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Producing an LGBT Religious Organizational Identity: The Case of DignityUSA

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Abstract

In this exploratory study, we examine the production of an organizational LGBT religious identity utilizing the case of DignityUSA. To this end, we engage in two interconnected analyses. First, we revisit and verify the findings of Loseke and Cavendish (2001) concerning the production of what they called a “Dignified Self,” which LGBT Catholics may use to integrate their religious-sexual-gender identities. Then, we expand on their analyses of DignityUSA in the late 1990’s to outline the ways DignityUSA constructs an organizational identity their members may draw upon to construct the Dignified Self and integrate their sexual/gender and religious identities. In so doing, our analyses speak both to (1) Loseke and Cavendish’s (2001) call to explore whether their findings from three years of newsletters held over time; and (2) calls over the past two decades for LGBT religious studies to expand beyond individual LGBT religious-sexual-gender identity integration to ascertain the construction of the organizational identities LGBT people draw upon to accomplish individual and interpersonal identity integration.

Keywords

Catholicism, LGBT Christian, Religion, Sexualities, Identity

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Producing an LGBT Religious Organizational Identity: The Case of DignityUSA

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In this exploratory study, we examine the production of an organizational LGBT religious identity utilizing the case of DignityUSA. To this end, we engage in two interconnected analyses. First, we revisit and verify the findings of Loseke and Cavendish (2001) concerning the production of what they called a “Dignified Self,” which LGBT Catholics may use to integrate their religious-sexual-gender identities. Then, we expand on their analyses of DignityUSA in the late 1990’s to outline the ways DignityUSA constructs an organizational identity their members may draw upon to construct the Dignified Self and integrate their sexual/gender and religious identities. In so doing, our analyses speak both to (1) Loseke and Cavendish’s (2001) call to explore whether their findings from three years of newsletters held over time; and (2) calls over the past two decades for LGBT religious studies to expand beyond individual LGBT religious-sexual-gender identity integration to ascertain the construction of the organizational identities LGBT people draw upon to accomplish individual and interpersonal identity integration. Keywords: Catholicism, LGBT Christian, Religion, Sexualities, Identity

Introduction

Over the past thirty years, researchers have devoted significant attention to the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people with religion (cf. Mathers et al., 2018; Wilcox, 2009; Wolkomir, 2006 for reviews). For example, researchers have outlined the ways LGBT religious people integrate seemingly disparate religious and non-heterosexual (cf. Dillon, 1999; Sumerau, 2012; Thumma, 1991; Wilcox, 2003) and / or non-cisgender (cf. Mathers, 2017; Sumerau & Cragun, 2015; Sumerau et al., 2016a) identities. Further, researchers have examined the experiences of LGBT people within specifically-LGBT (cf. McQueeney, 2009; Sumerau, 2017; Wolkomir, 2004) and broader religious (cf. O’Brien, 2004; Pitt, 2010; Wedow et al., 2017) contexts. In fact, researchers have spent considerable time tracking and documenting the rise of LGBT-specific and LGBT-inclusive organizations throughout this time (cf. Fuist et al., 2012; Moon, 2004; Moon & Tobin, 2018). While these studies, and many others (cf. Sumerau & Cragun 2018; Sumerau, Mathers, & Lampe, 2019 for reviews), have importantly outlined the experiences of LGBT individuals within religious organizations and the interpersonal dynamics within some such organizations, we know far less about the collective identities created by such organizations for themselves and for use by their members (cf. Loseke & Cavendish, 2001; Sumerau et al., 2015; Wilcox, 2001).

In this exploratory study, we examine the construction of an LGBT Christian collective identity through newsletters produced by one such organization. We selected LGBT Christians both because they represent the largest LGBT religious group in the U.S., and because this group provides the cases for the vast majority of research on LGBT religious experience throughout the social sciences to date. Here, we utilize newsletters produced and disseminated by DignityUSA, an LGBT Catholic organization, between 2000 and 2012 as a case study in the identity work organizational bodies do to define who they are and what they stand for in the pursuit of members and continued operation (cf. Sumerau et al., 2015). We also selected this time span for two specific reasons. First, these years represent the years directly following the only other study focused on DignityUSA religious-sexual identity integration (Loseke & Cavendish 2001). Second, this time span ends at the latest date we are able to analyze complete newsletters at present due to data access and availability.

