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The Elusive End of the Rainbow: A (Queer) Rhetorical Analysis of Rainbow Sash Rhetoric

Kenneth Lythgoe

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**THE ELUSIVE END OF THE RAINBOW:
A QUEER RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF RAINBOW SASH
RHETORIC**

by

KENNETH P. LYTHGOE

BACHELOR OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2009

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts
Communication**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to sash wearers and all other LGBT religious practitioners. It can be risky to suggest that queer spirituality even exists, but the world is richer for your willingness to live that spirituality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If I've learned anything from my study of communication, it is that one can never truly labor alone: our perceptions, our identities, our goals, our beliefs, and our achievements are all forged through the symbols and meanings we collectively attach to the world around us. Beyond this abstract form of collaboration, however, there are several people to whom I am indebted very directly for the completion of this project.

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valuable feedback on portions of the thesis and I am intellectually indebted to both of you.

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**THE ELUSIVE END OF THE RAINBOW: A (QUEER) RHETORICAL
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ABSTRACT

Rainbow Sash Catholicism refers to several LGBT Catholic groups' practice of wearing rainbow sashes to Pentecost Mass to denote their opposition to the Roman Catholic Church's stance on non-normative gender and sexuality. Utilizing ideological rhetorical criticism, this study analyzed the act of sash wearing itself along with multiple publicly-available articles, letters, and other rhetorical artifacts generated about sash wearing. The rhetorical artifacts examined were generated by multiple parties to sash wearing: (1) sash wearers themselves, (2) members of the Catholic clergy, and (3) lay Catholics who do not wear the rainbow sash. The principal purpose of this study was to understand how sash wearing is used to construct LGBT identity in relationship to the Catholic Church, and how publicly available rhetoric about sash wearing mediates that construction process.

Analysis ultimately suggest that sash wearing is not used to construct LGBT identity in relationship to the Church, but instead necessitates the (re)construction of LGBT identity in relationship to the Church by queering the Church's most definitive

ritual: the sacrament of the Eucharist. Thus, the public rhetoric generated about sash wearing by sash wearers, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, and the clergy respectively represent ideologically-driven attempts to make sense of the queered sacrament. On the basis of this analysis, I derive several conclusions about rainbow sash rhetoric. I argue that queering is a rhetorically useful strategy for small or under sourced groups to elicit a reaction from larger groups in which they are marginalized, but that this strategy virtually eliminates marginalized groups' control over how others interpret and respond to their perspectives. I also argue that ritual and the logics of ritual are useful (and underused) analytical lenses with which to approach ideological rhetorical criticism.

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"The things that we love tell us what we are."

-St. Thomas Aquinas

"Indeed it may be only by risking the *incoherence* of identity that connection is possible."

-Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There was a time in my life when I had little patience for those who identified themselves as non-practicing Catholics. I had, after all, been a fairly devout Roman Catholic throughout my childhood and adolescence: I was baptized in the Church, attended weekly catechism classes from the ages of seven through 17, could recite all the faith's most important prayers from memory, was repeatedly encouraged to enter the Seminary (and briefly entertained it myself), and absolutely attended Mass EVERY Sunday. In light of all that, it made no sense to me why anyone would lay claim to a Catholic identity without engaging in Catholic religious practice or at least endorsing Catholic religious belief.

My perspective has vastly shifted, though, since I left the Church. I ultimately elected not to complete my Confirmation, a sacrament which marks one's avowal of Catholic faith upon reaching adulthood, because I felt deeply that I could not square my identity and life as a gay man with a religion that deems same-sex love (and indeed intimacy of any kind outside the boundaries of marriage) as sinful. What I have discovered in the years since I stopped attending mass is that it is quite possible to be a

non-practicing Catholic. I no longer personally endorse the Church's take on morality and spirituality, but I nonetheless feel a profound and continued connection to the Church. I feel defensive when others criticize it, I can still recite most of the prayers from memory, and I feel some measure of nostalgia for the familiar steps, procedures and rituals of the Sunday Mass. In short, I think I will always be a Catholic, irrespective of whether I ever step foot in a Catholic church again.

Against this backdrop, and in light of the huge role that sexuality played in my decision to leave the Church, my interest was piqued six or seven years ago when I saw a short article in the newspaper on a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT hereafter) Catholic group called the Rainbow Sash Movement. This group is comprised of openly LGBT practicing Catholics who don rainbow sashes during mass as a symbol of their usual invisibility and marginalization within the Catholic ecclesia. Accompanying this article was a photograph of a young man and a priest taken in a cathedral. The young man wore the group's eponymous rainbow patterned sash draped over his shoulder, and he shook hands with the priest. The photograph's caption indicated this handshake was offered to the young man in lieu of communion, which was denied him for acknowledging (or at least implying) his belief in the morality of homosexual activity that the Church condemns as sinful.

While this article interested me at the time, this was the sole exposure I had to the activities of Rainbow Sash Catholics for many years. I have long forgotten precisely what the article had to say, and my efforts to retrieve the article and/or the photograph have, thus far, been unfruitful. Nevertheless, I found myself thinking again about the

rainbow sash (and specifically that photograph) as I began familiarizing myself with the study of LGBT and queer rhetorics over the course of my graduate studies. For reasons I will describe in greater detail below, I have come to believe that Rainbow Sash Catholics and their activities have much to bring to this field of inquiry. As such, this thesis attempts to bring rhetorical communication studies to bear upon the RSM and its activities. In the remainder of this chapter, I lay groundwork for the review of literature, methodology, analysis, and discussion to follow by offering a history of Rainbow Sash Catholicism, a more detailed description of its associated activities, and a two-pronged rationale for rhetorical study of rainbow sash rhetoric based on (1) its novelty as a form of LGBT religious discourse, and (2) its utility as a lens through which to better understand issues of rhetorical agency.

Situating the Text(s): What is Rainbow Sash Catholicism

Before justifying an examination of Rainbow Sash Catholicism as a site for rhetorical study, it is necessary to first describe it in greater detail. Throughout this thesis, I will frequently use phrases such as Rainbow Sash Catholicism, rainbow sash rhetoric, rainbow sash wearers, and sash wearing as umbrella terms appealing to shared beliefs, practices, and collective identities that I or others perceive among multiple affiliated and unaffiliated groups that are known centrally to the press, the episcopacy, and local church-goers for wearing rainbow colored sashes to Catholic masses especially on Pentecost Sunday. While I ultimately argue that this common practice is central to understanding these groups' rhetorical similarities *and* differences, the differences between these groups and their relationship to one another is a cornerstone of this

project's rationale and research design. The organization of this section, then, is primarily chronological and is designed to fulfill three interlocking purposes: (a) offer an account of the development of sash wearing as a rhetorical act related to LGBT Roman Catholics and Catholic teaching surrounding LGBT gender/sexuality, (b) convey a sense of the complexity and contested nature of rainbow sash activities specifically within the U.S., and (c) introduce the two primary rainbow sash groups operating in the U.S. as well as the features of the discourse they each produce surrounding their sash wearing activities. In the subsection below, I begin with an account of the rainbow sash's genesis and its emergence as an organized movement.

Genesis of the Rainbow Sash and the Australian Rainbow Sash Movement

According to sash wearer and organizer McNeill (2007), the first person to don a rainbow sash at Roman Catholic mass was an Australian man named Nick Holloway in 1996. Seeking to discover whether openly LGBT Catholics were truly embraced by the Catholic Church, Holloway wore a rainbow sash to mass in both London and Melbourne and was denied the ability to receive communion, also referred to as the Eucharist, in both places (Rainbow Sash Movement International, 2007). Feeling that he had discovered the answer to his question, Holloway ended his practice of wearing the rainbow sash to mass in 1997. However, the following year a group of Melbourne LGBT Catholics inspired by Holloway's actions decided "over a six-month period of prayer and discussion to take up the sash again and transform it into a symbol of pride, dignity and challenge" (Rainbow Sash Movement International, 2007, "A Movement is Born," para. 1). In making this decision, they formed the first of two groups known as the Rainbow Sash Movement. In

the Australian Rainbow Sash Movement's foundational "Letter to the Church," convenor Michael Kelly (1998) describes his group's intention thus:

In wearing "the Rainbow Sash" we proclaim that we are Gay and Lesbian people who embrace and celebrate our sexuality as a Sacred Gift. In wearing it we call the Church: To honour the experience and wisdom of Lesbian and Gay people. To enter into open dialogue with us. To work with us for justice and understanding. Together let us seek a new appreciation of human sexuality in all of its diversity and beauty. (para. 1)

In keeping with the experiences of Mr. Holloway the previous year, "every one of the [approximately 70] rainbow sash wearers was refused Communion" during the 1998 Pentecost Mass (Rainbow Sash Movement International, 2007, "A Movement Begins," para. 2). Moreover, as the "controversy developed over the next few weeks, all of Australia's Catholic archbishops told the media that they, too, would refuse Holy Communion to Rainbow Sash wearers" (para. 3). Importantly, this denial did not simply limit sash wearers' full participation in the mass; it limited their participation in the most singularly important component of the mass. The Eucharist is a sacrament so doctrinally significant to Catholicism that the Church claims it is "the source and summit of Christian life," something that "the other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with" and "oriented toward" (Catholic Catechism, 2000, 1324). The Rainbow Sash Movement remains active in Australia today, and they don rainbow sashes at mass at least twice a year including on Pentecost (Rainbow Sash Movement International, 2007). The group reports that its

members continue to be denied the Eucharist when they present themselves at mass in their rainbow sashes, and there is no mention on its website (<http://geoffreybaird.com/rsm/index-rsm.html>) of sash wearers ever having been offered the Eucharist by any Eucharistic minister¹ in any (arch)diocese in Australia.

The Rainbow Sash Movement in the United States

The story of Rainbow Sash Catholicism in the United States is substantially more complex. A U.S Chapter of the Rainbow Sash Movement was convened by Chicago native Joe Murray in November 2000, and Murray and others first wore sashes during a mass celebrated to open that year's meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB hereafter) held in Washington D.C. (McNeill, 2007). As has been the case in Australia, sash wearers were denied the Eucharist during that mass. However, denial of the Eucharist to sash-wearers has not been a uniform response across U.S. Roman Catholic parishes and dioceses. According to McNeill (2007), "At Pentecost, 2003, those wearing the Sash received communion in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Rochester, NY, New York City, New Orleans, St. Cloud, Minnesota, and St. Paul[Minnesota]" (para. 10). While some (arch)dioceses, such as the archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, have

¹ This thesis will focus specifically upon Catholic clergy as the final arbiters of the Eucharist's distribution or denial. It should be noted, however, that the distinction between members of the episcopacy and lay Catholics isn't entirely cut and dry. In large masses, members of the episcopacy are often assisted in the distribution of the Eucharist by several other members of the Church who are not ordained. These Eucharistic ministers are frequently deacons, nuns, and others with religious vocations but may also include lay people without such vocations who are specifically trained or instructed to appropriately handle and distribute Communion in accordance with the Church's liturgy.

since ceased offering the Eucharist to sash wearers, others have not revoked their support. McNeill notes, for instance, that Los Angeles' Cardinal Roger Mahony "has never waived [sic] in welcoming those wearing the Rainbow Sash to the reception of the sacrament of Eucharist" (para. 15).

Perhaps because of the contested nature of the U.S. Catholic hierarchy's response to rainbow sash activities, the U.S. Rainbow Sash Movement (RSM hereafter²) has elaborated at great length upon what precisely its actions mean. They claim that they engage in this activity as a visible way to "self-identify" as "Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender people" (Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.b, para. 1) on a day that they understand to celebrate the "whole Church" as a body of believers (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 4). Many Catholic priests, bishops, and cardinals, however, have deemed RSM members' explicit avowal of and/or support for non-heterosexual identities a violation of the Church's teachings and an act of protest against the Church's spiritual authority. As a consequence, the RSM asserts that all members of the clergy have denied the Eucharist, or Holy Communion to those wearing sashes in Roman Catholic masses since 2004³ (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 7).

