Goffman Goes to Church: Face-Saving and the Maintenance of Collective Order in Religious Services

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Abstract

This article explores behavioural norms and consequences of their transgression during Mainline Protestant and Catholic church services in the Northeastern United States. We utilize Erving Goffman's essay "On Face-Work" as our primary theoretical orientation. Based on fieldwork conducted at twelve different churches in two Northeastern states, we found multiple types of social disruptions, sanctions, and attempted repairs occurring in services. Our findings highlight the normative complexity of religious services and have implications for a variety of collective endeavours.

Keywords: Religion, Goffman, Face-Saving, Social Psychology, Ritual

Introduction

1.1 All social rituals depend upon micro level norms for their survival. In particular, for any sense of transcendence or flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975a; 1975b; and Bennett 1971) to be cultivated within the religious setting, standard and profane interactional rules must be followed. While previous work comments on processes such tuning-in (Schutz 1951; Neitz and Spickard 1990) and the 'conscious collective' (Lawson 1999), there is a lack of literature investigating the everyday *Interaction Ritual* (Goffman 1967) present in Christian services. This work examines the enforcement of norms that form the basis of collective religious behaviour, outlined through the avoidance and corrective processes presented in Erving Goffman's 'On Face Work' (1967).

1.2 One way to understand the operation of norms is by observing their violation, and by using Goffman's study of attempts to save face during failed interactions we highlight the multiple ways in which non-normative action is defined in Christian services, and identify various strategies used to restore normative behaviour. More generally, our perspective on services emphasizes their collectively constructed nature. The hour or so that people spend in church is an event created by its participants, and many of them have a role in enforcing norms and repairing the damage done by gaffes. In this article, we examine how those in the congregation and clergy call attention and enforce behavioural norms, thus making a successful Sunday service. We therefore conceptualize religious rituals as group interactions requiring participants to be aware of an array of norms and responsive to social cues.

1.3 This article begins with a summary of previous ethnographic research in religious ritual, and particularly notes the lack of interactionist and dramaturgical research. Next we unpack Goffman's avoidance and corrective processes, followed by a description of the types of disruptions that occurred within the settings. Then we show how Goffman's processes function within the site. Lastly, we create the concept of the *enforcer*, and discuss the pivotal responsibility this informal social role serves for the maintenance of collective order during religious ritual.

Previous study of religious rituals

2.1 Previous studies examine behavioural norms in religious services and note the highly-regulated social and emotional aspects of religious ritual. Interest in the operation of services and effects upon social cohesion can be traced back to Durkheim (1995) and Weber (2003), with multiple contemporary manifestations (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Joas 2008). Within an experiential frame, authors such as

James (2004), Proudfoot (1985) and others outside the sociological rubric (Corrigan 2004; Otto 1958; Schleiermacher 1928; 1958) are especially interested in the different schemas and methods individuals utilize to construe the sacred and experience emotions. Such works not only posit theses about the nature of a divinity, but also outline sometimes detailed methods (Schleiermacher 1958) for attaining spiritual unity with a higher power - creating norms necessary for the 'true' religious experience. Many of these works therefore construct varying sets of rules, essential to follow, to assemble the ideal individualistic or communal religious rite. In contrast, with this work we focus not as much on the content of the rules themselves, but what happens when they are violated.

2.2 Within sociology, contemporary investigation illuminates a wide variety of social processes occurring within religious rituals. Specifically focusing upon a process pertinent to our research - social control - this concept is explained through 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1979; 1983; Nelson 1996; 2005), the 'conscious collective' (Lawson 1999), 'altercasting' (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963) and other themes (Wolff 1999) for the cultivation of collective sentiment and meaning. Status and prestige are also expounded in congregational contexts (Ingram 1982), along with comparing the formal role of the priest (such as Christopherson 1994; Fournier 1978; Hoge 2002; Littrell and Evers 1985; Stewart 1969) versus the participation of individual congregants in shaping meaning. Emotion and feeling are also a focus (Fuller 2006; Mitchell 1997; Weigert 1989), especially concerning their cultivation and control via symbolism (Spickard 2005) and service structure (Jules-Rosette 1980). In particular, Riis and Woodhead (2010) dedicate extensive attention to this subject in their analysis of 'religious emotional regimes' by blending individual, symbolic, and social constructionist concepts.

2.3 In order to study religion qualitatively, different theoretical models exist (for example, Straus 1981; Yamane 2000). For the sake of the present study, the phenomenological method influenced by Csikszentmihalyi's (1975a; 1975b; and Bennet 1971) concept of flow and Schutz's 'tuning-in' process (1951) created by Neitz and Spickard (1990) is closest to our method. Flow refers to 'the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement...[where] there is little distinction between self and environment' (Csikszentmihalyi 1975a, p. 35). In this instance, flow is a process of focus and involvement in the religious ritual; profoundly connecting with it and paying little regard to anything else. 'Tuning-in' is a similar process capable of linking together a congregation through a common process and task, cultivating 'a sense of being together in the vivid present' (Neitz and Spickard 1990, p. 27). This approach is presented as essential for understanding the shared religious experience and explicating the effect of worship upon the individual. While criticized (Yamane 2000), this work reflects the wider trend of phenomenological investigation in the study of religious ritual (such as Graham et al. 2008; Spickard 1991; Williamson and Pollio 1999; and Hood 2000; Wolff 1999), yet results in an unstated consequence. While encompassing many tenants of symbolic interactionist thought, 'profane' dramaturgical and interactionist processes operating underneath the spectacle of communal worship are neglected. Sociologists lose sight of the everyday, face-to-face processes that allow this collective practice to survive every Sunday morning.