In this study, we contribute to existing studies of sexual or gender and religious identity work by demonstrating the ways in which organizations engage in similar forms of identity work to construct an organizational identity that individuals can then draw upon for meaning and support. Further, our analysis picks up Loseke and Cavendish's (2001) call, almost twenty years ago, to (1) focus on the ways organizations create the symbolic materials utilized by LGBT religious people seeking to integrate their sexual/gender and religious identities and (2) expand their examination of three years of Dignity newsletters over the passage of time. In conclusion, we suggest future avenues of research whereby scholars could further analyze the organizational identities or the collective meanings people draw upon in the integration and maintenance of their individual sexual/gender and religious identities.

Identity Work

Identities are meanings people attach to themselves as individuals and groups (Goffman, 1959). These meanings allow people to make sense of themselves and others while allowing others to understand where they fit, or belong, in a given social setting, interaction, or context. Rather than immutable, however, identities, like any other socially constructed meaning, are mutable results of ongoing patterns of interpretation, interaction, and experience that may shift and change over the course of time and in relation to shifting societal norms (Blumer, 1969). As such, people may work on their individual and collective identities by mobilizing the resources at their disposal to define themselves and others in specific ways (Snow & Anderson, 1987).

In order to fashion individual identities, however, people must draw upon the articulation of such identities by collective actions and groups (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996). Put simply, one cannot define themselves as a "man," for example, without first learning there is something called a "man" and what it means to be and show others one is a "man" (Schrock & Padavic, 2007; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Without this information, one could call one's self a "man," but no one else would understand what this claim meant. Rather, the understanding of others that there is a collective identity, or a category, called "man," which means a specific thing in a specific time and context, allows one to claim and present the identity "man" in the first place. As a result, individual forms of identity work ultimately rely upon the collective identities created and maintained by broader social groups (Goffman, 1963; Sumerau et al., 2016b).

Building on these insights, our analysis outlines the ways an organization defines who they are for their followers. While individual members—or others who share the same religious and / or gender/sexual identities as the membership—may interpret and utilize such materials in a wide variety of ways to fashion their own identity claims, each will ultimately rely upon the collective, organizational identity to some extent in the process (Sumerau et al., 2015). Here

we outline one such construction of an organizational identity to demonstrate the usefulness of examining this type of collective identity work more broadly. Before doing so, however, it is important to contextualize our exploratory analysis in relation to existing studies at the intersection of religion, sexuality/gender, and organizations.

LGBT and Religious

As noted above, analyses of the intersection of LGBT identities and religion has expanded dramatically in the past three decades. Beginning with case studies seeking to understand how Evangelical Protestants in the U.S. (Thumma, 1991) or Catholics in the U.S. (Dillon, 1999) or Europe (Yip, 1997) sought to integrate seemingly disparate gay and religious identities, researchers outlined many ways LGBT Christians, for example, negotiated narratives that integrated and solidified identities as always both LGBT and religious (Sumerau et al., 2016c), navigated emotional turmoil to overcome guilt, fear, and shame related to LGBT identities (Wolkomir, 2001), articulated social positions somewhere between religious conservatism and secular liberalism (O'Brien, 2004), and deflected negative teachings about LGBT people in churches (Pitt, 2010). Further, researchers examined the psychological effects of anti-LGBT religious teachings on LGBT religious and secular populations (Rodriguez, 2010) and the ways LGBT people built their own religious traditions (Thomas & Olson, 2012) and integrated into emerging LGBT-inclusive religious groups and organizations (Woodell et al., 2015). Finally, researchers have noted many ways that LGBT religious experiences are influenced and shaped by experiences with race (Pitt, 2010), region (Barton, 2012), gender (Sumerau & Schrock, 2011), and other social factors (cf. Barton, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010; Sumerau & Mathers, 2019; Wilcox, 2009 for reviews).

