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Just regular folks: An ethnographic study of identity in a gay and lesbian Catholic community in South Florida

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Just Regular Folks: An Ethnographic Study of Identity in
a Gay and Lesbian Catholic Community in South Florida

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Much of the research done on religious gays and lesbians has focused upon the cognitive strategies they employ in order to negotiate conflicts experienced between their religious and sexual identities. In contrast to taking a psychological approach, this study focuses upon the role of social context in helping gay and lesbian Catholics to successfully negotiate their religious and sexual identities. Using participant-observation data of a small gay and lesbian Catholic community, the Holy Cross Community (HCC), as well as from interviews with ten of its members, I examine the role of the interpersonal context in identity processes. I outline the way that members create a community of inclusion, a community of affection, and a community of shared responsibility, which helps HCC's members in successfully enacting both their religious and sexual identities within a social context. In the discussion, I explain how HCC provides a place where members experience a sense of normalcy and where they worship in an environment that does not challenge their identities. From a social movements perspective, this in turn has a diminishing effect on the impetus for HCC's members to effect change on their behalf.

Chapter One: Introduction

Given the dominance of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition in the United States, it is not uncommon for many Americans who come out as gay or lesbian to have been raised in a religion that considers homosexuality sinful. Coupled with the fact that much of the resistance faced by the gay rights movement originates from religious groups (Adam 1995; Bull and Gallagher 1996; Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005; Coulmont 2005; D'Emilio 1998; Fetner 2001; Herman 1996, 2000), gays and lesbians can experience difficulties in maintaining ties to their religion, and consequently, religion can be abandoned. Nevertheless, there are many gays and lesbians who are unwilling to cease the practice of their religion despite the teachings and actions of their churches. One reason is that religious gays and lesbians "hold a deep alliance to these [religious] traditions" (Thumma and Gray 2005: xiii) and find it difficult to abandon them. Others' unwillingness to leave stems from a practice and interpretation of their religion recognizing that religious faith is not necessarily equated with or governed by the hierarchy of their church (Dillon 1999; Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Primiano 2005; Yip 1997a, 1997b). Whatever the causes may be, there are many gays and lesbians who remain faithful to their religious traditions in the face of their churches' stance against homosexuality.

Several studies suggest that an important factor for gays and lesbians in retaining ties to their religion is the support they find in gay and lesbian religious communities, such as Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) (Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000; Warner 1995), chapters of the gay and lesbian Catholic group Dignity/USA (Dillon 1999;

Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Primiano 2005), or gay synagogues (Schnoor 2006; Shokeid 2005).¹ For many gays and lesbians, the struggle in maintaining ties to their religious tradition arises from a conflict between their religious identity and their sexual identity. These gay and lesbian religious communities provide a place where their members receive affirmation of their religious and sexual identities and where they are able to negotiate the seeming contradictions between the two.

Much of the identity research and theorizing in the social sciences takes one of two general perspectives, with many studies taking a psychological approach, such as social identity theory (SIT), which examines the cognitive functions involved in identity formation. The second approach is sociological, such as identity theory (IT), which examines the role of social structures and contexts on identity formation. Recent studies have explored the ways in which SIT and IT are interrelated (Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker and Burke 2000) and have offered suggestions for achieving a greater theoretical connection between the two perspectives. One particular approach at conceptualizing identity processes that bridges these two facets of identity research has been set forth by Kay Deaux and Daniela Martin (2003), who conceptualize identity as being informed by

¹ Community support and relationships have been shown to play an important role in the maintenance of identities, especially in matters of non-normative gender expression and sexuality (Abrahams 1996; Adam 1995; Bonfitto 1997; D’Emilio 1998; Krieger 1982; Leznoff and Westley 1956; Schrock, Holden, and Reid 2004; Wolkomir 2001, 2004; Woolwine 2000) but also in other contexts as well, such as the experience of divorce or a spouse’s death (Francis 1997) or of being deaf (Bat-Chava 1994).

two contexts: 1) the cognitive and representational context as defined by categorical membership, and 2) the context of interpersonal and reciprocal relationships with others (2003: 105). Identity formation is connected to these two contexts through cognitive and social interaction processes.

Research on the identity of religious gays and lesbians focuses mainly upon the cognitive processes involved in negotiating religious and sexual identities. The processes explicated by these studies show how religious and sexual identities are negotiated within gay and lesbian religious communities in ways that do not downplay or reject either identity. However, few studies have focused on the place of interpersonal relationships and interactions in the community members' identity negotiation. Although most of these studies take the social context of these identity negotiation processes into account, the focus remains on the cognitive processes. Using past research on the cognitive identity negotiation processes undertaken by religious gays and lesbians as my springboard, here I explore the role of social interaction in supporting those with gay or lesbian sexual identities as well as a Catholic religious identity. An analysis of the social context of gay and lesbian religious identities is appropriate because of the importance the group context plays, and it is beneficial because much of the research done on religious gays and lesbians has not taken a primarily sociological approach.

The particular focus of the present study is a small community of gay and lesbian Catholics in South Florida, which I call the Holy Cross Community (HCC). Using data from participant-observation at HCC, as well as interviews with several members of the community, I examine the social interaction between group members as the context for identity processes. In this paper, the term "identity processes" can include the *negotia-*

tion or *reconciliation* of identities, i.e., the cognitive process required to overcome dissonance or seeming contradictions between identities, as well as the *maintenance* of identities, which is necessary for people whose identities may be challenged, e.g., gay or lesbian Christians or transgendered individuals. I focus on the “practice” (Lichterman 1995) of HCC’s members, which is the everyday patterns of interaction within this community that provide the social context for identity formation, as discussed by Deaux and Martin (2003). As my analysis will show, there are several types of community practices that together create a positive social context for the negotiation and maintenance of gay and lesbian Catholic identities, and which provide recognition and acceptance of the members’ religious and sexual identities. In conducting this analysis, I expand upon the work of past research on the identities of religious gays and lesbians through an explicit focus on the interpersonal context of their identity processes. By focusing specifically on this, I add to what is already known about religious gays and lesbians’ identity processes (i.e., the cognitive context), thereby creating a more complete picture of these dynamics.

In the discussion section, I address how the everyday interactions provide a stable interpersonal context for HCC members through their experience of inclusion, affective support, and of shared responsibility within the community. This results in an experience of normalcy for HCC members whose weekly gatherings are relatively uneventful, where members’ sexual and religious identities are not challenged, and, hence, where community members can be “just regular folks.” The routine nature of the community and the experience of not being challenged in either their sexual or religious identity in turn has ramifications for the well-being of its members. However, this also can be understood as negative in that it does not create an impetus for advocating change in the institutional

church's teachings regarding homosexuality.² At issue here is the relationship between the well-being of marginalized individuals and the motivation for proactively addressing and changing the structural basis of their marginalized status. Drawing from the literature on social movements as a framework, I discuss possible reasons why HCC members do not engage more actively the institutional church's teachings on homosexuality. By doing so, I draw connections between identity processes and the individual motivation to engage in activities necessary to achieve social change.

² By "institutional church," I refer to the Catholic Church's hierarchy, including the Pope, bishops, and other Vatican officials, who make pronouncements in regard to the church's official teachings. This is in contrast to an understanding of the "church" as being comprised of those who practice Catholicism, which is not necessarily connected with the hierarchy.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Development of Cognitive and Interpersonal Contexts of Identity Formation

I begin this chapter with a review of research on identity, specifically of the recent efforts to bridge the cognitive and social contexts of identity formation. As noted in the introduction, much of the research on religious gays and lesbians generally takes a cognitive and psychological approach in discussing how they negotiate their religious and sexual identities, whereas in the present study I examine the social and interpersonal context of these identity processes. I explain how understanding both the cognitive and the interpersonal contexts of identity, as advanced by Deaux and Martin (2003), help to present a more complete picture of identity processes. By providing this foundation, I show how existing literature exploring identity in religious gays and lesbians is mainly cognitive-focused and would be complemented by my analysis of the interpersonal context of their identity processes.

Deaux and Martin (2003) present a perspective that aims to bridge the psychological and sociological approaches to identity theorizing and research. Drawing on the efforts of others, such as Hogg, Terry, and White (1995), Stets and Burke (2000), Terry, Hogg, and White (1999), and Thoits and Virshup (1997), Deaux and Martin advance their own theory for understanding the dynamics of identity processes. For two of the major theoretical perspectives on identity, social identity theory (SIT) and identity theory (IT), the focus is on how identity affects an individual's attitude toward him or herself and

others and how this identification motivates certain actions (Deaux and Martin 2003: 102). From the sociological perspective, identification is an important component of maintaining social order (through an explication of an individual's role in relation to others), whereas the psychological perspective is concerned with an individual's categorical membership (e.g., race/ethnicity or gender) as derived from the social order (Deaux and Martin 2003).

Research taking the cognitive perspective examines the degree to which people identify with social categories such as race/ethnicity, gender, or status, which can be ascribed to an individual. Since identities are socially derived, there is a component of societal expectation in relation to the characteristics individuals should exhibit when claiming or being ascribed membership with a particular category or group. Deaux and Martin note how Turner (1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherall 1987) extends SIT by taking into account how individuals actively categorize themselves based on the degree to which they are similar to or different from those around them. The process of self-categorization is important because, unless an individual is aware of the categories to which he or she belongs, there is no sense of expectation in relation to that group membership. As will be shown in the subsequent discussion of religious gays and lesbians, the negative evaluation of a category or group can result in a weaker identification with that group. If the group's boundaries are perceived to be permeable, then this can result in individuals exiting the category or group for a more positively-defined one (Deaux and Martin 2003; Tajfel 1981). Thus, if people do not readily identify with their chosen or ascribed category, they may seek other categories and group memberships that are more

advantageous and more accurately align with how they perceive themselves (Deaux and Martin 2003: 102-03, 105; see also Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2002).

In sociological approaches, such as IT, identity is “necessarily defined” by the interactions taking place in a specific social structure (Deaux and Martin 2003; Stryker 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982). Citing Stryker (1997), Deaux and Martin note how social structures define the boundaries in which interactions take place. They explain how these boundaries, in a reciprocal way, encourage interactions and the development of identities that are in line with the bounding social structure. Moreover, the dynamic of the local social context in turn affects the way in which an individual evaluates his or her particular identity, consequently influencing the meaning and behavioral expectations of that identity for the individual (Deaux and Martin 2003: 103; see also Hogg et al. 1995).