2.4 In this work, we are not interested in mechanisms of transcendence and unity with the divine. We care about the gritty, **observable** reality of the performance of a collective project. At stake here is what Flanagan (1985, p. 207) discusses, where '[a]ctors come to rites with varying levels of stress and expectation that have an elective affinity to what the liturgies might or might not produce'. A 'failure of demeanour' in liturgical performance contains the possibility of leading to 'unfulfilled expectations' (p. 211). While many of our phenomenologically-inspired colleagues illuminate often complex processes during religious ritual (such as Squarcini 1995), they ignore the basic, commonplace mechanics of social cohesion that if not maintained and ensured prevent the sensation of self-transcendence, or being 'pulled beyond the boundaries of one's self...[and experiencing] liberation from one's fixation on oneself' (Joas 2008, p.7). Following Goffman's (1959) lead of explaining social life as theatre, we propose that the religious ritual be viewed as a collective endeavour where fronts are constructed, modified, defended, or abandoned during the life of the ceremony. While others have viewed interaction within religious ritual through a dramatic lens (Harrison 1977), we incorporate concepts of role, disruption, sanction, and repair, done through a framework developed by Erving Goffman (1959; 1967), to elucidate the front stage of contemporary Christian worship.

2.5 Aside from the authors mentioned above, interactionist investigation of processes during religious rite is regrettably lacking. For example, *The Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism's* entry on religion (Shupe 2003) is small and focuses mainly upon organizational effects on individuals, and an annotated bibliography on *Emotion and Religion* (Corrigan et al. 2000) while dated, is comprised of but a fraction of sociological studies out of the total surveyed. Arguably, two of the most prominent interactionist-based studies are both decade(s) old (Heilman 1998; Neitz 1987), and Goffman's dramaturgical concepts are still neglected in favour of a phenomenological approach (Nietz and Spickard 1990). This situation demands greater qualitative exploration into how Goffman's theory of social dramaturgy operates in contemporary religion.

Goffman and Saving Face

3.1 While previous use of Erving Goffman's work in religion (Park 1990; Kapp 2008) utilized aspects from his book *Frame Analysis* (1974), in this study we use Goffman's (1967) description of the social construction of 'face' as our theoretical basis, defined as (p. 5)

the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself.

3.2 Goffman particularly examines the problems that arise '[w]hen a person is in wrong face or out of face,' (1967, p. 8). These interactions are nested within the 'participation framework' of the interaction, so when a gaffe is performed both the performer and audience are connected through 'some sort of participation status relevant to it' (1981, p. 3). For the offender, this involves 'habitual and standardized' face-saving practices (p. 13), while the audience can 'challenge' or 'accept' the offering from the offender.

3.3 Specifically, face-saving can follow two separate paths: the 'avoidance' and 'corrective' processes (1967, p.15, 19). The first involves 'defensive measures' (p. 16) that a person utilizes to avoid the recognition of a gaffe, while the second is more complex and entails sanctioning from fellow interactants. This second concept is enacted through a turn-based process called 'interchange' (p. 19), starting with the 'challenge', where attention is drawn to the gaffe, followed by the 'offering' (p. 20), or the attempted repair from the offending party. The offering demonstrates to others that the offender has paid the price for their transgressions, and they are still a trustworthy participant in the ritual. Further, the sanctity of the normative system governing the situation is reaffirmed when the turn-based interaction concludes with 'acceptance' of the offering from the offended and "thanks" given by the offender to those that granted leniency (p. 22).

3.4 Social interactions are often structured yet very fluid and, in some instances, unpredictable. Occasionally, the audience of the situation and the offender will be uncertain of what response to perform; especially true of modest gaffes^[1]. This presents the possibility of a wide variety of offering behaviour at the disposal of the offender. Goffman describes these rituals as face-work, where rites are not completely random or spontaneous actions, but highly structured, subconsciously understood methods by which participants strive to abide.^[2]

Methodology

4.1 The following research was conducted at mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in two Northeastern states in the USA. The Northeastern U.S. is highly Catholic (43 percent) followed by mainline Protestant (13 percent) demographically, with few but growing numbers of Evangelical churches (Pew 2012). We chose to study these traditions because of the highly regimented nature of their customary rituals. This allowed us to recognize and observe gaffes during a service, where violations of behavioural norms were easily detectable. Furthermore, these traditions assigned a relatively passive role to the congregation, allowing us to focus on observing rather than participating in the ritual. We conducted six months of fieldwork at twelve different locations, visiting many sites multiple times. The denominations studied were Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian. We collected data until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point no new types of disruptions or reactions were witnessed (Small 2009).