While these studies cover a wide variety of LGBT religious populations in a wide variety of settings and contexts, one thing they each share is a focus on the individual identities (i.e., how a given person constructs or manages identities as LGBT and religious). At the same time, however, many of these studies note the importance of organizational or interpersonal meanings regarding LGBT identities, as well as the meaning of religious beliefs and traditions, in the individual's identity constructing processes (cf. Sumerau et al., 2015; Barton, 2012; Moon, 2004; Sumerau et al., 2016c; Wilcox, 2003; Wolkomir, 2006). In fact, utilizing a smaller and earlier period of the DignityUSA newsletters used here, Loseke and Cavendish (2001) outline some ways such organizational understandings of LGBT identities and religious norms are produced rhetorically for individuals seeking membership or resources for making sense of their own identities. In this exploratory study, we return to this effort by Loseke and Cavendish (2001) but focus on the ways DignityUSA defines itself as an organizational entity. In so doing, our work here points to a potential next arena for the expansion of studies of LGBT religious experience by demonstrating the usefulness of, as Becker (1999) notes in a large-scale study of religious organizations, ascertaining how organizations define who we are and how we do things as a collective group and as a source of guidance for individuals.

Methods and Analysis

Before outlining our methods, it is important to note the standpoint of the authors in relation to the study. We came to this study due to the second author's experience studying and as a member of the Catholic tradition. His access to insider information and the data set as both a Catholic and an expert on Catholicism in social scientific circles created the opportunity for this study. He then brought on the third author, an agnostic scholar raised in another religious tradition, and the first author, an agnostic scholar who was raised Catholic, but no longer identifies with or practices the religion, to examine patterns in the meaning-making of

DignityUSA as an organization. Together, we looked at the data set with the eyes of a former practitioner, a current practitioner, and a scholar with no connection to the faith beyond studying and publishing on Christianity in their career to date to gain a balanced view of the materials.

As three sexual minorities (i.e., the first and third authors identify as bi+ and the second author identifies as gay) raised in Christian traditions and working in social scientific disciplines, we were aware of both DignityUSA itself and the previous work on DignityUSA's newsletters in the 1990's by Loseke and Cavendish (2001) and sought to examine the construction of an LGBT-inclusive organizational identity over time¹. To this end, we focused on the DignityUSA newsletters produced directly following the sample utilized by Loseke and Cavendish (Fall 1997 – Winter 2000). Specifically, we analyzed DignityUSA newsletters from Winter 2000 to the end of 2012. DignityUSA newsletters have been produced by the leadership of DignityUSA throughout the past five decades and are widely disseminated and read by LGBT Catholics (and LGBT members of some other faith traditions) throughout the United States and in some other countries. As Loseke and Cavendish (2001) note in their study, these newsletters provide a rhetorical record of the development of the organization as well as the shared meanings promoted by the organization over time.

To accomplish this study, we engaged in several steps to collect and prepare the newsletters for analysis. First, the second author utilized his contacts to collect complete, full text and image, hard copies of the newsletters from 2000 to as close to the present day as could be managed (i.e., 2012). A colleague unaffiliated with the current article then digitized the entirety of the newsletters, and the third author collated and organized them into a digital repository. Utilizing this repository, the third author then cleaned and enhanced the readability of both the newsletters and the texts and images throughout their contents. Once this process was completed, we possessed the full newsletters for the time period in digital form, and in a form where we could code and make notes (digitally and by hand) on the newsletters themselves.