Recent research on IT, especially as advanced by Stryker, Serpe, and Hunt (2000), makes the distinction between the different levels of social structure: large-scale structures, such as race, gender, age; intermediate structures, such as schools and neighborhoods; and proximate structures, such as personal relationships (Deaux and Martin 2003: 104). Each of these levels affects identity processes in a specific way, but the proximate level is particularly important because “people assume roles as a function of these immediate relationships...which in turn become part of an individual’s self-concept, or identity” (Deaux and Martin 2003: 104). Although there is a connection between the role identity of an individual and large-scale social categories, it is not a direct influence, since “people find themselves in particular interpersonal networks only by virtue of their physical or other social markers” (Deaux and Martin 2003: 104). Consequently, large-

scale categories influence identity but not with the same impact of proximate-level structures and interactions.

Deaux and Martin's Integrated Theory of Identity

Based on this research, Deaux and Martin present a model of identity that bridges the psychological and sociological perspectives. They conceptualize identity as having both a *cognitive context*—shaped by categorical membership—and an *interpersonal context*—shaped by specific reciprocal relationships with other individuals (Deaux and Martin 2003: 105). An important component of Deaux and Martin's conceptualization of identity is the notion of *self*, which they define as the one who directs the identity process, and also as the one who is the product of its particular position within the social structure (Deaux and Martin 2003: 107). The individual retains agency in choosing his or her claimed social categories. Thus, while individuals have agency in choosing with whom they interact, it is the large-scale categories to which one belongs that provide access to similar selves or to people who validate their identities. Their approach to identity can be summarized as follows: Individuals claim social categories (vis-à-vis the cognitive context), which in turn affect the type of interpersonal relationships they have. However, it is also true that an individual's social context and interpersonal relationships (vis-à-vis the interpersonal context) contribute to the shaping of his or her identity through the proximate relationships, thereby affecting the social category he or she may claim. Thus, approaching identity from either of the perspectives of SIT or IT does not adequately address the interaction between the dual contexts of identity processes. Moreover, there still remains a level of agency for the individual in being able to choose the social category claimed, as well as in choosing the type of social structure or context in which he or

she participates. By recognizing how these different contexts affect each other, researchers can avoid the deterministic quality of either SIT or IT in their approach to identity processes. As Deaux and Martin assert, combining these contexts into one framework but retaining the distinction between them allows us to “increase our understanding of identity processes enacted in particular social locations” (2003: 105).

The Importance of Sexual and Religious Identities

Of course, each person has several identities that correspond to the social categories with which he or she identifies. One or another of these identities can be “activated” by particular social contexts (Armato and Marsiglio 2002; Broad 2002; Deaux and Martin 2003; Hammond 1988; Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker and Burke 2000). Since identities are connected to particular social contexts, these multiple identities are not activated at all times but instead depend upon the setting for their activation. However, because of the complex nature of social interaction, it is not uncommon for several identities to become active simultaneously, which occurs as a normal and generally unproblematic aspect of participation in social life. However, when a person has two or more identities that conflict when activated, the individual must then work at reconciling the conflict or otherwise live with the incongruous identities.

As a large-scale social category, sexual identity plays an important role since it tempers much of an individual’s interactions, especially a person’s affective life and intimate relationships. A recent study on gay Greek fraternity members, for example, discusses the difficulties faced by gay fraternity members and the negotiation processes they enact in order to reconcile their gay identity with living in the traditionally heterosexual culture of a fraternity (Yeung and Stompler 2000). Anderson (2002) also studies the

ways in which gay athletes reconcile their sexual identities with the hegemonic masculinity of high school and collegiate sports.

However, conflicts with sexual identity can be particularly problematic in relation to religious identity because of the importance religious identity can have for individuals (Seul 1999; Smith 1996). Lori Peek (2005: 218), for example, discusses the importance of Muslim religious identities in maintaining group identity and solidarity, particularly in relation to ethnic communities and immigrants (2005: 218). Other research on religious identity asserts that religion plays an important part in maintaining and stabilizing one's identity (Hammond 1998; Seul 1999). Jeffrey Seul (1999) contends that religion provides a sense of predictability and continuity and that, once established, religious identity may not be easily set aside. He argues that religious norms for those who are religious exceed other norms in influencing them and that religion "often lies nearer to the core of one's identity, in part, because the other elements of one's identity typically do not address the full range of human needs, fears, and concerns as comprehensively or powerfully as religion does" (Seul 1999: 562). Given the importance of both religious and sexual identities, gays and lesbians can have difficulties in the activation of both of these identities, especially when part of a religious tradition that defines homosexuality as sinful. This can result in what Jeffrey Weeks describes as a "paradox of identity" (1995).

The Cognitive Focus of Research on the Identities of Religious Gays and Lesbians

The difficulties faced by religious gays and lesbians have been explored by many researchers. Yet again, many of these studies have focused on the cognitive aspects of their identity processes, especially on how gays and lesbians reconcile the conflicts experienced between sexual and religious identities. Scott Thumma (1991), for example,

presents a participant-observation study of an evangelical organization named Good News, whose goal is to provide a place where gay evangelical Christians experiencing what he terms “cognitive dissonance” might be able to negotiate and reconcile their religious and sexual identities. The members of Good News expressed significant difficulties in reconciling their understanding of themselves as gay or lesbian with the fact that evangelical Christianity condemns their sexuality as sinful. As evangelical Christians and as gay and lesbian individuals, they experienced difficulties with their religious categorical membership because of the way they understood its views on homosexuality. Because of their unwillingness to abandon their religious identity altogether, they sought out Good News as a means of social support for their identity struggles. Their participation in Good News encouraged them to redefine their understanding of homosexuality in relation to the Bible through a reinterpreting of particular Bible passages and in coming to understand their sexualities as being innate and God-given. Doing so opened up a category that had not previously been available to them, that of a gay or lesbian evangelical Christian. In terms of the cognitive perspective, the members of Good News exercised agency in redefining evangelical Christianity as being inclusive of—and non-contradictory to—loving, committed gay and lesbian relationships. Understanding the identity processes of the members of Good News in this way shows how Thumma’s study addresses the cognitive context as explained by Deaux and Martin (2003).

As another example of the cognitive tilt in examinations of the identity of religious gays and lesbians, there is research on Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) where the majority of congregants are gays or lesbians. MCC is a church, as Steven Warner (1995: 82) describes, “of, by, and for gay men and increasingly lesbians” (see

also Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000). MCC's essentialist approach to homosexuality, asserting its innate and God-given nature, provides an effective means for reinterpreting Bible passages that often are seen as challenging the acceptability of homosexuality (Warner 1995). Eric Rodriguez and Suzanne Ouellette's study of an MCC congregation in New York (MCC/NY) delineates in greater detail four ways in which the gay and lesbian Christians deal with the incongruence between their religious and sexual identities: 1) rejecting the religious identity, which may include abandoning Christian beliefs or becoming atheist; 2) rejecting the homosexual identity, sometimes turning to "conversion" or "reparative" therapy to rid the self of homosexual desires; 3) compartmentalization of sexual and religious lives by keeping them separate, thereby achieving identity consonance; and 4) identity integration, where "gay men and lesbians integrate their religious beliefs and their homosexuality into a single, new, workable understanding of the self" (2000: 334; see also Mahaffy [1996] for a study on lesbian Christians with similar conclusions). Their study also found that increased involvement with the activities of MCC/NY positively correlated with a higher degree of identity integration.

Rodriguez and Ouellette note how in their previous participant-observation study (1999), MCC/NY employed several strategies (e.g., legitimating itself as a gay/lesbian and Christian religious institution through the church's liturgical structure, and preaching by the pastors that encouraged positive self-understandings as both gay/lesbian and Christian) to assist with its members' identity integration process. Both of Rodriguez and Ouellette's (1999, 2000) studies provide insight into the cognitive-level identity negotiation processes of religious gays and lesbians. Similar to the members of Good News, the reinterpretation of certain Bible passages opens up the availability of a gay or lesbian

Christian category that MCC members can claim as their identity. In this way, these studies further explicate the cognitive context of religious gays and lesbians as presented by Deaux and Martin (2003). Moreover, their participant-observation study of MCC/NY explains some of the strategies used by the church itself in facilitating the integration of its members' religious and sexual identities. While the context of the gay and lesbian religious community arguably provides a positive context for its members, there is not a focused look in either of these studies on the interpersonal dynamics within MCC that support the identity processes of its members.

The conflict of a gay sexual identity becomes even more problematic for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), known as Mormons. Richley Crapo's (2005) study of gay and lesbian Mormons explains the difficulty these individuals face in trying to work through the incompatibility of their religious and sexual identities. Crapo argues that the LDS church does not even acknowledge the existence of a gay or lesbian identity or even sexual orientation in general, but instead regards it merely as a same-sex attraction. By doing so, their "theological discourse delegitimizes sexual orientation as the basis for a person's social identity within the religious setting" (Crapo 2005: 106), meaning that for the LDS church, a gay or lesbian Mormon is a theological impossibility. Unlike the members of Good News in Thumma's (1991) study, gay and lesbian Mormons are not able to redefine their Mormon categorical membership since it is tied to the will of the Mormon authorities. Instead they are able only to employ certain strategies, including committing to celibacy or marrying a person of the opposite sex. Thus, because of their inability to redefine what being a Mormon entails, many gay and lesbian Mormons exit their religious category and leave the LDS church altogether (Crapo 2005).

Randal Schnoor's (2006) study on the identity negotiation processes enacted by gay Jews relies on a framework for understanding sexual identity as not fixed but fluid, and as something that does not reach a status as a centrally-defining identity for the individual. As something that can be both an ethnicity and a religion, how to claim a Jewish identity is unique terrain for gays and lesbians. Much like the identity strategies outlined by Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000), Schnoor found that those faced with the task of reconciling a Jewish identity with a gay identity generally fall into four main categories, which he borrows from Brekhus (2003): *Jewish lifestylers*, for whom the Jewish identity supersedes the gay identity; the *gay lifestylers*, who places a greater emphasis on their gay identity; *gay-Jewish commuters*, who enact their gay and/or Jewish identities based on the social context; and *gay Jewish integrators*, for whom neither the gay nor the Jewish identity assumes a master status. Additionally, Moshe Shokeid's (2005) ethnography of a gay synagogue found that, among its many functions, the setting provides a safe place for gay or lesbian Jews to be open about their sexual identity in a way that they might not be comfortable with in a non-gay synagogue. In these studies, the cognitive context of the religious and sexual identity negotiation process is given in detail. However, as with the previously cited research, the gay/lesbian and religious context is discussed only in terms of being a *setting* and is not explicitly explored as directly connected to synagogue members' identity processes.