² I wish to make a note here regarding my terminology. I've referred to both U.S - based and Australia-based groups called the Rainbow Sash Movement, but my discussion of the Australia-based RSM is included for historical context only. My analysis focuses upon rainbow sash activities in the U.S., and thus any subsequent reference I make to the RSM is intended to refer to the U.S.-based group. Hereafter, where I must refer to the Australia-based RSM, I will designate the group as such.

³ This particular report is somewhat difficult to square with later reports of Cardinal Roger Mahony's continuing support of sash wearers (e.g. Diogenes, 2005; Kralis, 2005; McNeill, 2007; Tamberg cited in Diogenes, 2005). It should be noted that McNeill (2007) does not explicitly state that Mahony's support

As the RSM's name clearly indicates, ritualized "self identification" is the group's core rhetorical strategy. However, the greatest volume of discourse the group produces comes from its website (<http://www.rainbowsashmovement.com>). The RSM identifies itself as a "cyber-based organization" whose "membership keeps in contact through our website" (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 8). The site is therefore a rich text unto itself, and one that is marked by forcefulness and combativeness that does not characterize the group's core activity of silently donning sashes during mass. Far from simply mirroring the silent "self-identification" members enact in churches, the group's web discourse often incorporates vocal challenges and condemnations of what the RSM perceives as the Catholic Church's anachronistic and hypocritical dogma on matters of non-normative gender/sexuality. As such, the site's verbal content is extensive, ever-evolving, and is home to a number of seemingly incommensurate rhetorical pronouncements; calls for dialogue with the hierarchy of the Church rest only lines from scathing indictments of the Church hierarchy's irrationality and stagnation. Similarly, the site's content includes strong disavowals of the role of politics in religious practice while concurrently featuring appeals to secular political ideals like visibility and universal rights.

In addition to the large corpus of symbols and statements that abstractly positions the RSM relative to the Catholic Church, the RSM website also includes a great deal of

took the form of offering sash wearers communion, and Kralis (2005) reports that RSM members in Los Angeles did not wear sashes to mass on Pentecost 2004 in recognition of the Cardinal's "warm reception of them in years past" (para. 22). I was unable to find documentation as to whether or not members of the RSM have resumed wearing rainbow sashes in Mahony's archdiocese since 2004.

content that directly deals with the practice of wearing sashes to Pentecost mass. This information is essential to the purpose of the RSM because the group is geographically diffuse. The RSM organizes as an organization primarily by way of its website, and encourages visitors to the website to don rainbow sashes in Catholic parishes near their homes. Thus, in the absence of a central site of activity or a readily identifiable physical headquarters, the RSM site is not just a resource or tool that enables members to keep in contact with the group as a whole. Rather it is rhetorically and literally the space in which the RSM exists 364 days out of the year.

The Rainbow Sash Alliance

The RSM remains active today in cities throughout the country and is an important source of discourse in undertaking any study of rainbow sash rhetoric more broadly. The RSM is not, however, the sole group of Rainbow Sash Catholics in the U.S., and has in fact become somewhat isolated from other collectives of sash wearers. According to McNeill (2007), despite the fact that Joe Murray was named U.S. convenor of the RSM with the endorsement of Australian RSM convenor Michael Kelly, the two organizations cut ties with one another shortly thereafter. McNeill and both the RSMs' websites are each vague in their characterization of this split, but in 2004 there was a schism *within* the U.S.-based RSM as well. A second U.S.-based rainbow sash group calling itself the Rainbow Sash Alliance (RSA hereafter) formed when Joe Murray controversially disavowed the ecumenical group *Soulforce's* decision to demonstrate against the Catholic Church. The Rainbow Sash Alliance emerged from this schism as an unaffiliated group devoted to “making the Rainbow Sash Movement in the US

democratic, with a leadership accountable to its members” (McNeill, 2011a, para. 6). The Australian RSM responded to this schism by endorsing the RSA (McNeill, 2007).

While the RSA engages in the same sash wearing activities as the RSM, the quantity and nature of the online discourse it produces about its activities is markedly different. The RSA heavily touts its connection to other rainbow sash groups around the world, and the first sentence visitors encounter on the RSA website is the bolded assertion that “The Rainbow Sash Alliance USA is part of the international Rainbow Sash Movement” (McNeill, 2011a, para. 1). More notably still, the only two documents featured on the RSA’s (n.d.a) “Archive Documents” page are an “Open Letter to John Paul II” and the “Foundational Letter to the Church” authored by members of the Australian RSM years before sash wearing had even been practiced in the United States. By comparison to the kinds of criticisms of the Catholic Church to be found in abundance on the RSM’s website, the RSA’s content is notably less critical and combative. The RSA does identify “issues of consistent concern” such as “the Church’s homophobic sexual ethics,” the adverse effects of faith-based reparative therapies, “the Church’s ongoing demand that it receive exemption from all anti-discrimination legislation,” and “the dangers of right-wing religious leaders” (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 1). However, the RSA site is far more limited than the RSM’s in terms of the overall content it maintains and generates and in terms of its critique of the Catholic Church’s hierarchy and religious mandates. For example, the group’s website (<http://www.rainbowsashallianceusa.org>) features no posts remarking upon contemporary

developments in the Church short of those which directly address Rainbow Sash Catholicism.

The RSA's support for interfaith organizing, a huge factor in its split from the RSM, is also on display on its website. Their site's homepage asserts that "the Alliance puts a primary emphasis on working with like minded organizations in other Christian and non-Christian religious traditions, and with secular lgbt [sic] organizations in the USA" (McNeill, 2011a, para. 3), and their aforementioned concerns surrounding "the dangers of right-wing religious leaders" specifies that those leaders are both "Catholic and non-Catholic" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 3). The RSA also features the inter-faith groups *Soulforce* and *Dignity Twin Cities* among its five hyperlinks to other organizations (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.c).

Finally, the RSA differs markedly from the RSM in terms of its locality. Far from being a "cyber-based organization" whose "membership keeps in contact through our website" (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 8), the RSA acknowledges that "most of the people working in the Rainbow Sash Alliance USA are based in Minneapolis, and are part of Dignity Twin Cities" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.c, para. 2). This is reflected elsewhere on the site: McNeill's (2007) "History in the United States, Australia, and England" expressly mentions the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis more frequently than any other (arch)diocese, the website's homepage links to two separate letters concerning the RSA penned by the Archdiocese's former Archbishop Harry Flynn (Flynn, 2004; Flynn, 2005), and the site encourages LGBT Catholics to don

the rainbow sashes not at their local parishes as the RSM does, but at St. Paul's Cathedral in St. Paul Minnesota (McNeill, 2011b).

In light of all this, it is reasonable to question why this study focuses upon Rainbow Sash Catholicism as opposed to other, more cohesive groups with similar perspectives and commitments. Without a doubt, there are LGBT groups, movements, and initiatives that are bigger, better known, and more structurally accessible than the array of organizations engaged in sash wearing. Moreover, one can plausibly argue there are more likely candidates than the RSM and/or RSA to produce the kinds of institutional changes often privileged in the rhetorical study of marginalized people and groups. However, this study is informed by the assertion that rhetoric does far more and can illuminate far more than just persuasion and the (social) changes persuasion produces. Whatever the material impact of Rainbow Sash Catholics upon the Catholic Church's stance on non-normative gender and sexuality, I believe that these group's unique symbol use and meaning making are also fruitful for understanding how sexual and/or spiritual communities: (1) constitute (potentially new) shared identities (e. g. Charland, 1987); (2) render new worlds and worldviews intelligible to rhetors and audiences (e.g. Foss & Griffin, 1995); and (3) help marginalized people and groups stake or carve out space for themselves within and among dominant social institutions (e.g. Fraser, 1990).

In other words, it is precisely the complexity of sash wearing as a rhetorical act, the religio-political weight of the sacramental symbolism in which it intervenes, and the often divergent sense-making discourses that circulate around it that provoke the questions underlying this thesis. Before laying those questions out, though, I justify

Rainbow Sash Catholicism as a specific object of study on two grounds. First, I suggest that the rhetoric of sash wearing carves out new spaces within broad popular and scholarly discursive formations concerning the place of non-normative gender/sexuality within various Christian religious traditions. Second, I argue that study of sash wearing rhetoric enters a long-running theoretical conversation among rhetorical scholars concerning the nature of (rhetorical) agency.

Justification

Rainbow Sash Rhetoric as a Unique Form of Discourse

Even when examined individually, religion, gender, and sexuality are each sites of intense cultural, ideological, and material investment. It is unsurprising, then, that any approach to combining the three is of necessity extraordinarily complex and rhetorically rich. In this section, I argue that that rainbow sash rhetoric requires study because it represents a novel form of discourse surrounding the compatibility of gender/sexual non-normativity with Christian teachings and Christian religious practices. I trace the outlines of two well-established, widely circulated, and seemingly incommensurate discursive formations: (1) discourses that imply a strict opposition between Christian religious teachings and sexual/gender non-normativity, and (2) discourses that posit the ready compatibility of Christian teachings with gender/sexual non-normativity. Ultimately, I believe that rainbow sash rhetoric maps out new discursive terrain because it liberally cites both of these formations, thereby troubling, nuancing, and perhaps even suturing them.

Before delving into these discursive formations, however, I wish to offer a few qualifications surrounding the justification that I am forwarding. First, by focusing on these discursive formations, I do not intend to suggest that sash wearers are the first Christians or even the first Roman Catholics to deviate from the bifurcated positions that I lay out. The history of Roman Catholicism (let alone of Christianity) is marked by a vast array of discourses and discursive formations that I do not touch upon here. In expounding upon discourses of opposition and compatibility, I do not intend to present an exhaustive archeology of Christian thought's articulations with non-normative gender/sexuality. Rather, I expound upon these particular discursive formation to focus upon the particular array of (relatively contemporary) symbolic resources mined by Rainbow Sash Catholics.

Second, I wish to acknowledge the precarity of discussing and characterizing Christianity at large, and of utilizing this broad concept to illuminate the rhetoric of specifically Roman Catholic groups. Undeniably, Christian faith traditions diverge greatly in their teachings, their membership, their politics, and their structure, as well as to what sources they lend ecclesiastical authority. Having said all that, the precariousness of Christianity as a unitary category does not undercut its relevance (or its frequent usage) in U.S. discourse. Hartman, Zhang, and Wischstadt (2005), for example, map the emergence and usage of the term "Judeo-Christian" in U.S. political discourse and find that it has been a hugely important discursive tool for coping with and/or mitigating the U.S.' cultural heterogeneity. They note that the term first became politically prominent during the 1930s and was employed by liberal political leaders to position Jews,

Protestants, and Catholics as the “three ‘fighting faiths’ of democracy . . . combating Nazism, Fascism, and Anti-Semitism” (p. 210). The demand for this discursive tool, they suggest, emanated from the mobilization of “pro-fascist” and anti-Semitic conservative groups around the term Christian (p. 210). Since then, they argue, the terms’ political usages have converged such that they are both “used as a reference point for partisans on both sides of various culture wars debates” and are “much more likely to be used by social and political conservatives as well as simply to designate the hegemonic culture core of the nation” (p. 231). Indeed, by the late 20th Century, notions of Christianity and Judeo-Christianity are “not so much debated” as they are “deployed to ground discussions and debates about controversial cultural subject matter” (p. 231). In deploying the notion of Christianity myself, then, my purpose is not to deny its heterogeneity as a category, but rather to invoke an umbrella concept that has historically and contemporarily wielded considerable discursive capital in contesting issues related to non-normative gender/sexuality. An umbrella concept that, I would argue, is very likely intelligible to sash-wearers and those making sense of their rhetoric.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge an institutional bias within the discourses and anecdotes I identify below. My discussion of these discourses may suggest that I am either disinterested in individual Christian practitioners, or that I believe all practitioners of Christian faiths unproblematically adopt/obey the dictates of their ecclesiastical leaders. Neither is the case, and there is in fact evidence to suggest that the Catholic Church’s officially held stance on issues of non-normative gender/sexuality is not shared by individual Catholic believers. A study of U.S. Roman Catholics’ attitudes toward

LGBT issues, conducted for the Public Religion Research Institute, reports that “a majority of Catholics (56%) believe that sexual relations between two adults of the same gender is *not* a sin” (Jones & Cox, 2011, p. 1). Moreover the study finds that U.S. Roman Catholics’ “support for rights for gay and lesbian people is strong and slightly higher than the general public,” they “are more supportive of legal recognitions of same-sex relationships than members of any other Christian tradition and Americans overall,” and they “are significantly more likely” than other religious groups “to give their church poor marks for how it is handling the issue of homosexuality” (p. 1).