This study had two goals at the outset. First, we sought to ascertain whether the elements of a "Dignified Self" (i.e., a positive LGBT Catholic identity proposed by the organization and outlined in Loseke and Cavendish's analysis) remained in the newsletters over the following decade-plus. Second, we sought to ascertain how DignityUSA constructed an organizational or collective identity as an LGBT inclusive religious tradition. Following Becker (1999), we sought to outline how DignityUSA leaders define what DignityUSA is and what it is not within the pages of the newsletter. Since the first and third authors had no way of knowing what the newsletters possessed ahead of time (though the second author had read many of them over time as a subscriber at earlier points) and we were well aware of how much has changed in LGBT and broader social and religious politics in the past two decades (cf. Bernstein & Taylor, 2013 for discussions on this topic), we adopted a modified form of "grounded theory" (Charmaz, 2006) for our analysis whereby we sought to answer the above questions, but we began by open coding and closely reading the entirety of the data set to formulate a preliminary idea of what the data set held (cf. Berg & Lune, 2011; Kleinman, 2007). This type of work with the newsletters was deemed exempt from IRB protocols or requirements as the data are at least partially available publicly and have been disseminated to the public at times.

In terms of analysis, the first and third authors, neither of whom were familiar with the materials ahead of time other than via prior studies, cleaning the data set in the case of the third author, and word of mouth, read through the entirety of the data set independently without input

¹ The first and third authors are also transgender people, and each of the three authors has attended DignityUSA and other LGBT Catholic gatherings for social and / or research purposes over the years.

from the other or the second author². Put simply, the first author studied, read, and coded the entirety of the newsletters in our sample. While doing this, they took detailed notes on the contents and created a set of codes capturing the overall themes in the data set as well as examples and arguments that recurred frequently over time. At the same time, the third author engaged in the exact same process. Neither the first nor the third author shared any of their initial codes and comments on the data with the other until both had finished preliminary analyses and coding of the entire data set³.

Two months after the first and third authors finished with this initial coding process, they met to go over what each had found utilizing this data independently. At this time, they compared their codes and notes looking for similarities and differences in their respective observations concerning the content, recurring themes, and salient discussions. In so doing, they discussed and shared codes and examples in a back and forth manner to arrive at a set of preliminary codes that spoke to the overall data set and the questions set out at the onset of the study. With this information in hand, the first and third authors reached out to the second author who initially provided the dataset to both of them, and began the formal analysis shared in this article utilizing insights, experience, and literature from the second author.

In this process, the first and third author collectively went back through the entirety of the data set coding examples and sorting them into categories. We focused on the most common elements of how DignityUSA defined itself as an organization in collective terms. Specifically, we sought to understand how DignityUSA, as Becker (1999) notes, explained to their followers who and what DignityUSA is and is not in the pages of the newsletters over time. At the same time, we utilized the existing studies of gender/sexual and religious identities, organizations, and debates to ascertain the ways the data set spoke to each of these literatures. Specifically, we compared the elaboration of the organizational identity within our coding processes to the studies cited throughout this work, and noted that this was a rare case in the current literature where the organizational identity—rather than the ways individuals drew upon an assumed organizational or collective identity—became salient and clear in the data. As we recognized this missing piece in existing literatures and opportunity for this study, we set out the distinct themes that we outline below as well as confirmation of the continued significance of the Dignified Self identity and story members could adopt to fashion positive LGBT Catholic identities (Loseke & Cavendish, 2001).

The Dignified Self Revisited

In their analyses of DignityUSA newsletters at the end of the 1990's, Loseke and Cavendish (2001) outline a story of LGBT Catholicism DignityUSA produced for the use of its members. As members work to overcome the shame, fear, and rejection they face as a result of the marginalization of LGBT people by the church, they can draw on this Dignified Self story to fashion positive, integrated identities as both LGB and / or T and Catholic. As the lives of LGBT people—Catholic and otherwise—faced renewed and increased attacks in the early 2000's (Robinson & Spivey, 2007) and a period of relatively increasing societal acceptance at the turn of the 2010's (Moon & Tobin, 2018), we wondered if the Dignified Self outlined in the 1990's would hold throughout the following decade as DignityUSA wrestled with shifting LGBT, religious, and broader social politics throughout the U.S. and the world.

² During this time, the first author also utilized parts of this data alongside fieldwork in an LGBT Catholic setting for another project they were pursuing as part of their graduate work.