The Particular Case of Gay and Lesbian Catholics

The negotiation of religious and sexual identities by gay and lesbian Catholics echoes the processes employed by the other gay religious groups just discussed. However, because the particular focus of my analysis is on a gay and lesbian Catholic com-

munity, it is important to contextualize the particular experience of gay and lesbian Catholics before entering into a discussion of their identity processes. In the past thirty years the Catholic Church has made a number of statements addressing homosexuality, issuing doctrinal pronouncements further clarifying the Church's stance regarding the sinfulness of homosexual acts (CDF 1976; CDF 1986; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2003).³ Many gay and lesbian Catholics, of course, disagree with these teaching and feel a sense of alienation and marginalization by their church (Dillon 1999; Loseke and Cavendish 2001). Despite the Catholic Church's doctrinal position regarding homosexuality and the alienation and marginalization felt by gay and lesbian Catholics, many gays and lesbians persist in claiming their Catholic identity.

Dignity's Role in the Religious and Sexual Identity

Negotiation of Gay and Lesbian Catholics

The institutional church's teachings on homosexuality as "intrinsically disordered" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2003: para. 2357-9) present a problem for those Catholics who come to identify as gay or lesbian and who thus face the challenge of integrating their Catholic religious identity with their sexual identity. Although many gay and lesbian Catholics respond to this as a private matter, others have responded to this as an issue to be addressed politically. Dignity/USA is the most forthright Catholic group about its missions to be a ministry for gay and lesbian Catholics, as well as a voice of advocacy for change within the institutional church's teachings on homosexuality.

³ For a concise review of Catholic teaching on homosexuality and its development in recent decades, see Dillon (1999: 54-60).

Dignity's vision statement asserts that it "envisions and works for a time when Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender [GLBT] Catholics are affirmed and experience dignity through the integration of their spirituality with their sexuality, and as beloved persons of God participate fully in all aspects of life within the Church and Society" (<http://www.dignityusa.org/whatis.html>). Founded in 1969, Dignity

reinforce[s]...the sense of self-acceptance and dignity and encourage[s] full participation in the life of the Church and society [by GLBT Catholics and] work[s] for the development of sexual theology leading to the reform of its [the Church's] teachings and practices regarding human sexuality, and for the acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender peoples as full and equal members of the one Christ...[advocating] for change in the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality. (<http://www.dignityua.org/purpose.html>)

Dignity then exists not only as a support group for gay and lesbian Catholics, providing an opportunity for gays and lesbians to negotiate their religious and sexual identities within the context of the Catholic religious tradition, but also as an entity that advocates change in the institutional church's teachings.

Historically, Dignity had been involved in official relations with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), offering its views on the role of gays and lesbian in the church and advocating for their greater inclusion. However, as a result of the institutional church's recent more authoritarian stance toward homosexual advocacy by some church ministers and leaders, Dignity has lost favor with many bishops, and many dioceses have prevented Dignity groups from using church property (Dillon 1999). Dignity's approach to gay and lesbian Catholic ministry is not in line with the institutional

church's teachings on homosexuality, and as Dillon notes, this approach continues to be a point of contention in Dignity's relationship with the church's hierarchy.

Michelle Dillon's (1999) study of a Dignity chapter in Boston (Dignity/Boston), Donileen Loseke and James Cavendish's (2001) research on a Dignity newsletters, and Leonard Primiano's (2005) ethnography of a Dignity chapter in Philadelphia each provide some insight into the identity negotiation processes of gay and lesbian Catholics. As with research on evangelical Christians, MCC, Mormons, and Jews, these following studies mainly focus upon the cognitive-level processes that gay and lesbian Catholics undergo in negotiating their religious and sexual identities.

Despite the institutional church's teachings regarding homosexuality, Dillon found that many of the gay and lesbian members of Dignity/Boston still felt inclined—and even felt it was necessary—to worship in a manner connected with the Catholic tradition: Being Catholic was an “inherent part of their self-understanding” (1999: 119). Much like the members of Good News and their evangelical Christian identities, Dignity/Boston members were unwilling to let go of their ties to a Catholic identity. Similar to the strategies of the members of Good News, rather than rejecting the notion of Catholic identity as defined by the institutional church, which marginalized gays and lesbians, they redefined what it means to be Catholic. They divorced their notion of Catholic identity from necessarily being tied to the institutional church's teachings, and consequently, as Dillon (1999) argues, gay and lesbian Catholics own the Catholic identity differently. One of the principal ways that they do so is in understanding their sexuality as being essential to their identities, holding the viewpoint that God created them gay or lesbian and that homosexuality is part of God's creation (1999: 115). This approach is echoed by

MCC (Warner 1995), as discussed earlier, but also by other studies on gay and lesbian Catholics (Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Yip 1996, 1997a, 1997b).

In addition to noting the essentialist constructions of sexuality, Loseke and Cavendish (2001) explain the three options for gay and lesbian Catholics in dealing with conflicts between their religious and sexual identities, as they found through their content analysis of Dignity newsletters: 1) transform sexualities to conform to spirituality, 2) transform spiritualities to conform to sexuality, or 3) reconciling sexual and spiritual identities. Loseke and Cavendish write that Dignity newsletters construct a “spiritual sexuality,” which not only cites God as the source of sexuality, but also emphasizes the goodness of sexual practice (2001: 352). In this view, homosexuality is viewed with the same dignity as heterosexuality, both being God-given and both being good and acceptable ways to express one’s sexuality. By understanding sexuality in this way, the incongruence between Catholic identity and sexuality is alleviated.

The gay and lesbian Catholics that Primiano (2005) writes about in his ethnography of the Dignity/Philadelphia community offer the most pointed example of redefining Catholic identity as not being necessarily tied to the institutional church, which then allowed its members to retain, rather than abandon, their religious and sexual identities. As Primiano notes: “These were Catholics, and they would not allow anyone, especially the functionaries of institutional Catholicism, to tell them they were not” (2005: 10). Thus, while the institutional church officially calls in to question whether people who are in homosexual relationships are “real Catholics,” Dignity/Philadelphia members felt that the individual dictates whether one has a Catholic identity (Primiano 2005; for another example of Catholics questioning the place of the institutional church in defining “authen-

tic” or “real” Catholic identity, see Elaine Ecklund’s [2005] account of Catholic women’s identity negotiation processes).

These three studies on gay and lesbian Catholics parallel others on gay and lesbian evangelical Christians, members of MCC, Mormons, and Jews in providing ample descriptions of the cognitive context of religious gays and lesbians’ identity processes. For gay and lesbian Catholics, as well as the gay and lesbian members of other religious traditions, cognitive processes are necessary in negotiating the conflicts often initially felt by religious gays and lesbians. And as these studies show, many of these individuals are successful in their identity negotiation.

The Interpersonal Context of Religious and Sexual Identity Negotiation

These studies give insight into how some religious gays and lesbians, through reinterpreting Bible passages as well as changing their understanding of sexuality’s source, are able to retain both their religious and sexual identities, and they broaden our knowledge of the cognitive context for religious and sexual identity negotiation. Understanding these cognitive processes is important, according to Deaux and Martin’s (2003) approach to identity research, because it highlights one context of identity formation. However, solely taking this focus does not provide a complete picture of the identity process. The extant literature provides a detailed examination of how religious gays and lesbians negotiate the seeming conflicts between their religious and sexual identities, but, as noted above, these studies do not focus on the interpersonal context.

Arriving at a more complete understanding of the identity processes of religious gays and lesbians requires a detailed examination of the interpersonal context. Deaux and Martin write that “social identities are enacted through the interpersonal networks of

daily life” (2003: 106). It is in “these immediate, day-to-day contexts [that] social identity is enacted as a concrete set of behaviors defined largely by shared membership in a category” (Deaux and Martin 2003: 106). The everyday interactions within the gay and lesbian religious community are the enactment of the gay and lesbian religious identity. Deaux and Martin argue that participating in a social network produces the support needed for a particular identity claim because “based on the degree to which one’s membership in a group category is recognized and accepted by others, this larger identity may be reinforced or, alternatively, devalued and eventually abandoned, depending on the networks in which one participates” (2003: 107). Therefore, a key objective for the present study is to determine the ways in which the interpersonal, community context supports the enactment of gay and lesbian religious identities.

The present study thus builds upon the previous research on the cognitive context of the identity processes of religious gays and lesbians, which explains how these individuals negotiate their religious and sexual identities. My analysis focuses on the “practice” (Lichterman 1995) of the community—the everyday, taken-for-granted patterns of interaction—and how these interactions provide support for the enactment of gay and lesbian Catholic identities.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Background and Access to the Holy Cross Community

Access to the Holy Cross Community is open in the sense that anyone is welcome to join the community for the Mass and social. In another sense, however, access is not completely open since knowledge of the Mass is limited, relegated to word-of-mouth advertisement by those who know about the community (HCC members or sympathetic priests). The only public information is a continuously running advertisement in the local gay and lesbian newspaper instructing individuals interested in attending a gay and lesbian Catholic Mass to call a number to find out more information.

As a former seminarian who spent four years studying to be a Catholic priest, and also as a gay individual who at the time was dealing with personal issues of religious faith, I was particularly interested in learning about the religious lives of gay and lesbian Catholics and seeing how they were able to practice their Catholic faith in light of the institutional church's teachings on homosexuality. After learning about the community from a colleague who was already an established member, I came to HCC with the intent to study it as a class project for an ethnography course. My initial fieldwork as part of this project consisted of participant-observation of the HCC community and resulted in a detailed description of the interpersonal dynamics of the community. The two months of fieldwork from this early research yielded a paper entitled "Queer as Family: The Family Dynamics of a Gay and Lesbian Catholic Community", which was subsequently pre-

sented at the 2006 Couch-Stone Symposium. After this initial period of participation, I continued my attendance of HCC on a semi-regular basis.

Because of the outcome of my initial study, I wanted to pursue further research on HCC, and I composed a formal research proposal to study HCC as the subject of my thesis project. After receiving IRB approval for my research design, I presented my research proposal on one Sunday at the end of the Mass, during the period allotted for announcements. I gave an oral presentation describing what the research would entail, and I provided all of those present with an Informed Consent document with a written description of the proposed research. I asked the HCC members if they would allow me to do participant-observation research for my thesis. Community members supported my project and gave their oral consent to the research proposal, after which I began collecting data for my thesis. During the following two Sundays, I again made an announcement regarding my thesis research and provided those who were not present for my earlier announcements with the Informed Consent document.