4.2 While service/mass structure differed between the denominations that we studied, the difference was not necessarily profound. All had a homily/sermon, and all contained some form of communal prayers. The aim of this research was not necessarily to distinguish between denominations and paint some as more or less sympathetic than others, but to detail a common process throughout these observations. While somewhat heterogeneous in structure, each service - like all interactions - had similar forms of expressive order (Goffman 1967, p. 9), and we focused on the common process throughout. In fact, the existence of this process across all denominations observed is a testament to the prevalence of the findings, yet might not hold in charismatic settings.

4.3 We studied these services via participant observation to examine behaviour in real-time without concern of our presence meaningfully changing the situation. We believe this approach gave us a clearer picture of what occurred, for being identified as researchers by the congregation, or even just the clergy, could potentially disrupt the natural flow and interactions in the ritual.

4.4 During the service we took notes while sitting in a pew near the back corner of the chapels. This allowed us to study most of the congregation, and it limited the number of people who might notice our scanning during the service. Despite our best efforts, however, there were portions of the congregation that we could not observe; an inescapable element in any ethnography.

4.5 For our observations, we arrived fifteen to twenty minutes early to attain good seating and examine behaviour before the service began. Similarly, we were among the last to leave so we could observe behaviour after the services as well. These pre and post-service segments reflect Goffman's (1959) 'backstage' region, where as opposed to the 'front-stage' where impressions are actively managed, the backstage allows an individual to 'drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character' (p. 112). Since these segments were relatively brief, disorderly, and not stringently policed, they were not the primary analytical focus of this paper.

4.6 The congregations visited were often overwhelmingly white and middle class, and situated within rural, suburban, and some urban districts. All services were open to the public and we encountered no issues with accessing sites. We clothed in dress-casual attire, often wearing slacks and button-down shirts to blend in with congregations. In most Catholic churches we were not approached, but in mainline protestant services we were occasionally engaged in conversation. In order to maintain our 'front' (Goffman 1959) as an average churchgoer, we did not reveal our research role, but were truthful about all other aspects of our lives. As many forms of qualitative research involve some form of deception (Berg 2009), we felt this was the best method for limiting any harm to those observed. This study was approved by the researchers' institutional review board.

Crying, coughing, and fumbling

Disruptions within religious services

5.1 Underlying all social rituals is what Goffman calls the '*expressive order*' (1967, p. 9). This process 'regulates the flow of events...so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with his [the actor's] face' (p. 9). Within religious ritual, this is ever at work until its tenacity is brought to the forefront through various disruptions. Disruptions and gaffes were behaviours that contrasted with the actions of the rest of the congregation, or any instance that interrupted the orderly progression of the service in a negative fashion^[3]. Specifically, we are concerned with 'dignity'—the bodily and emotional command 'that is always praised and never studied' (p. 10). By conceptualizing disruptions as violations of the ritual order, gaffes do not rely completely on audience reaction to verify their existence—they only need be actions deviating from the ritualistic norm. This viewpoint therefore allows us to first target violations of the underlying discursive order of the service (Naples 1997), and then capture and categorize the effects on the congregation by quality and severity contingent on the level of reaction. This section initiates this study, where failings of personal dignity are categorized by type, severity, and timing. Since we (and Goffman) were more interested in *reactions* to disruptions, this section is not a central focus of this paper, yet necessary to comprehend this practice.

I. Disruptions

Official Disruptions

6.1 Types of disruptions were stratified into two groups; those performed by the clergy and other service actors (officials), and those by the congregation (congregant). Starting with officials, corporeal disruptions commonly included inappropriate movement and sounds. While movement gaffes tended to be relatively minor (such as dropping a pen), on a few occasions we observed significant kinetic disruptions; for example

Father Mike walks over to the podium to begin the pastoral reading. As the hymn winds down, he throws the Bible a bit in the air with a hop, and then raises it above his head for all to see. Unfortunately, when he does this, he hits the cross suspended over him, which causes it to sway - he consequently acts as if nothing happened.

6.2 Noise gaffes included worship leaders singing out of tune, hitting the wrong notes, or playing their instruments too loudly, with clergy sometimes hitting microphones or coughing. Microphones themselves were a common source of trouble; often not working or being too loud. These situations specifically reflect a lack of 'competency' (Goffman 1981), or the expectation that worship leaders will correctly annunciate and perform their often complex duty.

6.3 Due to their high level of visibility and power within the service, officials also had the opportunity to commit procedural disruptions concerning its performance. Examples ranged from several instances where clergy forgot their place in the ritual or inadvertently changed the order, to a Catholic mass where a priest approached the altar and retrieved an object while another was conducting the ceremony.

Father David is in the middle of his opening prayer with his (and the congregations') head bowed, when Monsignor Jon quickly walks up the left aisle to the altar. He takes a napkin without saying a word and then walks out the chapel as if nothing happened.

6.4 Not only do gaffes impact the performer, but a disruption also 'unthinkingly makes an intentional contribution which destroys his own team's image' (Goffman 1959, p. 209) - the denomination at large. Therefore, with increased status comes increased responsibility to follow the line and substantiate the 'collective representation' (1959, p. 27) of the denomination, a process which inevitably fails and results in distractions from the service.