³ This was also to facilitate the first author's other work with the data as that work was an independent project where only their own reading and analyses of the data were allowed and utilized for the graduate work they were in the process of completing with parts of this and other LGBT Catholic data at the start of the study outlined here. Put simply, formal analyses by the team waited until after the first author's other project was completed in full.

The answer to this question is yes. In fact, the newsletters between 2000 and 2012 continued to outline very similar notions of “spiritual sexuality” and “sexual spirituality” as the ones at the end of the 1990’s. Echoing excerpts quoted by Loseke and Cavendish (2001) in their work, we found consistent articulations that all people, and especially DignityUSA members, “need to integrate our sexuality and spirituality” (Winter 2004 Newsletter), and continue to be an “affirming community modeling Gospel-based service” (Fall 2009) for LGBT and non-LGBT Catholic communities. In fact, mirroring pronouncements of the Dignified self as a “loving” and “spiritual” form of “witness” to the Catholic Church in Loseke and Cavendish’s (2001) analyses of 1990’s newsletters, DignityUSA publications, such as the following excerpt from the Summer 2006 Newsletter, regularly emphasized loving and witnessing to others throughout the 2000’s: “We LGBT Catholics continue to witness that our lived experience of love in our lives is indeed the spirit acting in the world and in our Church.” In short, the elaboration and construction of LGBT Catholics as dignified, witnesses, loving examples of God’s grace, and an integration of sexual and spiritual love named the Dignified Self by Loseke and Cavendish (2001) remained consistent throughout our data as well.

Such consistency suggests the Dignified Self story, rather than simply a product of time, is a primary or continuous frame whereby DignityUSA provides rhetorical resources for members seeking to integrate sexual/gender and religious identities (cf. Loseke, 2007). In fact, the only two slight shifts in this narrative mirrored broader shifts in broader LGBT and religious debates in recent years. First, newsletters emphasized family even more (including specific discussions about ‘what Godly family is’ in the Winter 2004 Newsletter and ‘how to build spiritual families’ in the Fall 2011 Newsletter). In this way, they mirrored greater emphasis on families in the broader culture tied to same-sex marriage debates (Bernstein & Taylor, 2013). Second, newsletters in the 2000’s more often discussed transgender and bisexual populations than in the past, which also mirrors increasing attention to these groups in recent years in the broader culture (Sumerau & Cragun, 2018). In sum, while able to shift to match current broader social patterns, the Dignified Self outlined in Loseke and Cavendish’s (2001) work remains a core message individual LGBT religious people may find and draw upon in their own religious, sexual, gender identity efforts.

The Dignified Organization

While verification of existing studies as well as the ways narratives are maintained and/or change over time represent important aspects of scientific inquiry in any field (cf. Blumer, 1969; Loseke, 2007; Plummer, 2010), here we also note another aspect of the operations of DignityUSA—and likely other LGBT religious organizations (Wilcox, 2003)—that receives less attention in scholarship to date: the ways organizations craft a collective identity their members may utilize—in a wide variety of ways—to make sense of their own individual religious and / or sexual/gender selves. Here we outline the ways Dignity, as an organizational entity, defines who they are and who they are not in relation to sexual, gender, and religious norms.

Who We Are

Likely tied to the growth of DignityUSA since its inception as a small group of gay Catholics at the end of the 1960’s⁴, one common point of DignityUSA’s definitions of who

⁴ In every year, there was a column in the newsletter discussing both the history of the organization as just a small group at its origins, and the growing numbers of people in DignityUSA (i.e., members). These columns were not always in the same editions from year to year (i.e., spring one year and winter another), but each year noted the growth in membership over time in columns updating the membership on its contents.

they are involves visibility. Specifically, DignityUSA newsletters throughout the 2000's emphasize the visibility of the organization in Catholic and broader social spheres as well as the visibility of members in relation to other social and religious movements operating throughout society. An example from the Spring 2000 edition of the newsletter offers an illustrative case of this type of self-definition:

As former Dignity president, Mary Cervone wrote: "Dignity must maintain and increase its national visibility...It is Dignity's right, privilege, and obligation to speak up and take personal responsibility." Gaining visibility provides a proactive and reactive voice for the organization and compliments the primary mission in serving LGBT Catholics, their friends, and their families across the world.