After completing the data collection, I continued attending HCC's Sunday gathering on a weekly basis (with the exception of a few Sundays) for seven months after the conclusion of the participant-observation portion of my data collection. One reason I continued my weekly participation was because I did not want to give the community members the impression that I had only been attending the weekly Mass and social *solely* for my research purposes. Another reason for my continued participation lay at the personal level: I had become attached to the community and its members, and I personally found participation in the community self-edifying. Beginning several weeks prior to

ending my participation with HCC, I informed the community members of my plans to move from the area. I discontinued my attendance of HCC when I finally moved.

Research Design

The data for this study were collected over the course of twelve Sundays through attendance and participation in HCC's weekly Sunday Mass, social, and an occasional group dinner at a local restaurant. HCC's Mass was a typical celebration of a Catholic Sunday liturgy led by priests of the local diocese or of HCC's religious community. The social consisted of a period of time after the Mass, typically lasting 30-45 minutes, during which community members spent time in the dining area eating cake, cookies, and other dessert items which different community members volunteered to provide each Sunday. The occasional group dinner consisted of anywhere from five-to-ten community members who joined for a meal at a local Cuban restaurant and occasionally at another dining establishment.

The research took place during mid-September until mid-December 2006. HCC's Mass began on Sunday evening at 7:00 p.m., with the social beginning at approximately 8:15 p.m., and with the dinner ending around 10:00 p.m. Each Sunday evening allowed for approximately three hours of fieldwork, for a total of approximately 36 hours of fieldwork. I continued my collection of fieldnotes until arriving at a point of saturation (Goffman 2001 [1989]: 158), and I judged that continued fieldnote writing would yield no additional valuable data. On most occasions, I wrote the fieldnotes as soon as possible after attending the Mass and social (during that evening or the day afterward) in full, or I would take "jottings" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), which were then expanded into detailed fieldnotes at a later time. Through the participant-observation, I recorded thirty-

one single-spaced pages of fieldnotes detailing the interactions and events I observed. This data set forms the greater basis for my analysis. However, I must note that during my initial research on HCC from October to November 2005, I recorded 34 pages of fieldnotes, which provide additional background information for my analysis. The initial collection of fieldnotes took place prior to IRB approval, so I did not directly utilize them in my analysis.

Interview Data

The other set of data for my analysis is derived from phone interviews I conducted with ten members of HCC. I chose these members of the community because of the diversity in their roles in the community, as well as the difference in the length of time that each had been attending HCC's weekly Sunday gathering. I based this decision upon my knowledge of the community members through conversations with them and other members of the community, and I felt that these individuals would give valuable insight into HCC. These eight men and two women varied in age, with the youngest being in his early 30s and with the rest being in their 50s and 60s. Of the interviewees, there were nine Caucasians and one Hispanic person, and all were regular attendees of HCC. All of the interviewees were involved with the community in a greater capacity than merely attending, with several regularly scheduled as lectors and Eucharistic ministers, while others were involved with the choir.

The interviews were conducted with a list of prepared questions, but I informed the interviewees that the interview would be more like a conversation and that, while I had specific questions I wanted to ask, we would let the conversation flow to any topics they elected to discuss. Questions probed background information of the participants,

such as how long they had been attending HCC and how they first came to know about and participate in the community. I asked questions pertaining to their approach to and feelings about the institutional church's teachings in regard to homosexuality and whether they had difficulties reconciling their sexuality with the institutional church's rhetoric. I asked for details about any involvement of theirs with other parishes, and I questioned them on what particular importance HCC had for their individual spiritual lives as gay and lesbian Catholics. I also asked questions regarding their general opinions on homosexuality, especially in regard to whether they felt it was inborn or learned. Other questions dealt with the interviewees' degree of openness about their sexuality in their personal and professional lives, as well as to what degree they had been involved with any sort of gay rights activity. I asked the interviewees their opinions on what needed to occur in order to procure change within the Catholic Church, specifically in regard to its attitudes, teachings, and approach to gay and lesbian Catholics. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted an average of 45 minutes to an hour, and these audio recordings were later transcribed. In accordance with IRB guidelines, I changed all community members' names in my fieldnotes and interviews and used pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Coding of Data

In the analysis of the data, I used a "grounded theory" approach (Charmaz 1988, Emerson et al. 1995) in identifying the relevant themes among the interactional patterns of the community. After doing several readings of the fieldnotes, I analytically coded the data for themes in the community's interactions. Data codes were developed through an open coding of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts, which then resulted in numerous

types of interactional patterns within the community. With the list of open codes, I then employed a focused coding of the data using some of the more dominant and relevant themes derived from the open coding as a guide (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). This coding process resulted in the main categories which are discussed in the analysis.

Chapter Four: Research Setting

A History of the Holy Cross Community

Prior to presenting my analysis of the HCC, it is helpful first to describe some of the history of HCC to provide a background for the community members' actions. When HCC began in the late 1970s, it had been founded as a local chapter of the gay and lesbian Catholic organization, Dignity/USA, and for roughly 15 years it operated as such. As Dillon (1999) notes, Dignity actively engaged the bishops of the U.S. in its early years concerning the situation of gay and lesbian Catholics, and during that time, the Dignity chapter (which later would become HCC) licitly and approvingly existed in its local diocese. However, on October 31, 1988, a letter—dubbed by the community members and other gay and lesbian Catholics as the “Halloween Letter” (CDF 1986)—was issued by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (today Pope Benedict XVI), head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the enforcer of Catholic orthodoxy). The letter instructed bishops and dioceses to cease promoting or supporting gay and lesbian Catholic organizations and groups that were theologically and morally opposed to the institutional church's official stance on homosexuality. This document was a direct but veiled censure of Dignity and similar organizations in response to the forward movement they had made in pushing for gay and lesbian inclusion in the Catholic Church.

The story told by the HCC members is that their local bishop, who had been a personal friend and former classmate of the then current pope, John Paul II, had gone to the Vatican for his required meeting as a diocesan bishop to give an accounting for the

state of the diocese. This meeting was held shortly after the Halloween Letter's issuance, and Pope John Paul II wanted to know how the bishop was specifically addressing the issue of gay and lesbian Catholics who were not abiding by the moral teachings of the institutional church on homosexuality. The bishop returned to his diocese with a mandate to address the presence of Dignity in the diocese. As one of the HCC members claims, the bishop, who had implicitly supported the community's existence, was reluctant to bar the community's access to Catholic facilities.

However, in obedience to the church hierarchy, the local bishop barred the Dignity Mass from using the Retreat Center where they had been gathering. Now having no official place to gather together for their often standing-room-only Masses, the community's members tried having Masses and meetings at different people's homes, changing the location from week to week, handing out maps during one week for the next week's meeting location. For a while, the community stayed minimally intact by meeting in this way, but understandably the situation placed a great strain on its ability to stay together.

After some time and through the efforts of some of the community members, the religious sisters who run the Retreat Center where the community met interceded on the community's behalf. They contacted the mother superior of their order and told her about their displeasure with Dignity's dismissal from the Retreat Center. The mother superior informed the bishop that the retreat center was a place of acceptance for all Catholics, gay, lesbian, divorced, or alcoholics. After reaching an accord with the mother superior, the bishop was able to save face by allowing the community to return to holding their gatherings at the Retreat Center, but they were no longer able to gather under the auspices of Dignity. Thus, after some time of being a nomadic community, they once

again had a regular place to congregate each week but, perhaps as expected, with fewer members in attendance.

Several years ago, the community suffered a split when a defrocked priest, who had been dismissed by the local bishop for being in a gay relationship, left to form another gay and lesbian Catholic community, but under the schismatic branch of the Ecumenical Catholic Church. This priest, who had been very active in the community, was highly regarded by its members, and as a result many of the community members left the HCC community to follow the priest. This new community is located about 45 minutes away in a nearby town to HCC.

The Holy Cross Community Today

In its current incarnation, HCC meets every Sunday at 7:00 p.m. for a Mass and social, just as it did when it was a Dignity chapter. The Mass is celebrated by a rotation of five to seven priests, some of whom are popular pastors of local parishes. HCC no longer has officers, although there are a small number of members who take charge of certain responsibilities, such as directing the choir and choosing music for the Mass; preparing worship sheets outlining songs and prayers to be used during the Mass; scheduling community members to be ministers of communion, as well as scheduling two people to read the weekly theme, the two readings for the liturgy, and the general intercessions; scheduling priests to come and celebrate the Mass; and keeping track of anniversaries or birthdays being celebrated by community members and taking charge of the social list which ensures that someone will bring dessert and refreshments for the social hour after the Mass. Often a subgroup of community members will get together at a local restaurant after the Mass and social to eat and continue socializing.

The primary location of HCC's meetings is the same Retreat Center where Dignity first met, although they sometimes meet at the nearby convent where the religious sisters reside. HCC holds its religious services in a chapel at one end of the retreat center. The chapel is a relatively small room with two entrances from the center hallway, and it is partitioned off from a larger section. There are about 50-60 chairs arranged in three rows in a semicircular fashion around the altar. The back wall is mostly windows that sometimes are opened to let in the breeze from the river located immediately behind the center. The chapel is mostly subdued, in dark red or brown hues, and flowers usually decorate the altar. Toward one end of the chapel is the music area containing an electronic keyboard, a piano, and equipment that control the sound system for the chapel and the adjoining meeting room. For the social after the Mass, attendees move directly across the hall to the dining room, which is about the same size as the chapel. The dining room consists of about ten round tables surrounded by five or six chairs. There is a rectangular table at one end of the dining room, upon which they place the desserts for the social. Like the chapel, the back wall of the dining room consists of several windows facing the parking lot.

Current attendees of HCC's weekly Sunday gathering are generally gay men, although there are a small number of about five or six lesbians out of the 35-40 people in attendance at the Mass and social. However, the social list that is distributed to members of the community contains the names and contact information for a total of about 100 people, which includes men and women who had previously or intermittently worshiped with HCC. The majority of the attendees, regardless of sex, are in their 50s and 60s, although there are several members in their 40s, a smaller number in their 30s, 70s, and

80s, and two or three in their 20s. The vast majority of the regular attendees of HCC are Caucasian, although there are about three or four members who are Spanish-speaking, as well as two or three Asians. The religious sisters from the retreat center also often join the community members for Mass, and community members sometimes bring family or friends. While a large number of the community members are retired, others still pursue professional careers, such as elementary school or high school teacher, college professor, lawyer, doctor, business people, and realtors.