Congregants

6.5 Congregants not only performed their fair share of gaffes, but enacted them more often - probably due to their quantitative and qualitative difference from the clergy. Like the clergy, these individuals also committed movement and noise gaffes, where the former occurred frequently and were often committed by children. These manifested at various times before, during, and after services, as children tore away from their parents' control and ran around (and sometimes into) the pews. For example, in one instance

A blond little girl (probably around six or seven) is sitting in the pew in front of me. We are about halfway into the service and she is becoming restless - fidgeting her body, climbing up and down the seat, and looking all over the chapel. At one point, she decides to climb up the pew in front of her, and taps a woman sitting in the pew on the back. The woman turns her head to the side in response; a grimace forms on her face.

6.6 Adults were not immune from movement disruptions either, such as arriving late with their families, dropping prayer guides, raising their hands at the wrong times during a question and answer period, shifting around in their pews excessively, and playing with their children.

It is communion time, and everyone empties out into the centre aisle to approach the rail. One man ahead of me has his head down in a prayerful posture, and apparently does not see the line stop. He runs into the man in front of him; almost knocking him over.

6.7 Noise gaffes were also regularly committed by children and highly repetitive in nature. Newborn babies frequently cried and yelped, and older children babbled, asked questions loudly, clicked their tongues, or tapped their feet. Adults made their own noises, including talking or laughing at inappropriate times, clicking their heels together, coughing, snorting, or blowing their nose.

6.8 Congregants were also allowed their own unique category of disruptions - appearance gaffes. These involved the physical presentation of self (Goffman 1959) and by and large excluded young children and clergy; children were generally given substantial leeway in dress, and clergy often adhered to well-defined styles of clothing. Congregants made appearance gaffes in a number of ways, such as

A woman in her forties walks in right before the start of the service with two teenagers (one female and one male) in tow. Both are dressed exclusively in black, with the female sporting a pink stripe in her hair. Several in the congregation take note; staring as the family settles into their seats.

6.9 Also, teenage and adult men wearing baseball caps (especially backwards) garnered negative attention. Yet it was not just physical dress that could pose an appearance disruption - this fieldwork was conducted in mostly white, suburban, and rural areas, so families of other ethnic groups, such as Asian, African-American, or interethnic families, were noticed by many congregation members. Likewise, large families, such as a single father with seven children in tow, were probably unexpected and attracted disruptive attention.

Severity and Timing

6.10 Many of these distractions were rather quaint regarding severity. The least severe were instances of arriving to the service late, a quickly-silenced cell phone, singing slightly off-key, and loud coughs, and were either ignored or elicited looks in the general direction of the disruption, yet rarely at the offender themselves. Moderately serious gaffes included babies crying, cell-phones ringing multiple times, near collisions in the communion line, children acting out, and microphone problems, and drew obvious looks of discomfort and agitation from others. The most serious disturbances were rare and in order to danger the service, were by necessity enacted by clergy. Examples included when a minister used the sermon to unexpectedly resign from her position:

This is the first time I've visited this particular Methodist church, and what an awkward service!... At the sermon, the minister is talking about how people need to grow and expand out of their comfort zone, during which she reveals that she is transferring to a new church. Some in the congregation let out "ohh"s, and many look around with eyebrows raised, sad or angry looks on their faces, and whisper to their neighbours.

6.11 As noted in this fieldnote excerpt, all of these situations had high shock and agitation value, and reactions consisted of initial displays of surprise and disbelief (raised eyebrows, worried faces, etc.) followed by apparent unease and agitation. Severity of gaffes and who committed them directly impacted the choice of avoidance or corrective process used by others.

6.12 Almost all disruptions occurred during the services themselves with the majority during sermon (due to few sounds other than the pastor's voice and seated children growing restless). The pre and post-service segments on the other hand were the temporal 'backstage' (Goffman 1959) of the religious service where faces and fronts from prior areas of life were being recalibrated and aligned with the coming ritual, and therefore adherence to behavioral norms was not at the forefront.

II. The Avoidance Process

7.1 According to Goffman, face saving takes two forms - the *avoidance process* and the *corrective process*. This first section focuses upon the former, and specifically examines the 'defensive measures' and 'protective manoeuvres' individuals employed when a disruption was unavoidable (1967, p. 16).

7.2 Perhaps the most common and least severe avoidance process was to simply ignore the offenders and their disruptions, thus 'maintain[ing] the fiction that no threat to face has occurred' (1967, p. 17). In this setting, such 'tactful blindness' (1967, p. 18) was marked by learning forward and demonstrating increased concentration, such as squinting to block out distractions. This approach was most prevalent concerning disruptions that were too loud to ignore. A prime example occurred when a mentally disabled young man started making loud noises when the pastor was saying a prayer.

Pastor Lynn is saying a prayer from the pulpit with her eyes closed and a calm look on her face. A few seconds in, James - a severely mentally challenged man in his early twenties wearing a hockey helmet - starts to groan loudly, yell, and then noisily shuffle through papers. Lynn continues with the prayer as if nothing is happening, but pushes her body forward over the pulpit, forcibly squints her eyes, and furrows her brow.

This appeared to cause the pastor difficulty in maintaining her concentration, and she visibly worked to focus. Some congregants also used this approach, while others gave the same gaffe more severe reactions.