This study’s focus upon discourses circulated by religious institutions and religious leadership derives from the RSA and RSM’s tendency to treat the Church’s leadership and teachings (not the beliefs of individual Catholics) as the object of their rhetoric. Individual Catholics’ relationships to Catholic teachings are complex and worthy of nuanced study, however the sash wearing rhetoric examined in this study is not as heavily implicated within highly personal discourses and experiences as it is within the institutional discourses discussed below. To mitigate this bias, however, I’ve taken care to be as precise as possible in my use of language concerning Christianity and Catholicism; where appropriate, I’ve referred specifically to beliefs, practice(s), and teachings associated with Christianity and/or Catholicism in lieu of more totalizing references to Christianity and/or Catholicism writ large. Explicit identification of these components of Christianity and Catholicism is intended to qualify observations and claims rendered in this analysis: the goal is to employ a lexicon that avoids implying that either Christianity or Catholicism are marked by sufficient homogeneity as spiritual

meaning systems to presume, for example, that Catholic teachings unproblematically equate with Catholic beliefs, which directly correspond to Catholic religious practices or Catholic identity. Bearing these caveats in mind, the subsections below respectively take up discourses of opposition and compatibility between non-normative gender/sexuality and Christian religious teaching. Exemplars of both these discourses are outlined so as to illustrate the manner in which rainbow sash rhetoric seemingly articulates the two.

Discourses of opposition.

To better understand the cultural terrain of opposition through which the sash wearer's rhetoric circulates, it is useful to observe some of the public rhetorical flashpoints in which sexuality and Christian teachings have encountered one another over the last several decades.

On December 10, 1989, members of the AIDS coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP hereafter) staged a wildly controversial protest during Sunday morning mass in New York City's St. Patrick's Cathedral. The activist organization took issue with the Roman Catholic Church's continued condemnation of homosexuality in the face of the growing AIDS epidemic as well as its opposition to HIV-AIDS inclusive sex education in public schools. On the day of the protest, some of the protesters entered the Cathedral itself, interrupting mass by vocalizing ACT UP's grievances, lying in the Cathedral's aisles, and chaining themselves to pews (Blotcher, 2007). These actions sparked outrage from many residents of the city, who described activists as having "desecrated" the Cathedral (p. 515).

In the days following September 11, 2001, Jerry Falwell, the prominent evangelical pastor and host of the Christian television program *The 700 Club*, suggested that the carnage of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were God's retribution for the actions of "the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle" (Falwell, 2001 cited in Cable News Network, 2001 para. 3). Although Falwell later apologized for his remarks (Cable News Network, 2001), a similar string of suggestions emerged from evangelical pastors in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Crawford, 2005). Indeed, these claims are numerous enough that Biesecker-Mast (2007) recommends that communication scholars study them. She claims that compelling rhetorical implications exist for these instances of religious speculation to have emerged largely from figures stressing the importance of literal rather than critical biblical interpretation.

In November of 2005, the Roman Catholic Church's Congress on Catholic Education issued a directive that "banned from the seminary men who 'practice homosexuality,' exhibit 'deep-seated homosexual tendencies,' or 'support the so-called gay culture' " (Russel, 2007, p. 739). This directive was controversial for two reasons. First, it represented a departure from the Church's longstanding position that so-called same-sex proclivities merely represent temptations to sin and cannot therefore be conflated with actual same-sex sexual activity. Second, the new directives for admission to seminaries came in the wake of the new Pope Benedict XVI's pledge to "purify" the episcopacy following the highly-publicized child sex-abuse scandals of the 1990s and

early 2000s (p. 740). Within this context, many claimed that the Catholic Church's leadership was actively perpetuating the long-standing but empirically unfounded belief that gay and bisexual men are more inclined to abuse children than straight men.

Beginning in 2005 and extending to the present, members of Topeka, Kansas' Westboro Baptist Church led by Reverend Fred Phelps received widespread condemnation for protesting the funerals of military personnel killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The group claims that the events of September 11, along with the United States' broader geopolitical struggles and the human toll of war on its military personnel, are divine punishments for its tolerance of homosexuality (Oxley, 2005). Their pickets, prominently featuring bombastic slogans like "God Hates Fags," "God Hates America," and "Thank God for 9/11," have provoked not only strong rebukes but also organized countermeasures among military personnel and others (Brouwer & Hess, 2007). Even before its highly publicized and widely condemned pickets at military funerals, the church made its debut in the national media in 1998, when it held a similar protest at the funeral of Mathew Shepard, a 21-year-old man who was famously beaten to death by two assailants for being gay.

On November 7, 2008, in the aftermath of the narrow passage of California's Proposition 8, which constitutionally banned same-sex marriage by defining marriage as between one man and one woman, several hundred opponents of Proposition 8 picketed outside of Westwood, California's Mormon Temple (Garrison & Lin, 2008). Protesters contended that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints had spearheaded the campaign and raised "more than \$20 million" from church members to bankroll it (para

4). Supporters of the successful proposition in turn accused the protesters of “Mormon-bashing” (Flint, 2008 cited in Garrison & Lin, 2008, para 14), claiming that the protesters were vilifying the Mormon Church while ignoring many other groups that provided financial and/or electoral support to the ballot measure.

This short chronology is neither an exhaustive list nor a cohesive narrative of the rhetorical interludes between non-normative gender/sexuality and Christian teachings and/or identity. Nevertheless, these anecdotes collectively speak to a discursive formation that positions Christian teachings and non-normative genders/sexualities as mutually exclusive in terms of the ideologies and the subjectivities they allow for. While each of these controversies is undeniably different in its content and context, they are all marked by either a clear separation between that which is authentically Christian and that which is gender or sexually non-normative, or a concerted attempt to create such separation. These bifurcations are real, important, and materially consequential to those who endorse them; by extension, they are worthy of study by students and scholars of rhetorical communication. However, while these discourses are certainly capable of capturing attention and can sometimes dominate the public consciousness as to the ways in which some Christian beliefs and non-normative gender/sexuality intersect, there are equally important counterdiscourses devoted to positioning non-normative gender/sexuality as compatible with Christian beliefs. I offer examples of this discursive formation below.

Discourses of compatibility.

One of the core lacunae in discourses that posit Christian religious dogma and LGBT identities as diametrically opposed is that each is prone to the erasure of actual

LGBT Christians. To borrow from one of the anecdotes outlined above, although it is potentially useful to think about the Roman Catholic Church's ban on gay seminarians as an issue of Catholicism versus homosexuality, this narrative makes no room for a multitude of individuals whose identities/commitments straddle Catholicism and non-normative gender/sexuality. This narrative, for example, does not account for: (1) the gay men who aspire to and/or enroll in the seminary despite the Church's stance on sexuality, (2) the gay priests who remain members of the clergy after their sexual proclivities are explicitly deemed a threat to the Church's sanctity and moral authority, or (3) the gay seminarians who are neither yet priests nor barred from the priesthood due to their sexual/romantic interest in other men. For these men and others, discourses emphasizing the compatibility between some Christian teachings and gender/sexual non-normativity may be a source of greater agency. Examples of these discourses exist both in parallel with and in response to the oppositional discourses discussed above.

One of the most prominent examples is that of Reverend Troy Perry, who founded the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC hereafter) in October of 1968. Having been removed from the Pentecostal church congregation to which he ministered after revealing that he was a gay man, Perry founded the gay-affirming denomination in Los Angeles "in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe" (MCC Statement of Faith cited in Todd, 2007, p. 185). The MCC asserts that its spiritual outlook is "based upon the principles outlined in the historic creeds" of mainstream Christian churches, and that the Church "moves in the mainstream of Christianity" (MCC Statement of Faith cited in Todd, 2007, p. 185). The MCC is overwhelmingly popular; the denomination has

grown to over 275 churches in 25 countries with an overall membership of approximately 50,000 people (Todd, 2007, p. 186).

LGBT religious leaders and clergy have also experienced success in advocating for LGBT individuals' inclusion within existing denominations. In March of 2004, V. Gene Robinson, a member of the Episcopalian clergy, was ordained as a bishop in the church, making him the first openly LGBT person to hold the position (Grossman, 2007). Similarly in 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, voted at its biennial assembly to allow for the admission of non-celibate LGBT Lutherans into the clergy, and to empower clergy to bless unions between committed same-sex partners (Duin, 2009). In both instances, however, the decisions have allowed for the individual discretion of congregations and clergy to choose whether or not to adopt inclusive attitudes/policies toward LGBT people.

Rhetorical appeals to the compatibility of LGBT identities and Christian faith even circulate outside the boundaries of denominations altogether. Chávez (2004) and Usher (2007) document large and broad-based extra-denominational evangelical organizations that offer resources for LGBT Christians to connect with one another and allow for collective voices for LGBT inclusion within more formal Christian faith communities. Chávez (2004) describes her experiences with *Soulforce*, a group composed of LGBT Christians of all denominations (and without denominations) that urges Christian believers and Christian leaders to embrace sexual/gender non-normativity. Usher (2007) describes an organization of college-aged LGBT Christians called *Equality Ride*, who articulates a similar LGBT affirmative message by touring

religiously affiliated universities around the country and speaking with their students. Unlike the clear-cut denominational affiliations of the individuals and groups discussed above, members of these groups belong to a diverse array of Christian faith communities ranging from the well-defined and well-organized to the explicitly non-denominational. Such groups do not directly intervene within the policies and practices of specific churches. Rather, they articulate the compatibility of Christian belief and non-normative gender and sexuality, and provide spaces where LGBT members of many Christian faith communities can congregate and participate in networks of solidarity and support.

As noted with respect to discourses of opposition, discourses of compatibility between Christianity and gender and sexual non-normativity are consequential and worthy of serious study because they create a framework through which many individuals make sense of their lives. It is important, though, for critically oriented scholars of rhetorical communication to seek out and illuminate new understandings and new avenues of discourse that exist outside the boundaries of the familiar. The RSM and the RSA are uniquely suited to this task in that their symbolic activities and rhetorical strategies straddle discourses of opposition and compatibility rather than fitting comfortably into either one. Although both the RSM and the RSA reflect discourses of compatibility in their efforts to legitimize LGBT people's membership within the Catholic ecclesia, their core strategies in pursuit of that goal take on a confrontational tone more in keeping with discourses of opposition. In sum, it is a discursive innovation to sartorially interrupt the rituals of the Catholic mass and stridently (and publicly) critique the Catholic Church in the name of being included within and embraced by the

Catholic Church. Sash wearers' marriage of conciliatory and oppositional discourses makes their rhetoric a valuable object of study as a site of religious meaning making, LGBT meaning making, and as new kind of juncture between the two.

