the difference is significant or not. I found that the coefficient for defectors from conference  $\times$  conference dummy was significantly greater than that of historically black schools defecting in the prior year  $\times$  historically black dummy (1.25, s.e. = 0.12,  $z=10.06$ ), and of defectors from the religious category  $\times$  religious dummy (1.40, s.e. = 0.12,  $z=11.8$ ). Together, these analyses confirm Hypothesis 2, which argued that lower-order identities were more salient than cross-cutting identities.

### ***Additional checks***

A potential objection to the results is that our analyses did not control for the number of non-black defectors in the prior years. I did not include the number of nonblack defectors in the model, because it was correlated with the number of nonreligious defectors (0.93) and with the number of independent defectors unaffiliated with any conference (0.85).

A second objection may be that I did not control for the number of years that a school was in the NAIA. Obtaining data on school history in the NAIA before 1973 is very difficult, as the NAIA did not keep accurate records. Because these are some of the smallest schools in terms of enrollment, other athletic guides (for example, *Blue Book Guide to College Athletics*, or *Ronald's Guide to College Athletics*) did not provide complete information on all of the schools in our data set. The NAIA had a fire in the mid-1950s that destroyed many of its records (Hoover 1958). However, I was able to obtain records of which schools were in the NAIA as of 1956. From that, I created a dummy variable for member in the NAIA since 1956 and I reran the analysis. While this variable is negative and significant at  $p < 0.05$ , I found that the inclusion of this variable did not alter the results. I refrain from presenting these results for the sake of brevity.

A third objection is that our religion dummy ought to be disaggregated by denomination, and then interacted with defectors from each denomination. I reran

**Table 2**  
**Logistical regression analysis predicting defection of schools from the NAIA to the NCAA**

	Variables	Model 1	Model 2
1	Number of defectors from focal college's athletic conference x conference member dummy		1.35*** 0.12
2	Number of defectors from focal college's specific religious affiliation x religious dummy		0.06** 0.02
3	Number of historically black college defections x historically black dummy		0.09*** 0.02
4	Number of defectors from focal college's athletic conference	0.09*** 0.02	0.16*** 0.03
5	Number of defectors from focal college's specific religious affiliation	0.04*** 0.01	0.07*** 0.02
6	Number of historically black college defections	0.07*** 0.02	0.16*** 0.02
7	Number of independent colleges defecting to NCAA	0.27 0.15	0.17 0.15
8	Number of nonreligious colleges defecting to NCAA	0.59***	0.29*



9	Conference member	0.14	0.14
		0.66***	0.02
10	Religious affiliation	0.21	0.19
		0.59***	0.20
11	Historically black	0.14	0.18
		0.84***	0.35
12	Size	0.22	0.28
		0.00013***	0.00013
		0.00002	0.00003
13	Number of sports in which participated in 1972	0.16***	0.17***
		0.03	0.03
	Constant	6.50***	6.19***
		0.33	0.33
	Log likelihood	1126.17	987.82
	Log likelihood of base model	1320.03	1126.17
	Chi square	387.71***	276.70***
	Degrees of freedom	10	3

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Notes: Standard errors below betas (robust standard errors).

Hypothesized variables: one-tailed, control variables, two-tailed.

the analysis and disaggregated religious affiliations into five major religious affiliations using dummies (Baptist, Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian). The results support my hypothesis in that with regards to cross-cutting identities, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist were significant, and, with regards to whether lower-order or cross-cutting identities were more significant, the athletic conference variable was a more significant predictor of defections than the cross-cutting categories of religious and historically black affiliations.

## Discussion

This study was motivated by the lack of research on the salience of multiple social identities for organizations. It sought to answer two questions: (1) are lower-level identities or cross-cutting identities simultaneously salient for organizations and (2) are lower-level identities more salient than cross-cutting identities? It investigated these questions in the context of members of the NAIA leaving it for the NCAA, and analyzed whether prior defections of peers from the lower-level identity (athletic conference) were more consequential than defections of peers from cross-cutting identities obtained from membership in religious denominations and demographic groups.

The results unambiguously suggest that multiple social identities can be simultaneously salient: a focal college was influenced by the defections of peers from the same athletic conference and from defections from the same demographic group constituted by historically black origin. Therefore, a researchable implication is whether organizations vary in their degree of tolerance for simultaneous salience. Are all organizations able to balance multiple identities equally, or are some organizations more adept at balancing multiple organizational identities? Future research needs to uncover the intra- and interorganizational factors that affect such tolerance of salient multiple social identities.

The findings demonstrate that lower-level identities are more salient than cross-cutting identities—that is, the effect of number of defectors from conference  $\times$  conference dummy was more salient than the effect of number of historically black defectors  $\times$  historically black dummy, and the effect of defectors from the focal college's denomination  $\times$  denominational dummy. One implication of these results is that social groups characterized by task interdependence and interaction are more consequential sources of social identity than psychological groups consisting of anonymous strangers who do not interact with each other or do not share common fates. In the case of colleges in the NAIA, athletics conferences consisted of a focal college and its opponents and were characterized by intense competition. Therefore, when competitors left to join the NCAA, the focal college also followed suit, thereby indicating that antagonists (a school's rival, for example) also provide moorings for the identity of an organization. Future research needs to uncover how antagonist identities influence the identity of the focal organization and also delineate the role of external audience (in our case, the role of competi-

tion between the two schools in terms of tradition, alumni, and spectators at the sporting events) in a school's reason to defect.

Although I did not develop a hypothesis, the analyses suggested that religious affiliation was generally a stronger source of social identity than a historically black origin. While this might be an artifact of our sample being confined to colleges, organizational researchers not only need to be sensitive to religion as a source of cross-cutting identities but also need to theorize about how its salience varies across time.

This study also extended research on institutional strategy (Lawrence 1999; Washington et al. 2004). A key issue in institutional strategy is competition among institutions over membership. This article sheds light on how institutions compete for membership by highlighting the ways that the NCAA attracted NAIA members. It also shows how attracting some NAIA members led to mass defections of other NAIA members. Future research could continue this line of inquiry by examining the role of the previously mentioned social creativity and social change on the strategic actions of competing institutions.

Finally, the study illuminated the salience of lower-level and cross-cutting identities in the case of social mobility. However, organizations respond to threats to their social identity through strategies of social creativity—that is, redefining their social group to look better than a rival social group—and of social change—that is, fighting with the rival group. Do organizations use cross-cutting identities to redefine themselves instead of lower-level identities? What precipitates the use of social-change strategies? Are grievances for organizational actors more easily concretized and framed at the level of lower-level identities or cross-cutting identities? Research into these and related issues is necessary to extend our understanding of the relationship between individual identity, organizational legitimacy, and social mobility.

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