7.3 Another type of repair involved making a joke of the situation. Here a person noticed a gaffe, yet simultaneously corrected the individual while saving face. For example, such a situation occurred when one pastor baptized a child;

Pastor Al dips his index finger into the bowl of holy water at his right, and then draws a cross on the child's forehead. The infant did not apparently appreciate this, and immediately wiped it off while letting out a cry. The congregation laughs, and Pastor Al says "don't worry, she's still baptized", which draws more laughter from all.

7.4 In another case, a child in the congregation cried suddenly and interrupted the service, and the priest turned toward the child and stated sympathetically, 'I know' drawing much laughter from the congregation. In these cases, the pastor 'openly acknowledges an incident as an event that has occurred, but not as an event that contains a threatening expression' (1967, p. 18).

7.5 When verbal or audio disruptions occurred during services, clergy members frequently not only ignored the distraction, but often talked right over it. This 'tactful overlooking' (1967, p. 18) arose commonly with crying infants, where even with repeated episodes of sobbing, the pastor simply continued on with their prayers, not pausing to recognize the infants' noise. In a notable case, a priest increased the intensity of his homily performance by using exaggerated hand motions and vocal fluctuations as a way of blocking out noise.

Father Tom is in the middle of his homily when a child from the right section of the pew starts wailing and screaming loudly. The parent does not take her out immediately, and tries to console her by whispering in her ear and bouncing her up and down on her lap, which only makes the screams undulate with an odd vibrato. Father Tom reacts by speaking much louder, leaning his body in multiple angles over the pulpit, and throwing his right hand around in front of him.

This strategy was also used by the pastor concerning the mentally-challenged congregant who was frequently loud and disruptive. This technique retained the progression of the service without explicitly punishing the individual committing the gaffe.

7.6 While most of the sanctioning we note later in this article was directed toward other people, we did notice several instances of *self-sanctioning*. In these cases, the individual 'loses control of his expressions during an encounter' (1967, p. 18) and therefore works 'to hide or conceal his activity in some way, thus making it possible for the others to avoid some of the difficulties created' (1967, p. 18). For example, during one observation,

The organist walks briskly up the left side of the chapel. Unfortunately for her, the children's choir piece she will accompany is not for a bit longer, and she apparently realizes this halfway down the aisle. She lets out a soft "oops", looks to her right, and quickly ducks into the nearest pew. She bows her head and looks down, aligning her action with the rest of the congregation during the pastoral prayer.

7.7 In another case, a male congregant responded to a communal prayer at an inappropriate time. When he realized he had done this, he quickly stopped and dropped his head to his chest in apparent shame. This type of self-sanctioning was observed when a person made a rather overt, sure to be noticed gaffe, and through its performance displayed respect for the 'expressive order' of the ritual. They are 'ritualistic acts' that show that the offender is cognizant of their mistakes, and that they support and respect the normative structure in principle, if not in action (Goffman 1981, p. 198).

7.8 The final type of avoidance was what we called *excused acceptance*. Here the congregation and clergy treated the disruption as a normal aspect of the service, where what otherwise would be a negative disruption was redefined as acceptable because of the actor who created it - under the influence of infancy or apparent mental or physical disability.

James is acting up again. During the second half of the hymn, he starts yelling at the top of his lungs "AH!" and "OH!" Once the song is over, he continues to groan loudly and yell. There is absolutely no recognition from the congregation nor clergy; all sang with blank faces during the song, and the communal prayer afterwards was done in monotone with flat faces.

7.9 This practice provides a variant of normalizing deviance (Vaughan 2005) and involved 'tactful blindness' at its extreme. The disruption was treated as an unavoidable, albeit undesirable, aspect of the service. Other examples included infants who were moderately disruptive but not out of control (drawing a few looks, yet no verbal or nonverbal sanctions) or physically-disabled congregants who had difficulty participating in the bodily aspects of the service. This was quite a powerful process, as illustrated by the following scenario with Pastor Lynn:

Pastor Lynn is talking with a congregant as I am getting ready to exit the front door. James is behind me with his caretaker, and making the normal level of fuss. I shake Pastor Lynn's hand and she says "nice to see you" to me. While I turn to leave, James comes up behind her from the other side, and with his left hand, grabs one of Lynn's breasts. Lynn quickly turns around with a shocked look on her face, but when she sees who it is, she recomposes herself and greets James in a warm and friendly manner.

7.10 This is not to say, however, that the excused had carte blanche to act out however much they wanted. While babies were excused from making more noise than adults, there was a level of disruption defined as excessive and when reached corrective processes were expected. The congregation of the mentally-impaired young man learned over time how much disruption they could expect out of him on an

average Sunday, and when he exceeded this level, they displayed the inimical feedback associated with negative disruptions.

III. The Corrective Process

8.1 The *corrective process* was a far more intricate interaction that involved multiple actors with the expressed intent of shaming the offender and reestablishing 'ritual equilibrium' (1967, p. 19). This transpired when a disruption occurred and was seen 'as a threat that deserves direct official attention', initiating an effort 'to try to correct for its effects' (p. 19). As outlined in the introduction, this process requires the enactment of a disruption by the offender, the issuing of the *challenge* from another congregant, and the offender producing an *offering* in turn, possibly *accepted* by the sanctioning party with the option of *gratitude* from the distracter. We explicate the steps of this progression in the text below.