Rainbow Sash Rhetoric as a Complex Site of Rhetorical Agency

Rainbow sash rhetoric is compelling solely on its merits as a unique rhetorical form. However, its study is also justified based upon its capacity to contribute to an ongoing site of theoretical engagement within contemporary rhetoric as a field: the nature and source of rhetorical agency. Although he does not take up the issue as a question of rhetorical agency, Bitzer (1968) was among the first to interrogate rhetoric's longstanding focus upon the author as an active agent producing desired change in an audience through her or his rhetorical choices. Bitzer does not suggest that the speaker does not possess agency, but he does contend that "to say that rhetorical discourse comes into being in order to effect change is altogether general" (p. 4), and calls on rhetoricians to theorize how particular rhetorical acts are compelled by particular conditions. De-centering the speaker and her or his intent from the rhetorical act and its effects, Bitzer conceptualizes the "rhetorical situation" (p. 5) as follows:

Let us regard the rhetorical situation as a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character (p. 5)

Influential (and controversial) over 40 years later, Bitzer's foray into rethinking the source of rhetorical effects was the beginning of a trend in rhetoric that has only intensified with the linguistic turn: Charland (1987) suggests that rhetoric constitutes subject positions rather than addressing pre-constituted sovereign subjects; Biesecker (1992) argues that attempts to recuperate women in the history of rhetoric are counterproductive in that they appeal to the same notions of individual authorship that "fences out a vast array of collective rhetorical practices to which there belongs no proper name" (p. 144); and Butler (1993) suggests that even politically radical reappropriations of language and symbols inherently possess the vestiges of the subordination and violence they once signified.

In her treatise on rhetorical agency, Campbell (2005) synthesizes much of this scholarly conversation by defining rhetorical agency and making a series of claims concerning its nature. Defining rhetorical agency as "the capacity to act . . . in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others" (p. 3), Campbell claims that rhetorical agency is: (1) "communal, social, cooperative, and participatory" (p. 3); (2) subject to strategic "invention" of audiences, collectives, and subject positions (p. 5); (3) the capacity to "artfully" navigate, cite, and reappropriate existing discourses; (4) "textual" (p. 7), or residing within the capacity of an audience to intelligibly interpret the form of a rhetorical message; and (5) "protean," with an "equal capacity for transcendence, resistance, and destruction" (p. 8).

Several of these theories are germane to the present study. Campbell's assertion, for example, that "agency is communal, social, cooperative, and participatory" seems

relevant to understanding a rhetorical act whose meaning(s) derive from both secular LGBT and Roman Catholic religious symbols, and whose interactants include sash wearers, the Catholic episcopacy, Catholic laypeople, and visitors to the RSM and/or RSA's website (p. 3). Moreover, the affective power of intervening in the Eucharistic ritual seems to embody Cambell's assertions that texts themselves "have agency" and that agency "equally emerges in performances that repeat with a difference, altering meaning" (p. 7). Perhaps, most compelling of all is Campbell's assertion that agency is "promiscuous and protean" (p. 1): that rhetorical agency is definitionally flexible and sufficiently mutable that "rhetoric has an equal capacity for transcendence, resistance, and destruction" (p. 8). I contend that the sash wearing of the RSA and the RSM, and the sense-making that surrounds that activity collectively constitute a powerful lens through which to scrutinize this particular claim.

. This thesis can and does go beyond simply cataloguing the intricacies of a unique form of LGBT and/or Roman Catholic rhetoric. Examining rainbow sash rhetoric with an eye toward agency expands the breadth of inquiry that this study is able to speak to. One is compelled to ask, for instance: How fixed is the meaning of sash wearing?; How much control do the RSA and RSM exert over its meanings?; How do the Church hierarchy and those who endorse its stance on non-normative gender/sexuality make sense of (or make use of) sash-wearers' rhetoric? In a very direct way, analysis of rainbow sash rhetoric is well positioned to respond to the call with which Campbell closes her proposals on rhetorical agency:

What is needed are synthetic, complex views of authorship as articulation, of the power of form as it emerges in texts of all sorts, of the role of audiences in appropriating and reinterpreting texts when they emerge and through time, and of the links of all these to the cultural context, material and symbolic, in which discourse circulates (p. 8)

Research Questions

It is with this call in mind that I've formulated my research questions for this study. Beyond closely examining sash wearing within the context of the RSM and RSA's stated goals, this study seeks to apprehend how the "capacity to act" and the capacity to make sense of LGBT Catholics' place within the Church circulates among sash wearers, the clergy, and non-sash wearing Catholic laity. This thesis thus looks to rainbow sash Catholicism to better understand the array of rhetorical strategies that are available to LGBT religious people. In specific, it seeks to understand how sash wearer's rhetoric legitimizes them as loyal Roman Catholics while also legitimizing their non-canonical stance on non-normative gender/sexuality. It also seeks to understand if and how the meaning of sash wearing changes subject to the interpretive labor of the Catholic episcopacy and other non-sash-wearing Catholics. In keeping with these goals the following overarching research question guides my method and analysis:

1. How is sash wearing used to rhetorically construct LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church?

Several sub-questions illuminate notable features of rainbow sash rhetoric and inform my analysis. They are as follows:

- a. How do sash wearers appropriate and/or interrupt ritual as a rhetorical strategy?
- b. How do the RSM and RSA's publicly available online discourses work to supplement, alter, or augment the meaning of their eponymous activities?
- c. How do other Catholics' publicly available discourses about sash wearers supplement, alter, or augment the meaning of the sash wearers' eponymous activities?

Thesis Preview

The following chapters systematically explore rainbow sash rhetoric to illuminate its potential contributions to theories of rhetoric and LGBT Catholic identity.

Specifically, chapter 2 surveys the literatures on sexual politics, online discourse, and ritual, and positions rainbow sash rhetoric's potential contributions within each. Chapter 3 outlines my epistemological and methodological commitments, discusses my approach to textualizing rainbow sash rhetoric across the many sites that generate it, and develops the approach to rhetorical criticism employed in my analysis. Chapter 4 reports and discusses the analysis and interpretations that emerged from rhetorical criticism. Finally, chapter 5 explores the implications of the research, proposes its potential contributions to existing literature, discusses the limitations of the study, and proposes directions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As groups composed of LGBT Catholics and their allies and working to alter the beliefs, activities and religious prescriptions of the Catholic hierarchy through ritualized self-identification organized and contextualized via the internet, the RSM and RSA are both challenging and fruitful as sites of rhetorical inquiry because they straddle multiple bodies of existing literature within rhetoric and communication, as well as social theory more broadly. To bring rhetorical analysis to bear upon sash wearing, then, it is important to first position its online and embodied rhetorics within these various literatures. In doing so, my purpose is two-fold. First, I explain how sash wearing intervenes within each body of literature. Second, I juxtapose these disparate bodies of theory to show how sash wearing rhetoric straddles them in a way that they haven't been previously.

To accomplish this, the proceeding review of literature maps out three distinctive bodies of literature that sash wearing rhetoric overlays: (1) studies of LGBT politics; (2) analyses of online discourse as produced and deployed by marginalized groups; and (3) ritual as a framework for the symbolic redress of social conflict. Because LGBT discourse implicates all of the activities of the RSM and RSA, and their very existence as groups, I begin here. Subsequently I consider marginalized digital discourses and ritual, since the significance of these concepts is more grounded in discrete and identifiable aspects of sash wearing rhetoric as a whole.

As later chapters will illustrate, these bodies of literature are less of a corpus of background material than a set of dynamic and overlapping contexts for study. In other

words, this review is a map of intellectual ecologies that help to position sash wearing relative to existing knowledge and gaps in knowledge, and also provides a pool of interpretive resources to draw from throughout the remainder of the thesis.

LGBT Politics

The literature on LGBT politics and activism is immensely relevant to understanding rainbow sash rhetoric and its implications. Indeed, there is precedent for engaging with the intersections of Christian faith and sexuality through the lens of sexual politics. Bennett (2003), for instance, critiques institutional religious discourses about reparative therapy, suggesting that they deploy relatively radical theories of gender and sexuality as performed rather than innate, while retaining conservative notions concerning which performances are and are not “authentic” (p. 336). Similarly, Lynch (2005) critiques the condemnatory rhetoric of the Roman Catholic Church’s pastoral letter on homosexuality. She ultimately claims that in order to speak with sufficient authority to be structurally meaningful, the possibility for conciliatory rhetoric between the Church and its LGBT adherents is precluded as a means for the pastoral letter to garner the support of multiple (and often conservative) bishops.

Rhetorical scholars of religion and non-normative sexuality have also examined the counterdiscourses produced by LGBT-identified religious adherents. Chávez (2004), for example, critiques the activist claims of the LGBT Christian group *Soulforce* and ultimately proposes that they adopt new rhetorical frames that are more politically challenging and productive. Usher (2007) similarly examines the rhetoric of a pro-LGBT Christian bus tour called *Equality Ride*. Although Usher’s analysis is more celebratory

than Chávez's, he too calls attention to the ways in which the tour must negotiate its simultaneous potential to promote ideals of LGBT religious inclusion/tolerance on the one hand, and compromise the safety of its participants on the other.

These studies are both points of comparison and points of contrast in analyzing sash wearing rhetoric. Comparatively, Bennett, Lynch, Chávez, and Usher all testify to the value of examining the complex symbol use and meaning making that adhere both within religious institutions' attempts to deal with LGBT people, and within LGBT religious people's concomitant attempts to challenge/change religious institutions. With respect to contrast, the rhetoric of the RSM and RSA does not as readily lend itself to the adoption of political and activist frames for rhetorical analysis as these previous studies do. Despite the topical relevance of these studies to the analysis of sash wearer's discourse, the studies each adopt an orientation to rhetorics of sexuality that assumes that the rhetorics are political in both substance and implication. Although I am inclined to adopt this assumption myself, it is one that is explicitly rejected by the RSM and the RSA.

The RSM asserts on multiple occasions that "the wearing of the rainbow sash is neither confrontation/protest nor political" (Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.b, para. 2). Rather, the RSM describes its activities as "an attempt to tell our stories outside the framework of homophobia" (para. 2), and as "a call for a conversion of heart" (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.e, para. 4). The RSA asserts this point less frequently, but also contests the reading of sash wearing as a form of activism. McNeill (2007) notes in his history of the RSA that sash wearers have been denied communion

“because the Vatican perceives it as a protest of Church teaching,” but he unequivocally asserts that “it is not” and that sash wearing is instead “a celebration of glbt [sic] sexuality, and of the diversity of God's marvelous creation” (para. 13). Understanding these assertions requires a deeper engagement with the literature on sexuality and sexual politics than provided by the studies mentioned above: an engagement that does not take the politicization of sexuality for granted, but instead actively demonstrates the relevance of sexual politics to the RSM and RSA by unpacking the ways in which sexuality has been and continues to be enmeshed within various political projects.

The following subsections undertake this task. First, I discuss the various conceptions of (non-normative) human sexuality that theorists have documented and/or proposed. Next, I move from these largely ontological questions toward a consideration of the various axiological commitments that sexually non-normative people and groups have adopted. Finally, I make direct application of these considerations to the RSM and RSA to demonstrate: (1) why it is appropriate to deploy theories of sexual politics in understanding avowedly apolitical LGBT Catholic groups like the RSM and RSA; and (2) why it is appropriate to figure the findings of that analysis as a contribution to the literature on LGBT religious activism more generally.

Conceptions of Sexuality

Given the ubiquity of contemporary discourse surrounding sexuality, particularly in its purportedly less common or less *normal* iterations, it is unsurprising that the very notion of what sexuality is, is highly contested. Obvious though this may be, popular discourse can also promote the illusion that this contest over defining sexuality is simply

polarized or bifurcated. Indeed, questions such as “is it a choice?” or “what did I do wrong?” along with assertions such as “I was born this way” and “I can’t help the way God made me” illustrate this bifurcation. As such, one might reasonably hypothesize that questions concerning the ontological nature of sexuality can be neatly divided into a typology that separates the “nature” camp from the “nurture” camp, or that separates those who believe non-normative sexuality is a choice from those who believe that it is not.