Several of the members have been part of the community for many years, with about ten who had been part of the early years of the local Dignity chapter in the 1970s and early 1980s. Weekly attendance of the HCC Mass and social ranges is around 35-40 members, with attendance generally higher during the fall and winter and lower during the summer. Occasionally, members who have lapsed from regular Mass attendance will show up for one or two Sundays but then do not return again for some time.

Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis

Overview

Returning once again to the place of social context in identity processes, Deaux and Martin write that “based on the degree to which one’s membership in a group category is recognized and accepted by others, this larger identity may be reinforced...depend-ing on the networks in which one participates” (2003: 107). This analysis of the practice (Lichterman 1995) of HCC members will show how this interpersonal network of gay and lesbian Catholics supports the members’ religious and sexual identities by providing recognition and acceptance of their membership claims to both the gay or lesbian identity and the Catholic identity. Using data from my participant-observation of HCC’s weekly Sunday gatherings and from the interviews conducted with HCC members, I outline three main interactional themes in community members’ practice that allow recognition and acceptance of the gay and lesbian Catholic identity. Specifically, I discuss how through community members’ practice, they create 1) a community of inclusion, 2) a community of affection, and 3) a community of shared responsibility, which in turn contribute to the feeling of importance that the community has for its members

Creating a Community of Inclusion

Several themes of interaction exist in the everyday practice of HCC members that function to give those present a sense of support and inclusion within the community. As this section will outline, the practice of the HCC members creates what I term a *community of inclusion*, which refers to the community’s efforts of drawing new people into

their interpersonal network, while at the same time strengthening the relationships with current HCC members. The community members' practice illustrates their inclusive and welcoming nature, not only to newcomers to the community, but also on a continued basis in their affirmation of each other. Among the inclusionary practices of HCC members are the support and affirmation of its members, the friendly gestures offered to one another, and the use of humor which helps to strengthen the bonds between them. In this way, participants in HCC's weekly Sunday gathering receive recognition and acceptance of their religious and sexual identities through the community members' efforts in drawing people further into their interpersonal network, while at the same time strengthening existing relationships.

Community members regularly show affirmation of each other through the use of applause. The show of support and affirmation of certain individuals or certain occasions, sometimes through the simple act of applauding, is a regular part of HCC, and it is rare for a Sunday evening with the community not to end with some applause. Although community members, like those involved with the choir, have an almost expected role in the Mass, their efforts are rarely overlooked.

At the conclusion of the Mass's recessional song, Darryl, the accompanist, always segues into the song "Let There Be Peace on Earth", which most of the community members know by heart and join in singing heartily. On one Sunday while the song concluded, people began to applaud the efforts of the choir—which generally sings seven songs throughout the course of the evening—as they regularly did.

Kathy yells out, as she often does at the end of Mass when she's present, "Good job choir! Yeah, for the choir!" or some variation of that. She always makes it a point to praise the choir for their efforts.

On another occasion, George, the choir director, stood up at the end of Mass and addressed the people attending, saying that we were all very lucky to have Darryl playing for us and that he appreciated having him. The community members then started applauding for a smiling Darryl.

One Sunday, Max showed his appreciation of the community members after many of them attended his entertainment act that he performed in a distant town.

Max stands up and thanks the people who went to his show down south for making it. He said he appreciated seeing so many faces from the community down at his show. Most everyone in the community does not live that far south, so he said it meant a lot to him for people to go down and see him. "This community is truly a blessing," he says to the group. We break out into applause

Once again, after Max's show of appreciation for the support received from community members in his professional life, people used applause as a means of affirming him and, in a way, the general community as well.

During another Sunday evening, two community members announced a special anniversary they were celebrating.

Steven and Brad are in attendance today for the first time in over a month. At the appropriate time during the announcements when Clint asks for any birthdays or anniversaries, Steve speaks up, "Actually, this Thursday is the fifth anniversary of mine and Brad's Holy Union." People applaud and say congratulations, and we

segue into a rendition of “Happy Anniversary to You” to the tune of “Happy Birthday.”

As each of these examples indicates, the simple act of applauding is a means by which community members express their support and affirmation of each other. This frequent occurrence at HCC is demonstrative of the inclusionary efforts of the community.

Another way in which the community practice affirms and seeks to include those in attendance of HCC’s weekly Sunday evening gathering is through the openness and welcoming approach that members show to each other, especially toward first-time visitors, but also to former community members whose attendance had lapsed. As the following example shows, community members were quick to make new attendees feel welcome and included:

There are a lot of new faces tonight. There is a couple, probably in their forties, who showed up maybe 20 minutes into Mass. I’m pretty sure no one has met these people before because at the end of Mass, a long-time community member says very vocally, “Welcome!” Later, during the announcements, the older of the two men, Matt, is standing in the doorway. Meanwhile, George asks if any community members recently had a birthday or had one coming up during the following week. Matt announces that his partner, Tim, is celebrating his birthday today. Matt says that Tim is off in the bathroom, and someone jokes, “Let’s all go to the bathroom and sing to him!” We laugh.

Because of the great length of time that most of the regular attendees have participated in HCC’s weekly Sunday gathering, they are well aware of newcomers to the community, and they do their best to make newcomers welcome. Several members are always quick

to welcome these new faces, lest they feel that the newcomers' presence has not been noted or appreciated.

At the end of Mass on most Sundays, whenever Clint does the announcements highlighting special events or birthdays and anniversaries, he usually asks, "Are there any new people here with us tonight who want to introduce themselves?" Asking the question in this way encourages newcomers to introduce themselves. Sometimes, the newcomers take the opportunity to give their name, while others elect not to say anything. However, Clint opens up the option for the newcomer to introduce him or herself, thus breaking any initial barriers that a newcomer might have. It is also through this simple gesture that newcomers are made to feel included in the community through the recognition of their presence at HCC.

Community members always extend a welcome of inclusion to people who may have once been regular attendees but have since lapsed in their regular attendance of HCC's weekly Sunday evening gathering. For example, a man who had once regularly attended the Mass was present one Sunday, and rather than criticizing him for his lack of attendance, Clint offered a greeting to him saying, "We welcome back Kyle. We haven't seen him in a while!" after which there was spontaneous applause. Interestingly, while Clint's comments signaled the fact that it had been some time since Kyle's last attendance of the community's Mass, no one expressed outward resentment about his failure to be there regularly. In fact, in all my experiences with the community, people who may show up after having been absent for a significant length of time are welcomed back unconditionally.

Another component of the inclusionary practice of HCC members are the frequent acts of friendliness which are displayed in various ways each Sunday. While members of typical Catholic parishes no doubt experience acts of friendliness from their fellow worshippers, this friendliness takes on a special dynamic in the community.

The first time I came to Mass, Kathy was just as perky, and she was in fact the first person to give me a warm greeting when I was in the parking lot of the Center that first time. This is who she is genuinely. She was like this with the two new guys who attended last weekend. And as we're sitting there, she comes up and gives each of us a warm hug. She hugs Harry first, then me, then Brian. She says to Brian, who's dressed up with a nice shirt, tie, and dress pants, "You're looking good!"

Kathy's display of friendliness, and most especially her hugging of three people, is a display of friendliness that is part of the regular and uninhibited display of affection and praise commonplace at HCC. Many community members arrive to the center several minutes in advance of the start of Mass, giving them some time for socializing. Because of personal obligations, I generally arrived at HCC only a few minutes before the beginning of Mass and did not regularly have the opportunity to socialize beforehand. However, one day I did arrive early and noted a lot of friendly acts being displayed between community members.

I notice today how there are several instances of smiles and waving hands between people. People look across the room at another member, and upon making eye contact, they smile. As people are conversing and chitchatting with each other, they smile. People see each other across the chapel, and they give a friendly

wave. I notice that Peter has to take care of something at the front of the chapel, and he walks past me. As he does so, we give each other a big smile.

As this example shows, simple acts of friendliness, such as smiling and waving, are commonplace actions among HCC members. These kinds of practices among the community members help to create a community of inclusion, which is particularly important for newcomers to HCC's weekly Sunday evening gathering. It also allows for the continued affirmation of established community members, further demonstrating the acceptance that members show to each other as gay and lesbian Catholics.

Another important part of the community dynamic is the sense of humor of the community members and their willingness to laugh, which is especially important given their marginalized status. Francis (1994) and Vinton (1989) both note how people use humor as a way to strengthen group bonds, that humor creates bonds and performs a harmonizing function (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001: 126). Citing the research done by Seckman and Couch (1989), Robinson and Smith-Lovin also note how humor helps to define shared group identities and to foster positive relations (2001: 126). Sharing jokes, poking fun at community members, and expressing a general sense of humor encourages a lighthearted mood within the community, which in turn encourages good feelings and strengthens the bonds between the community members.

Humor is displayed in varying contexts, during the Mass or directly afterward during the announcements, at the social, and sometimes at the meal after the Mass and social.

Clint has done it numerous times, but for some reason every time he pokes fun at the long list of people that the Mass is technically for, it always strikes us as

amusing. Clint says, “Welcome to the Center sponsored Mass for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual community. How is everyone tonight?” George, sitting in the front row, responds with good timing, “I didn’t know there were that many of us here!” Everyone laughs.

The Mass is clearly for those Catholics experiencing marginalization by the institutional church because of their sexuality. However, Clint’s occasional poking fun at all those included on the list, as well as the community’s recognition—voiced by George on this occasion—that the community’s Mass serves, as far as most people know, gays and lesbians, helps to make light of their sexual marginalization. On another occasion, Clark fills in for Clint on his post-Mass announcement duties and creates a humorous variation.

Tonight, as a little variation on Clint’s normal spiel welcoming the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community of the area (to which Clint will sometimes add “transsexual” or “queer”), Clark says in a half-serious tone, although we know and are expecting him to say something humorous: “Welcome to the Center sponsored Mass for sexual minorities.” We all laugh because it’s clearly a shortened version of Clint’s regular verbiage. Part of it is also Clark’s demeanor. A little later on, we get somewhat noisy during the announcements, and Kathy, who’s sitting in the front row, yells jokingly, “Clark, you’re losing control!” We all laugh again. Then Clark responds in a very calm manner, “In 30 years as a school teacher, I never lost control. It’s because there are some rowdy people here tonight.” We all laugh again.

