

## Book Review

# “Beyond Betrayal: The Priest Sex Abuse Crisis, the Voice of the Faithful, and the Process of Collective Identity”

By Patricia Ewick and Marc W. Steinberg

The University of Chicago Press, 2019, 176 pages. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/B/bo41210790.html>

**Reviewer:** Maureen K. Day, *Franciscan School of Theology*

There is the person who is not aware of the priestly sex abuse crisis within the Catholic Church. Catholics themselves have responded to these revelations through a frame of exit, voice or loyalty. Exit is usually quiet, with Catholics opting out of Mass attendance or no longer claiming a Catholic identity. Loyalty is a bit louder, as laity and clergy together implement programs that better safeguard minors, propose new guidelines within seminary admittance and formation, or minister to the reactions of grief or anger harbored by those in the pews. Media outlets may cover these, either favorably or unfavorably, but loyalty, too, is relatively quiet.

Voice, however, is loud. Those who exercise voice remain within the institution, and this choice often entails the upheaval of systems of meaning, personal and interpersonal struggle, and institutional pushback. Patricia Ewick and the late Marc Steinberg call those who seek change while remaining inside that institution “challengers within,” and provide a thoughtful analysis of the ongoing challenges these groups face related to strategies, goals and—most importantly for their purposes—collective identity. *Beyond Betrayal* is based upon 10 years of qualitative research on a single affiliate of Voice of the Faithful—an organization of Catholics who advocate for victims, clergy who were not a part of the scandal and coverup, and structural reform of the Catholic Church. Going in deep and for the long-haul with a small set of actors, the authors examine how social movements “work” at the level of the individual and what role collective identity plays in the endurance of the group.

The theoretical frame Ewick and Steinberg provide for understanding the identity work challengers within face is that of three axes, each of which are characterized by extremes of sameness or difference; groups typically fall somewhere between these. The first axis is the temporal axis or the ways groups perceive continuity or change in both themselves and the group. The second

axis is the external relational axis or the ways groups understand themselves in relation to parties outside the group. The authors demonstrate that the second axis is complicated through the fact that groups have relationships with multiple constituencies, which are themselves multifaceted and shifting (e.g., some clergy committed sex abuse and others did not, so “clergy” are not a monolithic group). The final axis is the internal relational axis, that is, the group members’ relationships to one another. Although many may assume that a sense of group sameness is ideal, internally discussing and even debating the meaning of the group allows difference to be organized. The extent to which groups are able to hold sameness and difference in creative tension determines the group’s ability to endure. Further, it is the way groups navigate these three axes and the relationship of each axis to the others that produces identity.

As indicated in the subtitle, collective identity is central to *Beyond Betrayal*. The book illustrates that identity is a process and is emerging, even while it is experienced as separate and “out there.” When identity is conceived as a process, identity is made manifest in ritual and action, linking agency (doing) and identity (being). A processual and emerging understanding allows us to explore how individuals create a collective identity as well as how tension does not undermine and instead becomes fruitful for collective identity. This notion of identity also invites social movement scholars to consider the impact of movements beyond success or failure (e.g., what effects did they have?), that is, not just assessing tactics or achievement of outcomes, but examining the evolving narratives as the group makes sense of their participation, collectively and individually.

Given the centrality of identity in their work, I would have liked the authors to say more about the ways their findings contribute to the literature on identity at the personal level. They demonstrate that collective identity is formed at the group level, and that this also has transformative effects on the individual members. In other words, collective identity shapes personal identity. However, the vast majority of connections the authors make to other literature were from the realm of collective identity. The findings here are important for identity at the individual level, as well, and more conversations with that literature would have expanded the relevance and usefulness of the book.

I was pleasantly surprised by the centrality of narrative in the book’s analysis. Although an examination of narrative goes unmentioned in their title and back cover (but is readily apparent in their table of contents), the authors demonstrate the importance of storytelling in the process of forming and maintaining collective identity. They show that stories affect both mood and motivation, which shapes responses to a problem. Also, stories take rupture and tension and give them meaning and coherence. In their telling and familiarity, stories become ritualized, reinforcing collective identity. Stories provide an interpretive lens that shapes action, making sense of the past while integrating new events into a collective identity. Stories, in short, are a meaning-making enterprise. However, despite their importance as a human activity, stories are underexplored in scholarly literature; this book rightfully demonstrates the importance of the story as an object of social analysis.

*Beyond Betrayal* is a masterfully written book that dives deeply into the minds of individual activists to see the ways they make sense not only of their activism, but also their very selves. This book is sure to invite new questions on meaning and the role of narratives in social life. It is a must-read for scholars in the areas of social movements, identity, emotion, small groups, or framing and would be very useful for those who lead small groups trying to foment social change.