A survey of social theorists’ work on the nature of sexuality, though, offers a much different and much more complicated picture. This subsection discusses some of the ontological definitions of sexuality that animate both historical and contemporary thought on the issue. In doing so, it demonstrates that how one defines sexuality is not only a contested issue, but a profoundly contextual one. To accomplish this, I synthesize various ontological orientations to sexuality into a tripartite typology that I believe emerges from the literature. Within this typology we see each of the following orientations: (1) a conception of sexuality as a static and innate orientation to sexual practice; (2) a conception of sexuality as a cultivated but otherwise static orientation to sexual practice; and (3) a conception of sexuality as a performed and evolving set of proclivities toward sexual practice. I believe this typology, while certainly not a comprehensive one, is useful in that it not only troubles the nature-nurture and choice-destiny paradoxes mentioned above, but it also defies any easy equation of these ontological orientations with support for or rejection of non-normative sexualities. Closely examining ontological orientations to sexuality, then, is the first step toward

understanding where sash wearing fits within a diverse array of rhetorics and activisms concerning non-normative gender/sexuality.

Sexuality as an innate and static orientation.

Conceiving of sexuality as an innate and static orientation toward the world positions sexual preference as a trait much like hair color, height, eye color, or any other element of personal identity which is predetermined at birth and “essential” to the being possessing it (Slagle, 1995, p. 93). This is, relatively speaking, a new orientation to sexuality with origins in the emergence of modernism. In the first of a planned six-volume work on the development of sexuality, Foucault (1990) claims that the practice of theorizing sexuality as a trait and therefore as an element of identity emerged in response to the rise of the modern bureaucratic and bourgeois state. With the emergence of a governing entity that could rationally lay claim to control over more than merely the capacity of subjects to live or die, he argues, states began employing discourses that technologically and scientifically ordered the day-to-day bodily (and in this case sexual) activities of its citizens.

Whether or not one endorses Foucault’s account of the emergence of sexual identity as a historicized discursive possibility (and those embracing an innate and static orientation toward identity likely would not), his formulation does account for the emergence of these theories on a bare historical level. According to Sullivan (2003), the notion of “homosexuality as the basis of an individual’s nature” gave rise to a body of nineteenth century thought that posited same-sex desire as an “inversion” or mismatch between an individual’s biological sex and the sexual “drives” of their “psyche” (p. 4).

These formulations, according to Sullivan, predominated among the foremost scientists of the time and were rather protean in terms of their political implications. While some argued that the congenital nature of seemingly aberrant sexual desires decriminalized the enactment of those desires and made them as natural as opposite-sex love (Ulrichs, cited in Sullivan, 2003), others used an innate and static vision of sexuality to substantiate “medical scrutiny” in search of a “cure” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 7).

Far from being a purely historical phenomenon, though, conceptions of sexuality as static and innate are also in heavy circulation contemporaneously. According to Slagle (2007), LGBT studies and gay liberationist perspectives embrace this “essentialism” of non-normative gender/sexuality (p. 323). This essentialism animates an “identity politics” that makes claims grounded in civil rights discourses possible (Sullivan, 2003, p. 82), discourses that argue for the inclusion of LGBT peoples’ sexual proclivities among other natural sources of human difference that should not (and legally cannot) be used as a basis for differential treatment. Just as with the notion of natural inversion that preceded it, though, Sullivan argues that identity politics is equally double-edged in its claim of rights rooted in the innateness of sexual orientation. She states that “identity politics has been accused of being complicit in the systems of meaning it aims to challenge” (p. 82). Specifically, identity politics’ reliance on the same “notion of an autonomous, unified, coherent, and knowable self” that have been deployed to make moralistic claims that criminalize and clinicalize sexually non-normative people (p. 83).

Sexuality as a cultivated and static orientation.

One can observe similarly divergent sets of political projects deriving discursive force from the second ontological orientation to non-normative sexual and gender identity: the assumption that gender and sexuality, though relatively stable in the long term, are initially cultivated or enculturated. In a way similar to an orientation toward sexuality as static and innate, sexuality viewed as cultivated and static largely conceives of non-normative sexual proclivities as either present or absent within an individual. This view, however, posits that these proclivities are to some degree formed by an individual's social milieu. Perhaps the most prominent (historic?) example of this orientation is Freud's (1997) view that homosexuality is a neurosis driven by an individual's failure to identify with the parent of the same gender. However, this is not the only instantiation of a view of sexuality as cultivated and static. Massad (2008), for example discusses the late nineteenth century Orientalist theory of the "sotadic zone": a geographic region of the world in which male sodomy⁴ was more common (p. 10). The lines of this zone, Massad notes, encompassed an Orientalized and therefore culturally aberrant Middle East while excluding discursively privileged regions such as Northern and Western Europe.

Contemporarily, theories of sexuality marked by cultivation and stasis seek to both maintain and challenge the marginalization of LGBT and other sexually non-normative people. In the aforementioned study by Bennett (2003), reparative therapy

⁴ The notion and term "sodomy" is itself an important site of articulation for Christianity and sexuality. As Sullivan (2003) notes, the term is a reference to the Biblical city of Sodom, which God destroys in punishment for its wickedness in the book of Genesis. This wickedness has, by convention, been viewed as sexual in nature, and the term sodomy thus became culturally and legally significant throughout the Christian world as a means of classifying, rejecting, and prohibiting a range of [sexual] practices which did not have procreation as their aim: that is, 'unnatural' forms of sexual relations" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 3).

represents a means for divine intervention in the disordered and immoral sexual proclivities that those with same-sex desires have actively adopted. Conversely gay liberationist politics, according to Sullivan (2003), also sometimes appeals to a paradigm of “choice” (or at least the choice of avowing a sexually non-normative identity), in order to construct a “positive” and agentic view of sexual non-normativity that the notion of an innate or “congenital” theory of sexuality does not allow for (p. 30).

Sexuality as performed and evolving proclivities.

A final ontological orientation toward sexuality departs entirely from the idea that sexuality should constitute a static identity at all. Somewhat ironically, this orientation to sexuality is evident both in the era preceding modernity (Foucault, 1990), and in what Sullivan characterizes as the “postmodern” era of social life and thought captured by queer theory (p. 205). Foucault (1990) views the possibility for sexuality to be inscribed in identity as a product of the modern moment rather than an ontological statement of fact. He claims that prior to the emergence of modernity, society rejected same-sex sexual practices as one among many sinful sexual practices that were never understood as either innate to the individual practicing them, or exclusive of normative opposite-sex sexual practices. Queer theory, based heavily upon the theories of Foucault and other poststructuralists, also rejects the notion of sexual identity in favor of a “politics of difference” that views non-normative sexual practice as an avenue for challenging the idea of sexual normalcy altogether (Slagle, 2007). Queer theorists argue that gender, sexuality, and even sex are fundamental social constructions and therefore can never be

understood as natural, innate, or static (Butler, 1993). As prominent queer theorist Michael Warner (1999) succinctly argues:

The psychic dimensions of sex change as people develop new repertoires of fantasy and new social relations, like “white” or “construction worker,” not to mention new styles of gender and shifting balances of power between men and women. Through long processes of change, some desires too stigmatized to be thought about gradually gain legitimacy, such as the desire for a homosexual lover. Others lose. Even desires now thought to be natural and normative, such as equal romantic love, only came into being relatively late in human history; they depend just as much on politics and cultural change as do the stigmatized ones. (p. 11)

As with orientations toward sexuality that posit its innateness and/or its stasis, theorizing sexuality as performed and evolving fails to map definitionally either acceptance or rejection of non-normative sexualities. On one hand, the ontology supports the pre-modern (but in some cases thoroughly contemporary) assertion that LGBT people deserve marginalization for choosing a sinful or aberrant set of sexual practices over more “natural” alternatives. On the other, this ontology is also consistent with a radically queer worldview that advocates for the rejection of normal sexuality altogether as an oppressive construction that artificially bounds continually developing avenues for human intimacy and sexual fulfillment.

Definitions of sexuality are thus important but fundamentally protean elements of sexual politics. Assumptions concerning the fundamental nature of sexuality within (or

between) any of these orientations are integral to but not definitive of activist sexual politics. The RSM and RSA not only can be said to approximate ontological assumptions of sexuality that are sometimes associated with LGBT advocacy, but can also fit along a continuum of actual activities that have been deemed explicitly (sexually) “political.”

Axiological Variants: Inclusion, Separatism, and Difference as Models of Change

Alongside ontology, Miller (2005) identifies “axiological considerations” as central to the formation of theory (p. 30). She defines axiology as “the study of values,” or philosophizing about the role values should play in understanding and theorizing the social world. Although neither this portion of the literature review nor certainly the RSM and RSA themselves are expressly concerned with theory building as such, a typology of axiological perspectives offers a useful lens for understanding LGBT activism and to underscore the intimate relationship that exists between one’s political commitments and one’s overall understanding of the social world. An immense amount of the literature examines the political activism LGBT people engage in to build social worlds that do not marginalize them. Far from chronicling a monolithic march toward equality, though, the story of LGBT activism is fraught with competing claims, agendas, and visions for what a world without LGBT marginalization should look like.

This section is not intended to advocate for one axiology over another or to highlight my own commitments (see Chapter Three for a discussion of the researcher’s axiology). Rather, the paragraphs below define and discuss three different conceptions of LGBT-affirmative social change: (1) axiologies of inclusion/reform; (2) axiologies of separatism; and (3) axiologies of difference. Similar to the earlier discussion of

ontological orientations to sexuality, this taxonomy of activism has heuristic and analytic utility rather than a real world capacity to separate different LGBT activisms concretely and uncontroversially. I believe that it is a useful mechanism for illustrating how sash wearer's rhetoric, though potentially less political (read radical) than other LGBT groups' approaches to activism, are nonetheless commensurate with well-established traditions of sexual-political activism.

Axiologies of inclusion/reform yield approaches to activism that are closely associated with the rights claims of the mainstream LGBT movement. According to Morgan (2001), rights claims "envisage a particular type of subject and a particular model of that subject's relationship to government" (p. 208). This model, he claims, is rooted "in enlightenment notions of the rational subject who has natural or inherent rights, protected by government under a social contract which enshrines the rule of law" (p. 208). From the axiological standpoint of inclusion/reform, then, the marginalization of LGBT people is always already in breach of the system as it *should* work. The role of the LGBT activist is to label these disparities as breaches and lay claim to the institutions and protections she or he has been denied. Examples of this axiology in action include legal challenges to the illegality of same-sex marriage (Eaklor, 2008, p. 240), the successful pursuit of the U.S. Supreme court's nullification of sodomy laws (p. 186), and recently successful attempts to overturn the ban on LGBT people serving openly in the United States military (p. 200).

Axiologies of separatism have their foundations in lesbian feminism and depart from rights-based conceptions of activism in that they conceive of oppression (in this case

at the hands of patriarchy) as “an absolute aspect of our culture” that cannot be remediated but instead must be abjected (hooks, 2000, p. 72). Such commitments once led to the formation of all-female communities that treated lesbianism as the embodiment of a “feminist lifestyle” (p. 29). Although they seem temperate when compared to lesbian separatism, the activities of radical gay liberationist groups also emerge from a separatist mold; notions such as “gay power” and practices, such as forcibly “outing” prominent community members in the name of political struggle, are both driven by the twin separatist contentions that LGBT people: (1) are essentially different from their heterosexual counterparts; and (2) are entitled to the viability of their identities even if it is at the expense of heterosexuals (Alsenas, 2008, p. 129).

Axiologies of difference, like axiologies of separatism, also espouse radical politico-cultural change in the belief that heterosexual privilege, or “heteronormativity” is deeply ingrained within modern society (Sullivan, 2003, p. 59). Eschewing separatism, however, activism of difference view sexual non-normativity not as an essential identitarian disparity but as a constructed site of social marginalization that can be appropriated and channeled to denaturalize privileged discourses and create the space for change. This entails, according to Slagle (2006), a rejection of both assimilationist rights claims, and essentialist notions of LGBT identity in favor of an understanding of sexuality as performative. Examples of difference-based activism include Berlant and Warner’s (1998) call for a defense of public sexual spaces in the city, the die-ins staged by queer activist group ACT Up in protest of insufficient public scrutiny of HIV/AIDS (DeLuca, 1999), and Cohen’s (1997) call for a coalitional queer politics in which “one’s

relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades" (p. 438).