On a different occasion, Clark covers for Clint again:

During the announcements at the end of Mass, Clark makes his way up to the podium because Clint is out of the country vacationing in Mexico. He says, “Our regular host is out cavorting, and so I am doing the announcements this evening.”

Everyone laughs at his usual comic demeanor and delivery.

On another Sunday, humor is expressed in a small group context during the social.

The conversation somehow turns to how Brian’s home is decorated with many finds from antique shops. Taylor, who is Brian’s neighbor, is talking about the large amount of stuff that Brian has in his home. It sounds like it would be very cluttered, so I ask, “Does it resemble a thrift store?” Immediately, they start laughing because apparently my description was pretty accurate. Later, Brian talks about specific items of furniture at his house, and he describes a little bit about his bed. One of the guys asks, “Have you seen Brian’s bed?” Ed responds quickly, “Who hasn’t?” We all laugh.

During another conversation, there is a more sexually explicit joke shared among some of the men.

They were talking about grilling steaks and the like, and one of the guys asked, “How do you like your meat?” in reference to how they liked it cooked. The *double entendre* was obvious, and so another one of the guys responded, “Throbbing.”

We laughed.

In my experiences with HCC, I found that this type of sexually explicit humor is particular only to the men. I did not hear any of the women in attendance tell any jokes of a sexual nature, and anytime I observed them hearing a sexual joke, I noticed that they in fact

did not laugh and at times expressed distaste regarding the joke. However, given the fact that most of the regular attendees of HCC are men, this occasional practice of sexually explicit humor did not detract from the overall cohesiveness of the community. As these examples show, the freedom to joke, laugh, and poke fun at each other and their situation as gay and lesbian Catholics helps keep the community dynamic lighthearted. The humor functions to build communal bonds and, in the case of the jokes of a sexual nature, further defines their group identity as a community that is built around a common spirituality as well as a common sexuality.

Creating a Community of Affection

Through their openness about personal details, their emotional and physical intimacy, and the concern they show for each other, HCC members create a *community of affection*. This section outlines how participants of HCC's weekly Sunday evening gathering are drawn into the affective life of the community, creating and deepening bonds with each other that are a reflection of their mutual support of each other as gay and lesbian Catholics, further reinforcing HCC members' religious and sexual identities. HCC members' creation of a *community of affection* helps establish emotional bonds with each other, which in turn promote the continued recognition and acceptance of each other as gay and lesbian Catholics. One of these affective practices is the openness with which community members share details about their personal lives. By being open, members indicate their willingness to create relationships that go beyond the chit-chat of acquaintances.

Charlie, for example, has been attending the HCC Mass for several years and had spoken at length with me about a former relationship of his with a doctor who no longer

lives in the country. He offered various details about how their relationship started and even about its eventual demise. While the conversation started initially because Charlie said I reminded him of his ex-partner, he subsequently brought in pictures of him and his ex-partner and shared them with me and several other members of the community, talking freely about the former relationship.

Another community member, Harry, spent time speaking with some people during the social one evening about a difficult situation he had been having in trying to evict a roommate, eliciting advice from some of his close friends in the community as well as legal advice from a lawyer who throughout the year has periodically attended Mass at HCC. The conversation continued for at least ten minutes, with several people giving Harry advice about his situation. Harry and the others discussed this personal and potentially troubling situation in the openness of the post-Mass social.

On several other occasions, HCC members spoke in detail about their personal history, further demonstrating the openness and candor that community members have in relating to each other. Randy spoke with me at length about his former work as a counselor and about how the burnout from that job led him to work in the real estate business doing property appraisals. Max and his partner, Jack, are longtime attendees of the Mass at HCC and have spoken in detail about their former art gallery and cappuccino bar where they used to live before they moved to the area. Kenneth, who worships with the community very infrequently because of HCC's distance from his home, shared details about his former marriage and spoke about his estrangement from his now adult daughter.

As these instances show, community members show willingness in speaking about various personal issues at HCC, from the details of former partners, to personal and

possibly legal issues, to personal shortcomings in family relationships, as well as background details about their personal histories. This openness about personal details shows the trust that community members place in each other and adds to the affective dynamic of HCC, raising the level of intimacy among community members beyond that of the simple acquaintances. The openness and sharing of personal details provides a sense that HCC is a secure and non-threatening environment, allowing for the deepening of members' ties to the community. In fact, many of the community members maintain friendships with each other outside of the community setting.

A further demonstration of how HCC members create a community of affection is the regular showing of emotional and physical intimacy. Perhaps the most telling example from the Mass is the "sign of peace" that Catholics show to one another before the reception of the Eucharist. Recalling my first time attending the HCC Mass, I remember how stricken I was with the outpouring of intimacy, as well as the extended time allowed for the peace exchanging process. While a small number of members stay in their general area and offer a simple handshake as a sign of peace, the most common sign of peace involves a heartfelt embrace, a kiss on the cheeks or lips, a smile, and a verbal expression of one's wishing of peace toward the other person:

It took at least two minutes for people to get around giving hugs, kisses, and embraces. People were hugging everywhere, and the whole scene to me just seemed indicative of why this community continues to be here each week. I really didn't see anyone just standing back trying to be standoffish to people. Each person seemed to be receptive to getting a hug or a sign of affection. There are a few individuals who make it a point to go around to almost everyone at the Mass. To-

night, Kathy made it a point to go from person to person, as she usually does, giving them a sign of peace.

While Kathy is a superlative case among the community members, this outpouring of warmth among Mass attendees is a regular occurrence.

Other signs of emotional and physical intimacy outside of Mass include kissing and hugging. On one instance, I see Clyde, a much older man dealing with health problems, speaking with Peter, a physician, at a table, and as Peter gets up to leave, he gives Clyde what I observe to be a very affectionate kiss on the cheek. It is also not uncommon for a community member to give another person a shoulder massage during the social after Mass, and departures from each other for the week generally involve well wishes and a warm embrace. HCC members display a high level of intimacy which contributes to the warmth of relationships between community members.

The concern shown by HCC members for each other is another demonstration of how community members create a community of affection. Sunday evening attendees show this concern for their friends and loved ones most notably through the petitions made during the “Prayers of the Faithful” at Mass. While there is a prepared list of prayers read by one of the lectors, everyone in the community has the opportunity to offer a particular and often personal petition at the end. Their prayers sometimes name specific individuals within the community or name particular ailments from which others are suffering. Many of the prayers have included the following: the quick recovery of someone who had just recently gone through brain surgery; concern for someone who may be facing a mastectomy; a member who recently had suffered a heart attack; quick recovery

from an illness; concern for someone just diagnosed with cancer; and a regularly offered prayer by one of the community members, “in thanksgiving for prayers answered.”

There is a spirit of concern for others that often gets expressed in the prayers they offer, which is indicative of the fact that the community members are truly spiritual people who believe strongly in their faith and in the power of prayer. There are occasions of praying for others’ sufferings, even when those people may be present in the community, as well as a showing of sincere concern with each others’ well being. In this way, the community members exhibit an underlying concern for others in the community, which gets expressed in their individual petitions.

Creating a Community of Shared Responsibility

The last section in the analysis pertains to how the practice of HCC members supports the enactment of gay and lesbian Catholic identities through the creation of a *community of shared responsibility*, which refers to how the community members take ownership of the many duties and details required in running the weekly Sunday evening gathering. In taking proactive responsibility for the various details of the Mass and social, members of HCC sustain ties through their weekly voluntary, but necessary, involvement in the organizational details. A key component to HCC is the ownership that its members show in all aspects of the weekly Sunday evening gathering. The community must plan all aspects of the Mass, including scheduling lectors for the readings, ministers to distribute the Eucharist during Communion, providing songs for the liturgy, and, most importantly, securing a priest to preside at the Mass. Moreover, someone must bring snacks for the social after Mass. Community members also exhibit ownership of the Mass in other ways.

As the priest walks in for the beginning of Mass, Sherri notices that the candles on the altar haven't been lit yet. Knowing that Charlie is a smoker, she signals for him to get his lighter, which she uses to light the candles. Then, noticing that the spotlights over the altar weren't on yet either, she walks to the wall and turns the lights on.

On another occasion, Kathy takes initiative over moving the altar:

During the communion procession, I notice again how Kathy takes it upon herself to push the altar to the back wall so that there is room at the front of the chapel for people to receive communion. This is not an assigned task for a community member. Instead, she just goes and does it.

Sherri and Kathy both show initiative in taking care of these minor details of the Mass, illustrating that they see this as their community, and when they see that something is overlooked and needs to be done, they do it. Community members take seriously their obligation to other members by performing specific roles, such as that of lector, greeter, or taking care of the refreshments for the social. During one Sunday, someone comments to Brian about him being absent and missing him the previous Sunday. Brian responds matter-of-factly to him, "I never miss when I have to read."

Another indication of community ownership is the spontaneous gathering of the song books and worship programs at the conclusion of Mass. It is a process that is never coordinated, and instead, people simply get up and take initiative in gathering the programs and placing the song books on the bookshelf. Rather than rushing out the door to get on with their lives, the community members stay behind, talk, and help tidy things up

in the chapel. During the social after Mass, various individuals take part in preparing and placing the food out on plates, as well as cleaning up afterward.

Before leaving the dining room, I notice Peter cleaning off the table that the food is set on. He was scraping at it, trying to get a food stain off or something. Then later on, I saw him carrying a big trash bag full of the night's garbage. A little later, I see Clint running around trying to take care of some last minute things, reaching up to turn off some ceiling fans. George says to Clint, "I didn't realize how much you have to do around here. I used to have to do all that stuff, but I've forgotten!"

Much like Sherri's display of ownership, Peter and Clint do things that help ensure background details, such as taking out the trash or turning off ceiling fans, are taken care of before the community members leave. Since the sisters who live at the Retreat Center allow community members to come in to what is technically their home, the Sunday evening Mass attendees make sure that these minor details are not overlooked. These kinds of actions help in a pragmatic way to keep the community afloat and indicate the dedicated nature of many of the members. As these several examples show, community members create a community of shared responsibility through the ownership that they show in taking care of the various details of the weekly Sunday evening gathering.