The Challenge

8.2 A wide range of sanctions were 'adapted to the persistence and intensity of the threat' (p. 19) from a disruption. One low-key challenge involved paralingual responses indicating frustration and anxiety. These responses typically entailed an exaggerated, drawn-out sigh, a sudden exhale of air, or muttering under one's breath.

Pastor Rich is saying the announcements right after the start of the service. It is early February, and he says at the end of this segment "and I don't know about you all, but I'm looking for a date this Valentine's Day". This elicits laughter from much of the congregation, while a woman sitting behind me lets out a "hrrmmppphhh" in response.

8.3 We did not observe this often, perhaps because it was difficult to notice and could only be heard by those near the individuals performing them. This technique and especially the avoidance process of ignoring call to mind the extremely reserved nature of the religious setting for congregants. With ignoring the *interchange* process is not engaged in at all, and paralingual responses are left at the challenge with neither guarantee nor pursuit by the corrector to receive an offering.

8.4 The next type of correction entailed looking directly at the source of disruption. In its least-severe form, it involved glancing at the offender with a neutral facial expression. Frequently, several people in the congregation looked over at the same time, subtly indicating the breadth of the distraction.

A child sitting in the front of the right block of pews drops something - probably a hymnal - with a loud boom. Multiple congregants across the chapel look over with flat faces at the child.

This was the most commonly observed reaction to disruptions, was performed concerning all types of gaffes, and indicated an increase in intensity and aggressiveness in the challenge. This intensity could be further extended by looking directly at the offender for a longer-than-expected period, possibly accompanied by negative facial expressions, such as a frown. This type of response was reserved for more severe disruptions that distracted many people.

8.5 We observed all forms of the looking sanctions among congregants in services. Perhaps because they could not formally intervene to stop a disruption (since they were not in charge of the service) this was the most common form of sanctioning behaviour available to them. In contrast, we rarely saw the clergy glaring or scowling; in fact, we observed only a single instance of such occurring.

One of the readers for the mass is wrapping up the opening announcements, and says "please stand" at their conclusion. Awkwardly, the congregation is already standing, and a couple parishioners laugh in response. Apparently, the priest does not think this is funny, and looks over at her with a frown and furrowed brow on his face.

8.6 The most severe challenge we observed was a verbal comment, sometimes performed along with glaring, scowling, or scornful laughter. Spoken comments were not, however, said directly to the offending person as in a heated exchange. Rather, the comments were made aloud to be heard by others as a way of labelling (Becker 1991) and shaming the offender. We did not observe many of these sanctions, but those we did often involved a person in the congregation denouncing a service leader. For example,

While the musicians are warming up before the start of the mass, Father Henry ascends the pulpit. He tells the congregation that we need to respond to the hymns, but only in a certain way—"black people in their churches say 'right on' while we say 'amen' in ours"...On my way out of the chapel [at the end of the mass], two elderly women are walking in front of me. One turns to the other and while referencing Father Henry's pre-mass comment, says "I've been coming here for twenty years and I cannot believe that."

8.7 These spoken comments allowed the congregant to sanction the offending church leader anonymously, yet occurred in the 'backstage' segment of the mass, when the congregant is no longer responsible for maintaining the front of the ideal churchgoer. Even while not a direct challenge, these comments still signalled an official's loss of '*[e]xpressive [c]ontrol*' which, no matter how small, threatens 'the over-all definition of the situation that is being fostered' (1959, p. 51)—possibly negatively impacting the religious experience for the congregation.

8.8 The last type of correction involved a clergy member overtly correcting the behaviour of a congregant. These were *direct* challenges that required the pastor to deviate from the service plan and guide congregants back to acceptable behaviour. Consequently, they were only enacted in response to very salient gaffes, and rarely occurred. In one example,

A man and woman with two young children in tow walk up to the advent wreath in front of the altar. The man has a lit stick with him which he uses to ignite the candle. Once the candle is lit, the family stands in front of the wreath, apparently unsure of what to do. After a bit, the priest nods to one of the ushers in the nearest aisle, who walks over and escorts them back to their seats.

In another example, a song leader forgot to announce a hymn, and the pastor had to remind her verbally, eliciting an 'oh' in response. We observed this type of repair more frequently before the service, when the clergy member would explicitly guide readers, musicians, singers, and other lay-leaders in how to perform their job. Once the service started, however, they were much less likely to adopt this very overt response.

8.9 Congregants attempted direct challenges toward clergy only once, but the response to it was telling; illuminating the 'asymmetrical rule' (1967, p. 53) that governs congregant and clergy interaction.

During his sermon, the pastor with a heavy Eastern European accent stopped at one point midway through his sentence—apparently unsure of the exact word he wanted. Two members of the congregation sitting in the front row attempted to help him by suggesting possible choices, yet none of these were correct. In response to them, the pastor became agitated, said "no" a couple of times, and then continued on with the service as if nothing had occurred.