Positioning Rainbow Sash Rhetoric in LGBT Activism

The RSM and RSA, whether avowedly political or not, can be partially elucidated through the lens of sexual politics. Specifically, statements by both groups reveal that they perceive sexuality to be ontologically *fixed and static*, and are axiologically committed to *inclusion/reform* with respect to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The RSM's reliance on an ontology of sexuality as *fixed and static* is evident within statements like "homosexuality is a way of being before it is a way of behaving" (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 4). Meanwhile, its assertion that it does "not seek separate liturgies" (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para.6), and rather pursues a "conversion of heart" among Catholic Church leaders on the topic of homosexuality bespeaks its axiological commitment to an agenda of *inclusion/reform* (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.e, para. 4). The RSA articulates its sense of sexuality's fixity and stasis through appeals to sexuality as "a sacred gift" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e, para. 1) and calls sash wearing a means of "sacramentally expressing the truth of our lives" (para. 4). The RSA also strongly evokes a commitment to *inclusion* when it alternately characterizes sash wearing as a means of "claiming our place at Christ's table" (para. 4). Finally, they appeal to a vision of Church *reform* that closely resembles the RSM's, calling on the Catholic Church "to embrace a new day of integrity and freedom" (para. 4), marked by a "new appreciation of human sexuality in all of its diversity and beauty" (para. 1).

These points of resonance with literature on LGBT activism make it important for an examination of sash wearing rhetoric to incorporate politically oriented understandings of gender/sexuality whether or not they are actively endorsed by the RSM and RSA. Moreover, both groups' explicit denial of a political stance/agenda make them useful texts with which to potentially stretch or add to the ontological and axiological categories I have laid out above. The sash wearers invite interrogation, for example, of the frequent equation of essentialism and assimilationism with non-radical rights discourses (e.g. Slagle, 1995; 2006). Within the purview of a religiously (rather than secularly) normative regime, however, do calls for LGBT inclusion have a more radical political valence? Similarly, where (if at all) might the religiously grounded appeals of the RSM and RSA feature within the typically "rationalist" rights claims of inclusion/reform activism (Morgan, 2001, p. 208)? I take up these and other potential implications for LGBT discourse in my ultimate analysis.

As important and compelling as the literature on LGBT discourse and activism is to rainbow sash rhetoric, it cannot encapsulate all of the dynamics at play in the RSM and RSM's symbol use. The RSM and RSA both conduct much of their communicative activities online and as such the section to follow centers literature on the importance of digital discourses among marginalized groups.

Marginal Digital Discourses

Locating rainbow sash rhetoric within the robust body of literature on the internet's relationship to marginalized individuals and communities is in many ways less fraught than locating it with respect to LGBT politics. In contrast to the RSM's

disavowal of politics, it explicitly claims to be a primarily “cyber-based organization” whose “membership keeps in contact through our website” (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 8). Although the RSA makes no similar claim about itself, the group does feature a great deal of organizationally important content on its website as well. Founder and primary organizer Brian McNeill’s e-mail address and phone number are listed on the RSA’s homepage (McNeill, 2011a), visitors to the site are offered the opportunity to join the RSA’s mailing list and “receive information about Rainbow Sash Alliance activities in your area” (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.d, para. 1), and an open call for participation in the group’s Pentecost sash wearing activities is also readily accessible from the home page (McNeill, 2011b). From the standpoint of analyzing rainbow sash rhetoric, the organizational significance of the RSM and RSA’s websites is important in that it demands that research on the groups engage with what it means to be on or in the internet as a marginalized group seeking social change.

I first parse out how the internet functions as a space for discourse and ultimately draw upon Fraser’s (1990) theory of “subaltern counterpublics” as a useful way of synthesizing sometimes disparate findings (p. 67). I then turn to several theorists’ renderings of how activism is conducted on the internet and offer examples of existing research that demonstrates these various functions. I work to specifically position the RSM and RSA within both of these bodies of scholarly thought as they are discussed and, as in the last section, close by contemplating how sash wearers’ use of the internet could potentially expand upon existing literature.

The Internet as a space for (Counter)public spheres

Communication relies on metaphors that render symbolic action and meaning construction intelligible. By relying upon a metaphor of message transmission, for example, theorists are able to productively figure symbols and intended meanings as messages that are sent from one party to another. Similar metaphors apply to conceptualization of the discourse that circulates on the internet. One need only look to popular phrases such as “*getting* online,” “*going* online,” or being “*in cyberspace*” to see that one of the major mechanisms by which we make sense of the World Wide Web and the interactions it mediates is by referring to it as a space or a place. Moreover, upon reviewing a selection of literature on the internet and its implications, it is clear that scholars find nearly as much utility in space/place conceptions of the internet as the general public does.

Conceiving of the internet as a space or place has invited theorists to consider it as more than a mechanism for messages to pass from one point to another: instead, theorists have frequently been given to figuring the internet as a new or expanded public sphere of discourse. First proposed by Habermas (1989), the concept of the public sphere has come to occupy a central place in contemporary critical theory. Much akin to the manner in which Foucault (1990) theorizes the emergence of sexuality as identity, Habermas (1989) suggests that the public sphere is a product of the modern historical moment. He argues that “the sphere of the public arose in the broader strata of the bourgeoisie as an expansion and at the same time completion of the intimate sphere of the conjugal family” (p. 50). Unlike Foucault, Habermas is not altogether critical of this discourse. Rather, he sees the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere as a circumstance that

fundamentally limited the capacity of longstanding ruling powers to exercise domination over individuals. It did this (and does this), he suggests, by fundamentally separating “civil society’s realm of commodity exchange and social labor” along with the “conjugal family’s internal space” from the “spheres of public authority” in which the state and its agents are empowered to hold sway (p. 30). This separation of spheres, according to Habermas, established boundaries and limits on state power that were subject to the rational and deliberative discourse of bourgeois society, thereby rending from the state the capacity to establish the boundaries or limits of its own institutional power.

Multiple scholars focusing on the social implications of the internet recognize strong linkages between the rational-deliberative ideals of Habermas’ public sphere, the broad interactive capacities afforded by internet technologies, and the unregulated space for discourse that both of them promote (Anderson, 2003; Campbell, 2008a; Herman and Ettema, 2007; Papacharissi, 2007; Salter, 2003; Ward and Gibson, 2009). Papacharissi (2007) for instance, suggests that if we conceive of the public sphere, after Habermas, “as a mode and ideal for civic participation and action” (p. 234), then the broad “access to information” (p. 234), “reciprocity” (p. 235), and even the “commercialization” (p. 235) of the internet are all commensurate with his standard. Moving beyond this theoretical discussion of the connections between the internet and an expanded/altered public sphere, Anderson (2003) actively claims that the internet is creating new public spheres in Islamic society. He states that the interactivity of web based features such as hyperlinks, along with the commentary these technologies invite on issues such as Qur’anic interpretation, are collectively producing a “creolized” sphere “between more private

worlds and those of public rituals” (p. 901). Anderson thus argues that the internet has produced a new and larger “public sphere” in the Islamic world “which gathers them up in an intermediate space between the discursive space of Islamic textual traditions . . . and divergent authority that remains embedded in personal experience and personal relations” (p. 900) Indeed, the heuristic (and sometimes theoretical and methodological) efficacy of figuring the World Wide Web as an expansion or reworking of the public sphere has become so broadly recognized that it has driven activism as well as analysis. Herman and Ettema (2007), for instance, argue that the expansion of internet access in “(digitally) divided” communities represents a unique site of intervention for scholars of communication in that those communities (read publics) become possessed of a greater “capacity for self-help as a process of constructing bridges that could span structural holes” (p. 259).

The easy points of resonance between the public sphere and cyberspace have also provoked much scholarly suspicion and many calls for caution. Campbell (2008a), for instance, draws conclusions that are nearly antithetical to Anderson’s despite being derived from a similar set of texts. Analyzing a sample of 100 Christian blogs, Campbell notes that despite persistent assertions of the internet’s capacity to “flatten hierarchies and give voice to the voiceless” (p. 251), “Christian bloggers were far more likely to affirm a category of religious authority than challenge or speak critically about them [religious authorities]” (p. 269). Margolis and Resnick (2000) echo these sentiments in much broader terms. They observe that internet technology “may provide instant public

feedback about the events of the day, but it is unlikely to lead to the triumph of popular sovereignty and direct democracy” (p. 207).

Part of the difficulty in looking to the internet as a kind of expanded or reconstituted public is that the very notion of *the* public is inadequate in accounting for the interactions and activism to be found online. Contemporary social movements have in recent decades departed from monolithic theories of ideology and/or “theories of organization and rationality” that could once be used to deconstruct and analyze most forms of collective action (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield, 1994, p. 5). Instead these “new social movements” or “NSMs” are marked by more opaque and diverse internal and external relationships of power than their forebears were (p. 5). Examples of NSMs, as listed by Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield, include “peace movements, student movements, the anti-nuclear energy protests, minority nationalism, gay rights, women’s rights, animal rights, alternative medicine” and a host of others (p. 5). Salter (2003) observes that NSMs proliferate in cyberspace, and he argues this should give pause to students of new media who feel tempted to unproblematically read the public sphere into the internet. He argues, after Habermas, that in order for the “civil society phenomena” of the public sphere to be possible, there must be the potential for successful communicative action “premised on the existence of criticizable validity claims” (p. 136). This, he reasons, “might be unattainable on the internet” where a “lack of shared lifeworld, or even a shared cultural background” often characterizes interactions (p. 136).

These criticisms, though grounded within the empirical realities of online social interactions, are not altogether new. Habermas (1989) himself positions the public sphere

as thoroughly the product of historical circumstances, and other scholars even further critique the lacunae of its applicability. Griffin (1996), for example, argues the public sphere is “not only the result of historical changes, economic influences, or religious perspectives” but also is rooted in an “essentialist view of women and men” (p. 22). In light of these and other criticisms, Fraser (1990) proposes the notion of “subaltern counterpublics” as an intervention within public sphere theory (p. 67). Fraser suggests that this intervention recuperates the heuristically and descriptively useful elements of Habermas’ public sphere theory while discarding the ahistoric and apolitical notion of a singular public in which individuals are equally empowered to critically deliberate. Instead, the social landscape, dotted with multiple and definitionally overlapping *publics*, often constitute “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 67).

The counterpublic reinforces the findings of theorists such as Anderson (2003) while it simultaneously allows for critique of a single cyber-public sphere grounded in the looseness and diversity of online social networks used by social movements. The notion of counterpublicity echoes the loosely associated NSMs that theorists have discussed (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994), and further helps to account for why NSMs heavily rely on new media (Salter, 2003; Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). Ward and Gibson (2009), for example, note that while “new technologies have not revolutionized or destroyed traditional collective organizations” (p. 34), the internet may still be considered “an outsiders’ medium” in that it presents a mechanism for

communication with “significantly lower. . . costs for resource-poor organizations and networks” (pp. 32-33). Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht (2004) mirror Ward and Gibson’s analysis while also expanding upon it, stating:

Whatever the preferred definition of a social movement, it is clear that social movements cannot exist without sustained interactions both internally and with their external reference groups. This points to the centrality of communication and, given both the network structure and their financial resources, to the attractiveness of ICTs [Information and Communication Technologies] (p. 4)

Several studies of specific online communities confirm the idea that the internet can be a fruitful site for the production of subaltern counterpublics. Scholars have, for instance, documented the importance of pagan listservs in constructing and circulating discourses on how authentic pagans might navigate consumerist appropriation of their beliefs (Coco & Woodward, 2007), and the use of the internet as a space for conveying religious beliefs grounded in lived experience rather than authoritarian doctrine (Campbell, 2005; Howard, 2010).