Similar statements occur in each year of the newsletter, and in each case, the writers focus on both calls from DignityUSA leaders to be visible in the world, and the benefits for the membership of visibility in current affairs and politics related to the Catholic Church and beyond. Such statements include discussions of the importance of "Building bridges rather than walls" (Spring 2001 newsletter), "Opening doors to others who need to see" (Winter 2008 newsletter), and to "share love" with others within and beyond the organization (Spring 2011 newsletter). Expanding and utilizing the "calling to be visible and active in the world" outlined as part of the *Dignified Self* by Loseke and Cavendish (2001), such statements emphasize the importance of visibility for DignityUSA as an organizational force in the lives of people.

Another major emphasis throughout the newsletters involves DignityUSA's commitment to Catholicism—and especially Catholic ritual and tradition—despite marginalization and, at times, outright rejection of the organization and its members by the broader church. Within a series of articles discussing the importance of ritual in the Spring 2010 issue of the newsletter, for instance, an especially illustrative example of the most common themes about DignityUSA as a site of Catholic celebration and ritual—no matter the obstacles—says:

As an organization, one of the central concerns of Dignity is recognized access to the Eucharist as LGBT people, which marks us as Roman Catholics. Especially since the 1980s, official leadership in the Roman Catholic Church has sought, in many direct and indirect ways, to exclude us from Communion. This has inevitably led some Dignity chapters to seek out presiders among resigned priests, married priests, and women priests, all duly ordained in episcopal succession... It can be argued that necessity knows no law in matters of church discipline. In the process, we have also made alliances with many welcoming groups and partners whose aims we share to some extent, especially on church reform. No one can fault desire for Eucharist; it is our right by Baptism.

The dual emphasis on the Eucharist and church reform throughout the newsletters demarcates DignityUSA as a continually, committed, Catholic organization for and by Catholics who face marginalization in the greater church (cf. Loseke & Cavendish 2001; Yip, 1997 for similar observations related to DignityUSA and other LGBT Catholic groups). As noted in the midst of a similar discussion in the Fall 2009 issue of the newsletter: "We are Catholic, we seek the Church to be a church for all who seek full inclusion." Likewise, in the Spring 2000 issue of the newsletter, a writer argues: "We are Catholic, and you can be OUT and Catholic." Throughout the newsletters, Catholicism—and the affirmation that members of Dignity and

Dignity itself are and remain Catholic—finds consistent voice as the central element of DignityUSA as an organizational entity.

Finally, DignityUSA very clearly articulates the organization's role as both the leading voice in Catholic reform and a voice calling for leadership. While this might sound odd to some in other religious traditions focused on more dispersed leadership structures (cf. Barton, 2012), the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church relies heavily upon the importance of leadership for parishioners (Yip, 1997). As such, it is not surprising that DignityUSA highlights its efforts to change this structure for LGBT Catholic members who feel rejected or otherwise displaced by existing forms of official Catholic leadership. A discussion in the Summer 2010 newsletter offers a common example of this type of construction of DignityUSA as a call for more equitable Catholic leadership:

As leaders in Catholic life, we know every community should prayerfully select among their members the one whom God is calling to leadership. That individual could be a man or woman, married or single, gay or straight! The Church of the Holy Spirit must become a totally democratic church with no caste system, no higher or lower; rather, totally equal, women with men, gays with straights; everyone possessing the Holy Spirit within them; everyone an authority.

Similarly, statements in the newsletters note DignityUSA as “the voice of change in Catholicism” (Winter 2011 newsletter) and the “push the Church needs” (Summer 2001 newsletter) toward “a more equal church of the Holy Spirit” (Fall 2007 newsletter).