The Personal Significance of the Holy Cross Community

A separate aspect of each of these practices of creating a community of inclusion affection, and shared responsibility is the outcome that these community practices effect, namely the importance and significance that the community has for its members. The personal significance of HCC to its members is established through the interviews with

several of the HCC members, which indicate the ways that members value the weekly Sunday evening gathering. The HCC members also express the sense of satisfaction that they receive as a result of worshipping there. They expressed several sentiments regarding the significance of the community for them individually, especially regarding 1) the ability to worship with other gay and lesbian Catholics, 2) the personal support they received from HCC, 3) the safety they felt in being able to express freely their sexuality and spirituality, and 4) the sense of happiness and satisfaction that worshipping at HCC gives them.

George indicates the importance of his ability to worship together with other gay and lesbian Catholics, an experience which being part of HCC affords. He notes:

For me, the most important thing about HCC is the feeling of community, that these are my brothers and sisters. Sometimes at a parish church, I feel like an outsider. It may not be their fault, it might be my perception, but that's what I feel...I think we're very privileged to have the opportunity [to worship together]. I wish more people would take advantage of that privilege.

George places particular value on HCC because of the feeling of community, of being connected with other gay and lesbian Catholics. He feels no sense of exclusion as a consequence of his gay identity, and this experience, he notes, should be taken advantage of by other gay and lesbian Catholics. In a similar vein as George, Juan expresses his thankfulness for being able to worship with other gay and lesbian Catholics:

Juan: I think it's wonderful. I think that especially the Catholic Church, among the several organized religions, there is all this accusing us of not being mature sexually, or having, have some sort of psychological immaturity, or whatever, you

know. And now, to be able to go to Mass with a number of people that seem to have the same “malady” that we have (laughs), you know...

Shawn: It’s what?

J: To be able to share, you know, Mass with other people who seem to have the same “issues” that you have, I think it’s quite—it’s very supporting.

S: So you like the fact that you’ve been able to go to this Mass?

J: I like the fact that I’m able to go to Mass with other people that have the same sexual inclination that I do, even though that’s not a topic for discussion in Mass.

George and Juan both speak about the importance of a gay and lesbian Catholic community. HCC provides a valuable opportunity for them to join with others who have faced or are facing the same struggles, and it is, as George feels, a privilege.

Brandon and Brian speak in greater detail about the personal significance that worshipping at HCC has for both of their lives. Brandon explains how his spirituality as a gay Catholic does not depend upon HCC but that he values it because of its communal, familial nature:

[HCC] is very important in the sense that—I don’t think that my spirituality is dependent upon it—but I think it does provide a good outlet because I see such good examples of spirituality. But as far as being hinged on it, it’s not hinged on it. I enjoy going there. I’m faithful about going there because I join in community, and I care about the members, and I get involved in personal relationships with the members. And so it’s more like a family. It’s like I’m going to see my family every week in a lot of ways.

Brian, on the other hand, explains the profound personal support that the many years of participation at HCC has given him. He explains:

[HCC is] very important because when I started to go there as a young person [25 years ago], it gave me a lot of hope for the future seeing that people were okay with themselves. And I think it helped me to realize that here are people that had been together in relationships and had lived a life. Some of them had gone through difficulties. They were able to survive that, and I think it gave me hope. It gave me strength. And I think it helped me as I went through my formative years. I enjoy the time I spend there, I'm surrounded by people that support me, and I feel like the priests have empathy and like they're really speaking to me. For me, it's life-affirming. And another thing I tell people: It's almost like I've been to a counselor. I feel like when you communicate with God and you worship and you work on your spiritual life, it helps your emotional being, it helps your physical being, and it helps you all around.

As Brian indicates, being at HCC helped him realize that it was indeed possible not only to be both gay and Catholic, but also to experience happiness in being so. There is a sense of support he feels from the other members, as well as from the clergy, which holds particular value for him, encouraging him to continue participating. Consequently, participation at HCC helps Brian on a variety of levels: spiritually, psychologically, and physically.

Sherri and Gerald speak about how HCC provides a safe place for their religious and sexual identity expression. HCC is a place where Sherri does not fear being challenged in regard to being a lesbian Catholic, as she explains:

I think it's a perfect place for us to be able to express our spiritual side with no confrontation and not be afraid that somebody is going to have negative things to say. I think, instead, we do hear affirming things, and we do hear—often I think—that when the rest of the community is rejecting you, don't feel badly about that. You know, just be strong. You know, you can hear tall Fr. [-----] saying that or Fr. [-----] saying that. They're troubled themselves by the response of their fellow clergymen sometimes. So I think it is a safe place to go. And it's not just safe. It's some place where somebody else is saying, "Don't let that get to you. That's not the most important thing. The most important thing is you're here for God."

Sherri notes the feelings of safety she feels when worshiping at HCC, and like Brian, she acknowledges the support that the priests involved with the community give to her and the other members. For Sherri, being part of HCC helps her place her focus on her religious faith rather than on the issue of her sexuality. Much like Sherri, Gerald notes how HCC provides a place of safe, open expression for him and his partner in contrast to worshiping at a typical Catholic parish:

Shawn: Is there a difference in importance for you as far as being able to attend Mass with other gay and lesbian Catholics?

Gerald: Definitely. You feel like you're among your own people, and I consider it sort of a family group. You know, gay and lesbian people, some of us are alienated from our family, and it's just nice to be open and to see other gay and lesbian members who feel accepted and everything.

Thus, HCC members show how the expression of their religious and sexual identities is a non-issue for community members, and this allows members to avoid challenges to their

open expression of these identities, while at the same time demonstrating the accepted nature of their identities within HCC. The community provides a safe setting where HCC members receive affirmation and support of their religious and sexual identities.

An important part of the personal significance of HCC to community members stems from the sense of happiness and satisfaction that they feel. Deaux and Martin argue that a function of interpersonal networks is the *satisfaction* that members experience as a result of the “validation and support of others, and in some cases the coordinated action of other group members” (2003: 107). Participation in HCC provides its members a sense of satisfaction from this support and validation, as George indicates:

I’ve never been happier in all my life. I’ve lost [someone], of course. I was in a 49-year relationship. I think Don died just before you came. And I was crushed. And if it wasn’t for that community, I’m not sure how well I would have come out of it. And I—you know, it’s been about five years since I lost Don, and I—I’m very happy. I’m very satisfied with my life. I’m about as content as I ever was in my life. I’m settled. I feel very good about myself generally. I mean, there’s always room for improvement (laughs).

Brandon echoes similar statements about the satisfaction and happiness he derives from being part of HCC:

For me, it’s good to see [gay and lesbian Catholics]. The reason I really go—I don’t think it’s sexual for me, I just—like in any situation, you enjoy being among your own. I think it’s in the sense that—and it’s not being separatist. I think it’s a comfort zone. I’m very involved with my home parish [as an adult catechist]. Also, I still make sure that I go every Sunday night at HCC because I enjoy the ca-

maraderie that does not exist and cannot exist realistically in the parish setting. And so it is very important in that sense because it does provide an outlet. The people that I've met have been such wonderful, great role models, spiritual role models. Hopefully I can be a model for other people to encourage them to come, to feel that their homosexuality is not mutually exclusive from their spirituality, that you can be gay and you can be Catholic, you know? You can come to Mass and be appreciated, you know, loved.

In both of these reflections, George and Brandon recognize the supportive nature of HCC as the validation they receive there, which ultimately contributes to their sentiments about being gay Catholics. Rather than merely being a place to worship, participation at HCC gives members a sense of happiness and satisfaction that are personally profound and valued.

As this analysis shows, these various interactional themes in the practice of HCC members show how they work to draw people into their interpersonal network and strengthen existing bonds through affirmation and acceptance, signs of friendliness, and the use of humor that makes light of their group identity. Moreover, community members work to support and sustain the interpersonal bonds through openness about personal details and emotional and physical intimacy. HCC members also create a community of shared responsibility through their displays of ownership of the various details of the community's weekly Sunday evening gathering. All of these interactional themes in the interpersonal context of HCC help to recognize and affirm the community members' chosen religious and sexual identities, providing greater insight into how the interpersonal context supports identity processes, especially in regard to religious gays and lesbians. In

concert with what previous research has already explicated about the cognitive context of gay and lesbian Catholics' identity processes (and of religious gays and lesbians as a whole), this analysis of the practice of HCC members provides a more coherent and complete picture of the identity processes of religious gays and lesbian by exploring in detail the interpersonal context of this process as advanced by Deaux and Martin (2003).

Chapter Six: Discussion

The role of community in the identity processes of religious and sexual identities is important because it is in that context that religious gays and lesbians can find recognition and affirmation of both their religious and sexual identities, which is important to the maintenance of identities (Deaux and Martin 2003: 107). As discussed earlier, identity is a sense of self deriving from social interactions consisting of multiple identities that are activated in relation to specific situations. For instance, a religious gay or lesbian person has the ability to express his or her religious identity in a secular gay context. Examples of this can include a gay pride parade with an MCC float, a gay restaurant or bar when one might be discussing one's religious faith, or any venue where sexual identity might be most salient. In these situations, both religious and sexual identities can be activated.

However, a religious setting that is not accepting of gay or lesbian identities diminishes the likelihood that a gay or lesbian person's sexual identity will be activated and engaged. As a result of the negative characterization that homosexuality receives in religious contexts, a gay or lesbian congregant would be less apt to activate his or her sexual identity given the likely negative reaction it would draw from the worshiping community. A religious setting that is not accepting of gays and lesbians would not lend the sense of support and shared understanding that communities provide for their members. Thus, a gay and lesbian religious community like HCC provides a setting where community members' efforts to embrace both their religious and sexual identities will not be challenged.

Moreover, gay and lesbian religious communities provide a context for its members' identity processes because of their ability to positively engage and activate the very salient religious and sexual identities in their members (cf. Krieger 1982). For gay and lesbian Catholics who are unwilling either to divorce themselves from their Catholic identity or to hide and refuse to celebrate their sexual identity, gay and lesbian religious communities like HCC help their members negotiate their religious and sexual identities by engaging these two important components of their identities.

One of the results of the practice of HCC members in their weekly Sunday evening gathering is the sense of normalcy that the community provides to its gay and lesbian Catholic members. By normalcy, I refer to the ability of members to be able to openly express their gay and lesbian Catholic identities without fear of being challenged. Such outward demonstrations of their religious and sexual identities might not be well-received in a non-gay or lesbian context, but they certainly are at HCC. Normalcy also refers to the routine and generally uneventful nature of HCC's weekly Sunday evening gathering, which is demonstrated by the weekly practice of the community in which nothing out of routine occurs in the community.