This was the only time that we observed a congregation member speak out of turn during a service, and the pastor's negative response to it highlighted the power dynamics within the ritual. Requiring assistance from a lower-status congregation member fulfilled Goffman's (1967) supposition that

when a rule of conduct is broken we find that two individuals run the risk of becoming discredited: one with an obligation, who should have governed himself by the rule; the other with an expectation, who should have been treated in a particular way because of this governance. (p. 51)

8.10 These strategies outlined varieties of 'the challenge' (1967, p. 20) enacted toward offenders: glaring or making a verbal comment to change their behaviour and fit with the norms of the situation. The most effective corrections were those involving contact with the offender, such as eye contact or paralingual responses. Corrections also allowed for a realization of self and provided an opportunity to substantiate the 'personal front' (1959) as the ideal churchgoer. Therefore, the challenges observed not only functioned to maintain the ritual order, but also as a mechanism of maintaining face.

The Offering

8.11 Our discussion so far highlighted only sanctioning reactions to disruptions. There were, however, another class of responses—those that sought to repair the damage done by gaffes. These repairs involved the third step of Goffman's process of *interchange*, where offenders are given an opportunity to provide an *offering* for their mistakes^[4]. Typically, these repairs happened after more overt gaffes, for subtle disruptions did not cause enough disorder to necessitate restoration.

8.12 Offerings primarily took the form of apologies, more commonly used by congregation members versus clergy. Apologies involved the offender admitting the disruption and proactively attempting to repair it. Through this tactic the offender seeks to show that they are 'now a renewed person, a person who has paid for his sin against the expressive order and is once more to be trusted in the judgmental scene' (1967, p. 21). Apologies are similar to self-sanctioning behaviour in that both involved an admission of guilt, but whereas the latter involved action against the self, the former requires reparations addressed to others.

8.13 We observed only a handful of apologies, such as

A woman in her mid-thirties enters the chapel late and walks up the left aisle. She chooses the pew in front of me, and while moving through it to an empty space, trips on a man's feet. She quickly recovers, and says "sorry" in response.

In another example, an usher collecting donations accidentally pulled away the contribution basket before a female congregant could insert her donation. The usher gave an embarrassed look, said 'sorry', and offered the basket back to her.

8.14 Distinct from the above concessions, examples of a clergy member apologizing were quite rare, and only happened once when a priest apologized for his faulty vision from cataract surgery. The priest delivered this excuse using humour - therefore while it technically constituted an apology, it did not involve admitting a fault per se. This once again highlights the 'asymmetrical rule' (1967, p. 53) ever present in religious ceremony, where the clergy is in a position of power and is incapable, in this case, of relating to a group with lower status as equals.

IV. Policing the service: The case of the enforcer

9.1 In our observations, we noticed that sanctioning behaviour was not performed randomly. While many did it, a few people in each service put an inordinate amount of time into monitoring their fellow congregants and enforcing the expectations of the service. We termed these individuals as *enforcers*: the police of the religious service, who regularly took 'on the responsibility of calling attention to the misconduct' (1967, p. 20). Enforcers were especially interesting as they occupied no formal role in the ritual. This is especially important in the religious service, for while the position of clergy and other officials vested them with liturgical roles and the ability to interpret and transmit the sacred, it also significantly curtailed their forms of action. Specifically, the very liturgical requirements that grant worship leaders greater 'religious capital' (Bourdieu 1991) concurrently restrict their repertoire of behaviour, as evinced by their extensive reliance on the avoidance process. Enforcers therefore fill a vital position - policing the service and providing the ritual stability necessary for clergy to enact their roles.

9.2 On average, for each observation one to three enforcers were identified. The great majority of them appeared to be at least sixty years of age, though one was in his late teens. All but one were white, and they dressed in a middle-class manner. They were also evenly split by gender, and we often saw the same person serve as enforcer from week-to-week at a given church.

A few minutes into the start of the service, I notice a woman in a red dress with short brown hair circa 40 moving her head back and forth across the chapel; apparently looking over those in the congregation. She sits straight up with her body in a stiff posture. Shortly after I notice her, a baby starts to yelp, and she quickly turns her head and looks at the disruption with a flat, expressionless face. Throughout the rest of the service, she commonly looked over at disruptions with a high frequency.

9.3 Enforcers were identified by three behaviours. First, they frequently visually scanned the congregation during the service, moving their heads from side to side. Through this practice they could detect a wide range of disturbances, and whereas others reacted only to disruptions they happened to notice, enforcers appeared to seek them out. Furthermore, enforcers scanned throughout the service and especially during the sermon (when the congregation had to sit quietly), along with communal prayers and hymns, when they had to act in unison. These times offered the best opportunities to observe a disruption.

9.4 Secondly, enforcers were by and large the most frequent responders to disruptions, regardless of their proximity; in fact, it was rare for a disruption to occur without at least one enforcer reacting to it. They targeted any type of disruption for sanctions, even those committed by the pastor leading the service (in these instances, however, enforcers usually reacted identically to other congregants, as described above). What separated enforcers from the general congregant population was the frequency of their reactions.

9.5 Third, the enforcers tended to display a stiff, proper, perhaps overly-formal body language that projected the model of the ideal churchgoer. They followed church norms with a diligence that perhaps gave the enforcers the moral high-ground in imposing rules of the service. In several instances we observed enforcers being overly meticulous and following norms that did not exist. For example, one enforcer made the sign of the cross at times in the service at which it was not required.