Throughout the pages of the newsletter, DignityUSA thus defines itself as a visible, deeply and committed Catholic entity focused on leadership and change within the broader church. In so doing, DignityUSA sets the parameters for what members can expect from the organization (i.e., who we are and how we do things; Becker, 1999). At the same time, DignityUSA defines its collective self as the visible, Catholic leaders that LGBT Catholics can rely upon to craft Dignified selves as both LGB and / or T and Catholic. Although these efforts clearly define who and what DignityUSA is, researchers have long noted that the construction of identities—individual and collective—also relies on the definition of who we are not (Ammerman, 1998). In the next section, we outline DignityUSA's definition of who they are not.

Who We Are Not

Whether we look to studies of individual (Wolkomir, 2006) or collective religious identity (Ammerman, 1998) or to broader discussions of identity construction (cf. Goffman, 1959; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Snow & Anderson, 1987), scholars have long noted the importance of establishing boundaries around a given identity claim. Put simply, an identity can only signify to others “what it is” if it also has a boundary around such content that demarcates the identity from “what it is not” (Goffman, 1967). As Becker (1999) notes in her comparison of congregations, organizations also typically outline both who they are and who they are not in the pursuit of members who will identify with both sides of such identity construction (cf. Sumerau et al., 2015). Here, we outline what DignityUSA says it is not.

Likely due to historical dominance of both DignityUSA and the Catholic Church itself by men (Dillon, 2018), an important aspect of Dignity's discussions of what they are not involved the inclusion of women. Specifically, there were many discussions—especially in the late 2000's—about the importance of affirming and including women and expanding Catholic

rites and leadership options to women. The following excerpt from a 2009 DignityUSA Convention speech printed in the Spring 2010 newsletter offers an illustrative example:

We have long held that there is no sound theological basis for the exclusion of queer folk. There is also no sound theological basis for the exclusion of women from the full sacramental life of the Church. The seedbed for homophobia is misogyny. We must challenge it at every opportunity. If we want women to come and to stay, we must make room for them at the altar, at the pulpit, and in our language.

If we unpack this and other statements like it, DignityUSA defines itself as in opposition to not only the sexual politics of the official Catholic Church, but also its gender politics. Statements like these affirm who they are (i.e., Catholic and for LGBT people), and demarcate who they are not (i.e., not the Catholics that deny full participation to women in the church). In so doing, DignityUSA defines itself as open to women, and at the same time, not part of official Catholic tradition that limits the roles and opportunities of women in Church matters.

Similar themes arose in relation to diversity. Describing a previous panel focused on diversity, the Fall 2011 issue of the newsletter, for example, stressed the importance of DignityUSA not following the homogeneity of the broader Church and added:

Look at our experiences and background, the diversity we bring to Dignity, to celebrate it, and to listen to the expressions of faith different from our own. Indeed, it was fascinating how the life experiences and background shaped the ministry of each of the panelists; yet common themes emerged.

This type of construction—DignityUSA as not the homogeneity of the broader Catholic tradition—was a recurrent theme throughout the newsletters. In an essay about reforms needed in the Catholic tradition in the Winter 2003 issue of the newsletter, for example, the writer notes the continuous push for reform and the importance of being: “Highly critical of Christian churches’ massive failure to promote true racial integration and healing.” Such statements, as captured in an essay on the topic in the Winter 2005 issue of the newsletter, were also integrated with the overall push for DignityUSA to stand opposite to other Catholic rules:

You and I walk the streets proud and unafraid. Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered, and God knows who else, not begging, but claiming equality, recognition and freedom, and celebrating the people we were created to be. Black/white/Latino, Native American and Asian, male and female, rich and poor, fat and thin, buff and flabby, closeted and in-your-face, out and not-so-out, rural naïve and urban cool, timid and bold, celebrating what many people think we ought to be ashamed of... Today, the love that only a few years ago dared not speak its name, refuses to shut up for all of us. And for lots of folks across the Church, and across the nation, it’s their worst nightmare.