Perhaps more germane to the present study, the significance of the internet in carving out subaltern counterpublics is also well documented among LGBT communities. Specifically prominent are the observations that: (1) the internet provides a more anonymous, and therefore safer, setting in which sexualities that risk censure can be explored/expressed (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2008; Kang & Yang, 2009; Nip, 2004; Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004); and (2) the internet offers LGBT people, as

a marginalized group, a useful tool in making social connections and building communities (Bryson, MacIntosh, Jordan, & Lin, 2005; Campbell, 2005; Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac, & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Gray, 2009; Kang & Yang, 2009; Nip, 2004; Young, 2004).

The RSM and the RSA's intense reliance on web-based methods of communication bespeaks the internet's fecundity as a space for the construction of counterpublics and the generation/dissemination of their counter-hegemonic discourses. Sash wearer's geographic diffusion, along with the relative infrequency of their eponymous activity make the internet's capacity to act as a place/space vital in the construction and maintenance of collective identity. It is literally one of the only "places" that sash wearers can congregate as sash wearers outside of the Pentecost mass itself. Far from merely constituting a region of one single cyber public, however, sash wearers are strategic in the way that they rely on the internet's accessibility and interactivity as a medium. Building what Howard (2010) would call a "vernacular web" with ideologically similar people and organizations (p. 739), sash wearers' websites lack mechanisms for the opposed or uninitiated to engage in direct communication with the community online. The sash wearers' websites are thus discrete, clearly identifiable, and intentionally constructed *counterpublics*, in which marginalized and oppositional systems of meaning can circulate with less risk of reprisal from those endorsing the existing regimes of power/meaning that circulate within the (cyber) public writ large.

Rhetorical analysis of rainbow sash rhetoric also necessitates an examination of precisely how online counterpublics use the internet to engage in opposition/activism.

Accordingly, the subsection below examines several scholars' structural taxonomies of the different kinds of political activism the internet is used to facilitate.

The Internet as a Site/Mechanism for Activism

I turn in this section to characterizing the multiple iterations of internet activism that occur within them. Margolis and Resnick (2000) offer a useful starting place in coming to grips with the various types of activism that find their homes online. Their three-part typology of activism is centrally concerned with what role the internet plays within collective action for change. Fundamentally, they argue that the internet can play one of three roles in social activism: it can be the object of social activism; it can be the exigence driving social action; or it can be the vehicle for social action. Politics that center the internet as an object of change, called "intra-Net politics" (p. 8), "concern matters that can be settled without reference to political or legal entities outside the Net community itself" such as contention surrounding online standards of technology and behavior (pp 8-9). Politics in which the internet is the exigence, called "politics that affects the net" (p. 10), usually play out partially offline and are comprised of the actions stakeholders take to (de)regulate the role the internet is able to play in issues of privacy, property, and other extra-digital legal considerations. Finally, politics in which the internet is a vehicle, otherwise known as "political uses of the net" (p. 14), most closely embody the forms of online activism cited in this paper. Simply put, this category includes all activities that employ "the Net to influence political activities online" (p. 14).

Each of these instantiations of politics online are important objects for communication study in that they are oriented toward understanding, channeling, or

regulating the features of the Internet as a (new) communicative medium. However, sash wearers' online communication is very clearly an example of the final of these three categories: "political uses of the net" (Margolis & Resnick, 2000, p. 14). The institutional and dogmatic change sash wearers seek within the Catholic Church certainly cannot be enacted "without reference to . . . entities outside the Net community" (pp. 8-9), and neither site makes any reference to the internet itself having any impact on the position of LGBT Catholics vis-à-vis the Church or the status of Catholic teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality. Rather, the internet is understood by both groups as a tool with which to supplement and enhance their core activity of wearing sashes to Pentecost Mass. Proceeding from these observations, the remainder of this section specifically examines different "political uses of the net" (p. 14). In doing so, I hope to contextualize sash wearers' online discourse in greater detail than Margolis and Resnick's (2000) typology does.

Vegh (2003) offers a second typology of cyberactivisms that picks up where Margolis and Resnick's system leaves off. Although Vegh does not specifically position his system as such, each of the "general areas" of online activism that he identifies are tacitly centered in a view of internet politics as politics that make use of the internet to produce outside social change (p. 72). Far from contradicting Margolis and Resnick's system, I believe that the two are best used in tandem, with Margolis and Resnick's taxonomy as a first-order method of categorization and Vegh's as a second-order method to be employed where individual activisms are deemed to be "political uses of the net" (Margolis & Resnick, 2000, p. 14). Vegh (2003) argues that cyberactivism generally falls

into one of three categories: the promotion of “awareness/advocacy” (p. 72); “organization/mobilization” of the activist community or its allies (p. 74); and “action/reaction” that directly employs internet technologies as a means of causing harm to objects of activism (p. 75). In an effort to better elucidate this second-order system of classifying internet activism, I take up each of the three categories in the paragraphs below. Accompanying a more extensive definition of each category I offer a few examples of this activism that have been documented in the literature.

Activisms of awareness/advocacy.

Cyberactivism that produces awareness/advocacy generally takes the form of “Web sites” or “e-mail distribution lists” that engage in “information distribution” (Vegh, 2003, p. 72). The awareness/advocacy function of cyberactivism is most often centrally important in instances when “traditional information channels” are “controlled by those whose interest is counter to that of activists” (p. 72). An example of this form of internet activism can be found in Campbell’s (2005) study conceptualizing the internet as a “sacramental space” for the dissemination of religious views (p. 111). Although Campbell does not insinuate that this conception of cyberspace is uniquely useful for religious dissidence, she does note that the use of the internet to disseminate religious information and perspectives has “enabled new religions” (p. 28) to flourish. Turner (2007) finds similar religious utility in online awareness/advocacy activities, suggesting that the use of online technologies to distribute and study the Qur’an has allowed practitioners of Islam in some localities to find new ways of engaging with the religious text that deviate from traditionalist approaches of “book-based learning by rote” (p. 126).

Activisms of action/reaction.

The tactics of cyberactivism oriented toward action/reaction are far more diverse than activism designed for awareness/advocacy. These efforts can involve the clandestine distribution of “communiqués” deemed unfavorable to the interests of the institutional object(s) of activism, the defacement of websites or establishment of parallel sites that are critical of the object(s) of activism, or even the use of programs designed to divert money and resources away from the object(s) of activism (Vegh, 2003). The exemplars of this form of activism as it is taken up in the literature are the anti-capitalist and anti-globalization campaigns spearheaded by the Zapatista movement (Aelst & Walgrave, 2002; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Vegh, 2003) According to Kahn and Kellner (2004), the Zapatistas are remarkable for their “early adoption” of internet technologies in “broadcasting and tailoring their own messages to an emerging global audience” in ways that escape governmental or corporate interdiction (p. 87). The Zapatistas are far from the only practitioners of action/reaction, though. Pickard (2008), for instance, documents activist groups *Indymedia* and *MoveOn* “co-opting” commercial internet models to create radical democratic norms (p. 642). In what is perhaps the most direct example of action/reaction, Aouragh (2008) documents the usage of internet technologies in Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon to hold online candlelight vigils for Palestinian victims of Israeli violence in the face of police barriers to physical demonstration. Aouragh argues that these vigils, along with similar activities, constitute a “cyber intifada” for those prevented (either by geography or state authority) from engaging in embodied protest (p. 110).

Activisms of organization/mobilization.

Finally, and perhaps principally from a rhetorical perspective, cyberactivism oriented toward organization/mobilization relies on a relatively “straightforward array” of tactics which usually include basic platforms for the provision of information that “influences the readers to adopt the desired point of view and prompts them to take action on the side of the cause” (Vegh, 2003, p. 75). This action taking can assume a number of forms: “offline action” such as demonstrating at a prescribed place at a prescribed date and time (p. 74); online activity that is normally done offline, such as writing letters to congress (p. 75); or online activity that is only possible online, such as flooding a website with simultaneous e-mail to “test” the communicative capacities of a “target entity” (p. 75). Examples of this type of activism as seen in the literature include: NSM’s usage of inherently fragmented/fragmenting internet technologies to enhance coalition building (Fenton, 2008b); NSM’s usage of inherently fragmented/fragmenting internet technologies to mobilize members through repeated (and fleeting) citations of hope (Fenton, 2008a); Gerhards and Rucht’s (1992) finding that West German activist groups successfully mobilized protest against U.S. policy by “bridging” anti-capitalist “master frames” with micro-level “group specific frames” (p.584); and Wojcieszak’s (2009) research suggesting that online radical environmentalist and neo-Nazi groups’ depend on the homogeneity of members’ offline social groups to increase the persuasiveness of their calls to action.

Although Sash wearer’s online rhetoric fits comfortably within the “political uses of the net” identified within Margolis and Resnick’s (2000) typology of internet activisms

(p. 14), it isn't so easily categorized within the confines of Vegh's (2003) more specific typology. Indeed, the sites' discourses seem to straddle two activisms within his taxonomy. On the one hand, the RSM's assertions that "it is important GLBT [sic] Catholics have access to the media in order to get their side out" (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 9), and that it "uses its expertise in the media to have a balanced public conversation" (para. 9), heavily invoke the awareness/advocacy function of cyberactivism discussed above (Vegh, 2003). On the other, the RSM and the RSA also feature discourse which seems obviously oriented toward organization/mobilization; most notably, both sites actively encourage visitors to don sashes themselves in support of the organizations' goals (McNeill, 2007; The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.e). While this lack of easy categorization shouldn't be read as a weakness in Vegh's (2003) typology, it does suggest one of several ways in which sash wearing and this thesis' analysis thereof might expand upon the literature I have presented. I discuss some of these potential contributions in greater detail below.

Potential Contributions of Rainbow Sash Rhetoric to the Study of Digital Discourses

Taken in aggregate, the literature on marginal(ized) digital discourses is an important piece of the puzzle in coming to terms with the rhetoric and activities of sash wearers. This literature supplements the primarily ideological orientation of many perspectives on LGBT discourse and sexual politics by encouraging and facilitating a more grounded consideration of precisely where and how the RSM's rhetoric gets produced and distributed. The rhetorical study of rainbow sash rhetoric is equipped to bring new perspectives to bear upon this body of literature in that it raises critical

questions about: (1) the implications of marginalized groups' capacity to carve out relatively insulated spaces online; and (2) the functionality of distinguishing between the awareness/advocacy and organization/mobilization goals of various cyberactivisms. With respect to the former, examination of the rhetoric surrounding sash wearing and sash wearers potentially illuminates how online spaces can contextually trouble which publics are dominant and which publics counter that dominance. For instance, how might the features of cyberspace allow for sash wearer's opponents to (re)figure themselves as victims of sash wearers' oppressive beliefs? With respect to the latter, the multiple functions fulfilled by the RSM and RSA's online discourses facilitates interrogation of whether it is most useful to think of efforts at awareness/advocacy and organization/mobilization as separate and hierarchically important, separate but equal, or functionally intertwined.

In the last section of this review below, I take up a third and final body of literature that is central to understanding rainbow sash rhetoric: ritual as a symbolic frame for redressive social action.

Ritual Discourse

Although I have demonstrated at length the necessity of couching rainbow sash rhetoric in terms of both LGBT politics and marginal digital discourses as they are applied to social change, these literatures are still ill equipped to fully contextualize the RSM and RSA's eponymous activity of annually wearing rainbow sashes to Pentecost mass. Irrespective of the small ratio of this "real-world" symbolic activity to the volume of online discourse that these respective groups produce, it is clear this activity lies at the

semantic core of the groups' rhetoric and cannot, therefore, be treated as an afterthought. Ritual offers a useful framework for understanding the symbolism that undergirds this activity. In deference to the huge scope of ritual studies, and in a slight departure from the other sections, I focus the final portion of the chapter on laying out a single framework for the study of ritual in detail. In doing so, I mean to offer a systematized and coherent lens through which to view the embodied rhetoric of the RSM: as a ritualistic mechanism for redressing LGBT marginalization at the hands of the Catholic Church.