9.6 We observed enforcing behaviour mostly only during the service itself. During the 'backstage' segment before the service, the activities were both disorganized and individual-focused, and the enforcers were much less active. Also, when we visited a church for the first time, it would usually take us until the start of the service to identify the enforcers, so we might have missed their pre-service activities. In a couple of cases, we observed the enforcer steadily increasing their rate of scanning as the service drew near.

I arrive at the church twenty minutes early, and after getting settled, I take notice of a man in his thirties sitting in the front pew. He initially prays with his head bowed, but after a few minutes, begins to scan the growing congregation with greater frequency. Once the mass starts, he crosses himself at the conclusion of a prayer, which no one else does.

In contrast to the build up of enforcement before the service, the enforcers' behaviour changed instantly at the close of the ritual. The moment the service was over, they ceased scanning the room and become pleasant and approachable. This change suggests that being an enforcer was a situation-specific role, rather than an intolerant personality characteristic.

9.7 While our observations covered multiple congregations and denominations, the role of enforcer was remarkably similar from service-to-service. These individuals appeared as having a hyper investment in maintaining the 'collective representation' (1959, p. 27) of the entire denomination. This occurred to such an extent that they sacrificed their own 'personal front' in order to uphold this - looking around and policing when they should be worshipping - the situational religious martyr.

Conclusion

10.1 Like the rest of social life, religious services entail a dialectic between two, constantly shifting groups - those who break the rules and those who enforce them. Through this article, we show the various threats to collective order, the methods to deal with these threats, and a particular informal social role - the enforcer - that manifests to enact a majority of these functions. These findings support and build upon Goffman's work, and reveal the normative complexity of contemporary religious ritual in the Northeastern United States. Specifically, this work illuminates the power dynamics in services, where actions disrupting

the 'expressive order' (Goffman 1967) are sanctioned by enforcers within the congregation, allowing worship leaders to maintain the 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1975a; 1975b; and Bennett 1971) of the service with minimal involvement in the profane. This also provides an opportunity to reflect on the sacred versus profane dichotomy, where the gaffes of congregants are not only manifestations of the profane, but symbolize its hierarchical nature and the 'subordinated realm of objects, activities and individuals' that characterize it (Duschinsky 2010, p. 124). Therefore, by bringing Goffman into the qualitative study of religion we continue previous efforts of illuminating the intricacy of the profane in religious services — presenting disruptions not only as a Durkheimian treatment of objects or behaviours set aside from the sacred, but as markers for differential allocations of religious capital between worship leaders, enforcers, and laity (Bourdieu 1991).

10.2 Previous work (Park 1990) also saw the utility of Goffman's theory in religion, and this text contributes to its further development. By revealing the underlying dramaturgical processes, we not only expand upon an area phenomenology neglected, but further describe the necessary process for order maintenance in a ritual that desperately needs it to create a profound religious experience. Social control in services is of the utmost necessity, and through Goffman's framework we are able to see how it functions on a face-to-face level. Future study should expand this analysis beyond the highly liturgical structure of the denominations analysed. We encourage researchers to observe these processes in charismatic contexts where congregants are given more expressional free-reign, possibly leading to novel findings as worship leaders may take an assertive role in upholding the ritualistic order in these circumstances.

10.3 These findings also have implications beyond the sociology of religion. The religious ceremony operates as a useful setting to innovate Goffman's theory thanks to its highly controlled nature, allowing the existence of enforcers to become easily apparent. Additionally, our findings not only shed light on social processes occurring in religion, but also in many other collective endeavours, from sporting events to university classrooms. Indeed, anywhere flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975a; 1975b; and Bennett 1971) and tuning-in (Schutz 1951) are at work, Goffman is operating underneath the surface; ensuring the survival of collective action.

10.4 This study illuminates the gritty unpleasanties occurring every Sunday during mainline Christian services. Far from a passive social body receiving indoctrination from a clergy member, this group has to actively work in order to maintain a suitable environment for such instruction and worship. This process is so important that informal social roles are created out of the necessity for order management. Therefore, while religious ritual may be a site of profound emotional experience and lifestyle education, in order for such to ever occur, it is necessary for the group to police itself; separating the crowd from the congregation.

Notes

¹It is important to note that for the purposes of this study we modify Goffman's definition of gaffe; an 'offense [that] seems to be unintended and unwitting... that he [the offender] would have attempted to avoid' (1967, p. 14). This work instead views gaffes as synonymous with disruptions; any behavior that disrupts the operation of or attention toward a standardized ritual.

²While this text draws primarily upon Goffman's work in *Interaction Ritual* (1967), he describes other forms of impression management in additional works such as *Stigma* (1963) as well (see p. 9-10). The theoretical model for this paper was chosen due to its useful applicability to highly structured ritualized interaction in brief, situational contexts, as opposed to an individual possessing 'abominations of the body', 'blemishes of individual character', or 'tribal stigma' (1963, p.4) which apply across multiple social settings.

³While other disruptions were appreciated - such as a child eliciting laughter by correcting a pastor on a point regarding turtles - they happened rarely and are outside the scope of the present text.

⁴Due to the highly controlled setting of the fieldsite and its limitation on speech, apologies and gratitude were extremely rare and difficult to detect.

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