Especially as a voice advocating within a Catholic tradition known to prize shared rules, expectations, official norms, and conformity to a single source of authority, truth, and power, DignityUSA defined itself as the opposition to such hierarchical and exclusive norms by continually constructing the organization as not these things throughout the time period we analyzed here. In so doing, such efforts, as has been shown in relation to secular (Goffman, 1959) and religious (Marti, 2008) identities of varied types, they defined who they were by arguing against who they sought not to be as an organizational entity. Further, such efforts were

integrated within their broader calls for church reform and the inclusion of sexual/gender minorities within and between varied LGB and/or T Catholic populations. Put simply, DignityUSA's newsletters reveal an organizational identity construction whereby Dignity *is* a Catholic organization, but *is not* the traditional, exclusive, only-for-certain-people Catholic organization.

Discussion

Research focused on the intersections of gender, sexualities, and religion in the case of LGBT people has expanded dramatically in the past two decades. Most of this research focuses on the ways LGB and/or T individuals make sense of their sexual/gender and religious identities while drawing upon the symbolic materials of local and national LGBT secular and/or religious organizations. Such research has invigorated—theoretically and empirically—social scientific understandings of LGBT, religious, and LGBT-religious identity construction, negotiation, and experience. However, it leaves out the social construction of the broader organizational identities LGBT individuals draw upon to accomplish such identity integration (cf. Fuist et al., 2012; Loseke & Cavendish, 2001; Sumerau et al., 2015; Wilcox, 2001).

We have drawn on religious studies' observations about the social construction and maintenance of organizational identities to examine the ways an LGBT religious organization constructs an organizational identity its members may utilize—or be drawn to—in their efforts at sexual/gender/religious identity integration. We have further utilized the case of DignityUSA as an opportunity to revisit and evaluate findings concerning this organization by Loseke and Cavendish (2001) almost two decades prior. In so doing, we verify Loseke and Cavendish's (2001) findings concerning DignityUSA's construction of the Dignified Self story and identity, and outline how DignityUSA produces an organizational identity as an LGBT Catholic entity.

Although exploratory, our work here has two important implications for continually expanding studies of LGBT and LGBT-religious studies. First, as Loseke and Cavendish (2001) called for in their own work on DignityUSA at the beginning of the millennium, our work here revisits their findings over time to ascertain if the narrative they outlined from three years of newsletters in the 1990's held constant at other points in the trajectory of the organization. We find that it not only held constant, but that elements of it can be seen in the broader depiction of the organizational identity of DignityUSA as late as this decade. Further, Catholicism continues to be underrepresented in studies of LGBT religiosity, identity integration, and religious organizations (cf. Dillon 1999), and our case once again brings Catholic LGB and/or T people into the discussions taking place throughout the broader field of LGBT and LGBT-religious studies. Our findings here thus serve as a verification of earlier observations about DignityUSA and again call for more study of Catholicism-sexual-gender intersections in the field (cf. Dillon, 2018).

At the same time, our work here provides an example of moving LGBT-religious studies beyond an almost complete focus on individual and interpersonal identity negotiation. Although other scholars have called for analyses of LGBT-religious organizational identity construction processes for almost two decades (cf. Loseke & Cavendish, 2001; Wilcox 2001), such work remains almost entirely lacking in the field (cf. Fuist et al., 2012; Sumerau et al., 2015). As earlier studies discussing the importance of analyses like our own here noted, we have to ask what might the similarities and differences in organizational identities—between, for example, LGBT Evangelical groups (Moon & Tobin, 2018) or straight-but-affirming groups (McQueeney, 2009)—reveal about nuances and variations in LGBT-religious experience? If, for example, organizational studies are anywhere near as multi-faced, nuanced, and varied as existing studies of the individuals within such organizations, then we could see another dramatic expansion in knowledge about and discussions concerning the contours of

LGBT-religious experience, traditions, and complexities playing out in the contemporary world. To this end, researchers may utilize the analysis presented here as an example of outlining and examining such organizational meanings, stories, and maneuverings that provide the symbolic resources of individuals seeking to craft and integrate LGB and/or T religious selves.

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