HCC's weekly Sunday evening gathering generally occurs as follows (with the occasional variation): Upon arriving at HCC, people have time to share in small talk before Mass and catch up on the past week's events in other members' lives. Right at 7:00 p.m., George welcomes everyone to the Mass and asks everyone to be generous in the collection basket. The members are encouraged to sit and enjoy the music as the choir sings its prelude piece. At the conclusion of the song, one of the readers walks to the podium and reads the theme for the Sunday's liturgy, after which Mass proceeds as normal.

Darryl segues into “Let There Be Peace on Earth” after the recessional song ends, and people join in singing as they collect the songbooks and worship programs. After a few minutes, everyone takes their seats again, and Clint leads the announcements, asking if anyone has any special news to share and whether there are any recent or soon-to-be-celebrated anniversaries or birthdays. Members are then told whether Mass the next week will be held at HCC or the nearby convent, and people are invited to enjoy refreshments afterward at the social. There is very little variation in the community’s practice. Aside from being gay and lesbian Catholics, HCC members are “just regular folks” who are in the routine of joining together every Sunday evening for religious worship.

Overall, the practice of HCC’s members illustrates a community that is an exemplary example of a faith community, providing a sense of belonging and a positive social context for its gay and lesbian Catholics members. The practice of the community members portrays a community that, from an objective standpoint, experiences their religion with little outward discontent with the institutional church’s teachings on homosexuality. It is important to note that in my interactions and observations of the community, it was rare for members to express discontent with the institutional church in the community context. In coding the fieldnote data, there was little talk about the marginalizing nature of the church’s teachings on homosexuality, and I noted no discussion on how gay and lesbian Catholics should actively protest the church’s stance on homosexuality. Although the practice of the HCC members might indicate a kind of reticence by gay and lesbian Catholics in addressing the issue, there indeed are many who feel that changes need to be made to the institutional church’s approach to homosexuality (Dillon 1999; Ecklund 2005; Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Yip 1997b).

Most prominent among those who voice concerns with the church's teachings are the members of Dignity, who regularly confront the anti-gay stance of the institutional church's teachings and instructions (e.g., admitting gay men to the seminary or ordaining them as priests) through public statements, protests, and other actions that indicate their disagreement with these teachings. Dignity proactively and vocally "advocates for change in the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality" (<http://www.dignityusa.org/whatis.html>). However, unlike Dignity, the members of HCC do not actively express their disagreement with the church's teachings and do not advocate confrontational actions. While there are some HCC members who express the possibility of changing the Catholic Church from within (e.g., through non-confrontational methods, changing the attitudes of lay Catholics, and educating them about gay and lesbian Catholics), others simply are content with their opportunity to worship together with other gay and lesbian Catholics.

An important question that my evaluation of this gay Catholic community raises concerns motivation for change. How does one advocate change for a group of people who do not indicate explicitly through their actions that change is needed, and to what degree can we expect people who are content and happy in light of a negative situation (as HCC members seem to be) rise up to address their marginalization? Not actively expressing their discontent might lead an objective observer to come to the conclusion that all seems well with gay and lesbian Catholics and that no change is in fact needed. Objectively speaking, from the standpoint of gay and lesbian Catholics who do not agree with the church's teachings about homosexuality, it is paramount that changes be made; otherwise, gay and lesbian Catholics will always be second-class members of the church.

Most gay and lesbian Catholics do not agree with the Church's teaching regarding homosexuality (Dillon 1999; Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Yip 1997a), and they desire that changes be made so that the institutional church's teachings are more affirming and inclusive of the experience of gays and lesbians. Given the institutional church's hierarchical structure, advocating these changes is an uphill battle. Thus we return to the conundrum of advocating change for a group of individuals who do not show outward signs of discontent, as well as how to motivate happy and content people to work for change on their own behalf? To advocate change, do gay and lesbian Catholics then need to exhibit signs that change is needed, and do they have to experience unpleasant situations?

Social movements, such as the gay rights movement, in many cases seek to change the status quo regarding the situation of a group of individuals. One of the key ways that they address the issue is through a method of "framing" the topic (Williams and Williams 1995), which provides a context in which to understand and interpret the world. On a larger scale, a movement frame "provides a group of individuals with both prescriptions for changing a particular social condition and motivations for taking action" (Williams and Williams 1995: 191; see also Noakes and Johnston 2005). Movement frames consist of three basic components which try to move people into action on a certain issue. This is accomplished through the use of the following framing strategies: 1) the diagnostic frame, which explains why something is wrong; 2) the prognostic frame, the solution for the diagnosis; and 3) the motivational frame, which gives reason for people to act (Snow and Benford 1988; Noakes and Johnston 2005). In order to be effective in its overall framing of an issue, social movement activists must incorporate each of

these three frames so that people are not simply aware of problems and solutions to problems, but most importantly, that they feel inclined to proactively take part in the solution.

I argue that a major reason that HCC members have a positive experience is the result of being removed from the larger Catholic population. Worshiping in non-gay setting would remove them from the support network required to successfully maintain both identities. As a result of being separated, HCC members are not being regularly and directly challenged by individuals who may feel that homosexuality and Catholicism are wholly incompatible. While HCC members know rhetorically what the institutional church teaches regarding homosexuality and are aware of the church's official stance, in their weekly gathering, the reality of their marginalized status in the church is not apparent. In fact, many of the community members would much rather worship at HCC than at a regular parish because the community is more meaningful to them. But in not being challenged and in not having to deal directly with the adversity of potentially non-supportive Catholics, there seems to be less of a drive for changing the institutional church's teachings and a sense of complacency with their status in the Catholic Church.

In order to effect the change needed, one might argue that the community members should worship openly as gays and lesbians in a regular Catholic parish. This would have two fold consequences. First, it would show the non-gay Catholics that there are gays and lesbians who are committed to the church and identify as Catholics and who are overall good, decent people. It would challenge whatever negative perceptions and notions that these regular parishioners might have about being gay and being lesbian. Second, these community members will more than likely face challenges and ridicule as a result of their openly gay and lesbian worship at a regular parish. I would argue that an

important component of mobilization for a social movement, such as gay and lesbian Catholics seeking to change the church's teachings, is the experience of being challenged. For those striving to change a particular social situation, the status quo already presents a challenge to the members of the social movement. In facing the undesirable social situation needing change, social movement participants are challenged, and this arguably helps to mobilize the social movement's constituents.

To further illustrate, consider the history of the gay rights movement. If police and other law enforcement did not regularly harass or conduct raids on gay bars and establishments, one might argue that there would have been no impetus for gays and lesbians to change the status quo, which then puts into question whether the movement would have even begun. Left alone, gays and lesbians may have been relatively content with their lives despite the overall cultural disapproval of their sexualities. However, this may result in more resolve by the community members that there is still change that needs to be done in regard to the church's teachings regarding homosexuality, and they as a result might more actively work to make Catholic parishes more inclusive of gays and lesbians.

In the end, it is difficult to argue that gay and lesbian Catholics must necessarily have negative experiences in order to substantiate the need for change in the Catholic Church. Although the effects of being a separate worshiping community may result in complacency in pushing for change in the church's teachings on homosexuality, having a separate community yields many positive consequences, the most important of which is the support that community members experience. Ultimately, HCC members are quite content expressing their affection with little hesitation and being able to worship in a faith tradition that they do not wish to abandon. The suggestion that they should place them-

selves in situations that might challenge their contentedness is not easy because it is difficult to mandate a person's unhappiness, even if it could result in greater positive consequences.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Earlier in this paper, I explored how much of the research on religious gays and lesbians focused upon the cognitive and psychological aspects for successful religious and sexual identity negotiation. There was not, however, any research that specifically analyzed the role of interactions among individuals in helping with this identity negotiation. Using Deaux and Martin's (2003) approach to identity theorizing, I here examined the role of the interpersonal context on identity processes, specifically within the community dynamic of the Holy Cross Community. This analysis further demonstrated the role of social context in identity processes and complements much of the psychologically-focused extant literature, especially in regard to the identity processes of religious gays and lesbians. Presenting this analysis helps to present a more complete picture of religious gays and lesbians' identity processes by focusing upon the role of the interpersonal context.

In my analysis, I outlined several themes present in the interactions among HCC's members, among which were their creation of a community of inclusion, affection, and of shared ownership. The creation of such a community helped to draw members further into the community, solidifying bonds with each other, and lending support to both their religious and sexual identities. The interpersonal context of HCC allowed community members to be both gay or lesbian and Catholic without being challenged about either aspect of their identity, thereby allowing members of HCC to overcome any potential difficulties between being their religious and sexual identities. In fact HCC's members

lived these identities within the community with little outward signs of difficulty. Thus, in the face of the institutional church's rhetoric denouncing homosexuality, there were able as gays and lesbians to continue being part of the Catholic tradition, practicing their religious faith with a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Rather than expressing themselves as marginalized individuals, members of HCC successfully negotiate both their religious and sexual identities.

The example of HCC members' ability to express both their gay or lesbian sexuality alongside their Catholic religious identity—and the ability to do so with little issue—further supports the importance of interpersonal networks to successful identity negotiation. While there certainly is a cognitive component to dealing with the seeming incongruities between being gay or lesbian and being a part of a religious tradition that denounces homosexuality, my analysis shows that the interpersonal network plays an important role in identity processes. As Deaux and Martin assert, “social identities are enacted through the interpersonal networks of daily life” (2003: 106). The opportunity for HCC members to express concurrently their religious and sexual identities in the context of the community allows them to enact their gay or lesbian Catholic identities within a social context that supports and affirms these identities rather than oppressing them, as many feel the institutional church's rhetoric does.

However, as I explored in my discussion, the positive effect of being able to worship in a non-oppressive environment, such as HCC, for gay and lesbian Catholics does not do much in terms of encouraging members to address the continuing oppressive environments elsewhere, e.g., the rest of the Catholic Church and, arguably, the rest of society. In their own niche, gay and lesbian Catholics experience a sense of contentment,

happiness, and fulfillment that any individual would be hard-pressed to take away from them. As this study shows, being part of HCC affords its members the opportunity to be in a community where, as Sherri very aptly noted, “The most important thing is you’re here for God.” In a context where sexuality is not a matter to be hidden but one to be lived openly, gay and lesbian Catholics can hold hands, kiss, and embrace each other as they worship with no need to be fearful or ashamed because, there, they are just regular folks.

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