Defining Ritual

Despite (or perhaps because of) its ubiquity across multiple disciplines, the concept of ritual defies universal definition. As Snoek (2006) puts it, defining ritual has been “notoriously problematic” and “no one seems to like the definitions proposed by anyone else” (p. 3). There are, nevertheless, a number of features that are frequent within various constructions of ritual, and Snoek goes on to list a number of these elements. She offers that rituals are (among other things): “culturally constructed”; “collective”; “symbolic”; “structured”; “purposeful”; a means for “creating/organizing society/social groups”; and a means for “creating change/transiton” (p. 11). Other scholars have added to this piecemeal characterization of ritual, suggesting that ritual occurs outside the realm of the everyday (Leach, 1968), and that rituals can be intelligibly categorized according to genres akin to those used to understand literature and discourse (Bell, 1997). In spite of this definitional polysemy, examination of sash wearing reveals the heuristic value of ritual as a descriptive framework. To revisit Snoek's (2006) list of descriptors: sash wearing is both “symbolic” and “culturally constructed” in that forges new meanings

through the juxtaposition/intermingling of exigent Catholic religious symbols contained in the mass with an exigent symbol of LGBT rights (the rainbow) (p. 11); sash wearing is “collective” in that it is undertaken by self-declared groups coordinating their symbolic activities (p. 11). It is also collective in that the groups’ activities are further contingent on the collective celebration of Pentecost Mass undertaken by the Catholic ecclesia at large; sash wearing is “structured” in that participants don sashes at a specific time during the mass on a specific day of the Church calendar and do so collectively as a clearly identifiable subset of the Catholic community as a whole (p.11); sash wearing is “purposeful” precisely because it is a mechanism for “creating/organizing society/social groups” and for “creating change/transiton” in Catholic teaching (p. 11). It is a means of “creating/organizing society/social groups” in that it visually lays claim to a shared LGBT Catholic identity where no such collective identity is avowed or endorsed by the Church hierarchy or its teachings (p. 11). It is a means of “creating change/transition” in Catholic teachings and beliefs because it lays claim to LGBT Catholic identity within a space (the mass) that is already central to Catholic religious practice (p. 11), thereby intervening in that practice for transformative purposes.

Jasinski (2001) makes a compelling case for ritual’s explanatory utility within the field of rhetoric. He states that not only are rituals innately communicative events, but they move scholars of communication and rhetoric beyond models of communication as “information dissemination and/or exchange” by offering an exemplar of symbol use that is both “instrumental and constitutive” in its function (p. 496). Thus, ritual invites rhetoricians to expand the field of that which they consider meaning making. Central in

any effort to take up ritual as a rhetorical framework is the capacity to understand it as an interpretive unit rather than “a fact of nature” (Leach, 1968, p. 521). This claim is in keeping with Grimes’ (1990) distinction between rituals and rites. Grimes claims that rites are “specific enactments located in concrete times and places” whereas ritual consists of the various interpretive schemata that observers deploy in making sense of these situated events (p.9). It would be folly, in light of these observations, to deem ritual a meaningless fiction. Rather, it constitutes a highly meaningful fiction that allows rhetoricians and others to systematically theorize apparently disparate instances of performative and symbolic behavior.

In light of the descriptive and explanatory utility ritual offers in this instance, I take up ritual as a communicative/rhetorical theory in this project. Thus, I contend that ritual is composed of constructs placed in relation to one another in pursuit of needed explanation. In order to unpack these constructs and their relationships to one another, and since no literature review could take on the size and scope of ritual studies at large, I specifically review Victor Turner’s theories of the social drama and rituals of passage in the sections below. It is important to note that I do so not as a testament to the inherent superiority of Turner’s formulations over others’, but rather in recognition of their remarkable clarity among competing theories. Turner is meticulous in the development and definition of individual concepts, constructs, and the relationships between them, therefore his formulation is ideal for adaptation to a rhetorical methodology. Like the other two bodies of discourse discussed above, I close my discussion of ritual by exploring the potential contributions that sash wearing can, in turn, make to ritual theory.

Turner's *Ritual Process*

Though Victor Turner's corpus is so large as to make a comprehensive definition of ritual less than entirely useful, I offer one encapsulation he proposed in 1967: "By 'ritual' I mean prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technical routine, having reference to belief in mystical beings and powers" (Turner, 1967, p. 19). Clearly, this definition encapsulates many of the features common of ritual and the attendant characteristics of sash wearing discussed above: it views ritual as a prescribed and formulaic set of activities that are enacted outside the realm of everyday space and time. What this definition only insinuates, however, is the core relationship between structure, process, and anti-structure that rests at the heart of Turner's understanding of ritual.

To Turner (1974) societies or groups undergo various processes of symbolic action that move them (or a selection of their members) between states of "structure" and states of "anti-structure" or "communitas" (p. 45). Structure can be understood within this framework as "all that holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions, including social structure" (p. 47). Put differently, structure characterizes the manner in which life operates in the everyday (Turner, 1982). Communitas or anti-structure characterizes a state in which conventions of structure do not apply. In the state of anti-structure, individuals are thus "undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct" and "nonrational (though not unrational)" (Turner, 1974, pp. 46-47). It is in the process of moving through these "often sacred" states of anti-structure that Turner believes groups and societies reproduce and/or rework their profane or non-sacred everyday structures

(Turner, 1974, p. 47). The social praxis that inheres within these processes of moving between structure, anti-structure, and restored structure is what fundamentally drives my interest in ritual as it relates to sash wearer's scripted, repetitive, communal, and public self- identifications as LGBT Catholics. The proceeding sub-sections discuss the specifics of two prominent social processes that Turner outlined: the social drama (Turner, 1974; 1980; 1982); and the ritual of passage (Turner, 1969; 1982). In doing so, I draw connections between the two that Turner does not fully develop and position sash wearing within the scope of social drama and rituals of passage as I have overlaid them.

The social dramas as a framework for social conflict.

Social Drama is the process developed by Turner (1974) for “describing and analyzing episodes that manifest social conflict” within a group (p. 78). As the name would suggest, this formulation (along with all of those originated by Turner) is a dramatic one, meaning that it seeks to understand social processes using aesthetic performance as a conceptual model (Deflam, 1991). According to Grimes (1985), social drama can be set into motion by “any conflictual social interaction,” and Turner (1980) believes that social drama occurs within all cultures as a mechanism for both social stability and social praxis. Turner (1974) proposes that all social dramas proceed through four stages: (1) breach; (2) crisis; (3) redress/reconciliation; and (4) reintegration or recognition of “irredeemable schism” (p. 79). This model is central to the study of rainbow sash rhetoric as a form of ritual for a very simple reason: sash wearing consistently evokes conflict. From members of the clergy denying Communion to sash wearers, to the frequently inflammatory online rhetoric produced about sash wearing by

sash wearers and non-sash-wearers alike, it is readily evident that sash wearing is universally perceived as a site of conflict within the Catholic ecclesia. In my analysis, I ultimately argue that sash wearing is positioned in different stages of social drama by different stakeholders, so I will refrain here from explaining the stages of the social drama in terms of sash wearing itself. However, I introduce and explain the stages in abstract below as a means of developing a theoretical vocabulary that will play heavily inform the findings of my research.

Breach.

The first stage of social drama, called a *breach*, occurs when members of a society or group behave or are perceived to have behaved in a manner that challenges, transgresses from, or undermines the values, beliefs, and/or systems of meaning held by the group at large (Turner, 1974, p. 78). Grimes (1985) rightly notes that Turner primarily conceived of and discussed breaches as though they are the intentional acts of dissident group members, but it should be noted that some of the case studies applying Turner's theory (e.g. Hoover & Clark, 1997; Farrell, 1989) treat breach as though it may be either an intentional or unintentional act. Although he is not innately suspicious of social power structures in the same way that critical theorists often are, Turner seems well aware that labeling the behaviors of others as a breach requires the discursive force of either power or numbers. Moreover, one can reasonably assert that those possessing power within a social structure have the greatest vested interest in that structure's existing regimes of meanings/values, thereby rendering them the most likely individuals in a group to recognize a breach.

Crisis.

Crisis represents the stage at which the parties to social drama (particularly those who object to the breach) perceive a breach to be sufficiently threatening to the existing social order as to warrant collective redressive action. Turner (1980) vividly describes crisis as:

a momentous juncture or turning point in the relations between components of a social field – at which seeming peace becomes overt conflict and covert antagonisms become visible. Sides are taken, factions are formed, and unless the conflict can be sealed off quickly within a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen and spread until it coincides with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the parties in conflict belong. (p. 150)

Turner does not devote much discussion to crisis in the remainder of his works on social drama, but the importance of this phase is undeniable. While breaches may come and go, only those that escalate to a crisis demand formalized redressive action.

Redress.

Redress is the third stage of Turner's social drama and, for the purposes of the present review, the most important one. According to Hoover and Clark (1997), "the third phase in the social drama begins as persons in a position of leadership employ 'certain adjustive and redressive mechanisms' to limit the expansion of the crisis" (165). Crisis can be subject to all manner of redressive mechanisms, ranging from "personal

advice and informal arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery (and to resolve certain kinds of crises) to the performance of public ritual” (Turner, 1980, p. 151). Ritual and other performances are thus the central practices by which structures redress breaches of value/meaning.

Reintegration or recognition of schism.

Reintegration or Recognition of Schism represents the end result of redress and the fourth and final stage of Turner’s (1974) social drama. Significantly, in recognizing two separate outcomes of social drama, Turner departs from other anthropological and social scientific conceptions of ritual and related social processes. Other theorizations of these phenomena are often dismissive, viewing them as circular and inevitably reproductive of existing hierarchies (Deflam, 1991). This departure is what makes Turner’s dramaturgical process theory of ritual and social conflict so well suited to analysis of rainbow sash rhetoric. By genuinely investing in the symbolic value of ritual and other mechanisms of social redress in producing new and different manifestations of structure, Turner offers a model of social conflict compatible with rhetorical scholars’ interest in processes of social change.

Turner’s understanding of the features of ritual is, however, not limited to the prominent role he broadly attributes to social drama. Rituals of passage specifically speak to rituals’ socially transformative potential, and as such are useful in theorizing sash wearing as a purposeful ritual intervention designed to affect change. As with my description of social drama above, I remain abstract in my discussion of rituals of passage because the features of rainbow sash rhetoric do not unproblematically map onto the

ritual's various stages. Rather these stages represent a shared lexicon by which different members of the ecclesia (i.e. the episcopacy, sash wearers, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics) make different kinds of sense out of sash wearing.

Rituals of passage as a specific redressive mechanism.

Ritual isn't simply a simultaneously structural and processual set of prescribed symbolic behaviors, but rather a structural and processual set of prescribed symbolic behaviors through which social identity can be reworked, and social breaches can be redressed within the boundaries of, and with minimal threat to, the overarching structures which organize a group, culture, tribe, or society. What, though, does ritual look like? Although Turner (1969) identifies a number of specific rituals as they play out within the cultures he studies, each of these rituals invoke a tripartite typology of steps that Turner adapted from van Gennep's (1908, cited in Turner, 1982) work on rites of passage (p. 24). This typology posits that individuals ritually transition from one stable social role to another via three successive phases: (1) a pre-liminal or "separation" phase in which the transitioning person or collective is placed in a state of "symbolic detachment" from "an earlier fixed point in the social structure" or earlier "set of cultural conditions" (Turner, 1969, p. 94); (2) a "liminal" phase in which the person or collective is "betwixt and between" the structures, symbols, and meanings of the existing social order (p. 95); and (3) a post-liminal or "reaggregation" phase in which the individual or collective "is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and 'structural' type" (pp. 94-95).

Pre-liminality.

Turner's (1969) theorization of the pre-liminal or "separation" phase of ritual is, perhaps unsurprisingly, situated as a parallel foil to the phase of post-liminality. Both states are marked by "a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal economic positions" which are absent in the "liminal" phase between them (p. 96). What distinguishes pre-liminality from post-liminality, however, is the unsustainability of the pre-liminal system of meanings and social structures. After all, ritual is undertaken as a symbolic-material mechanism for coping with the necessity of change from within the larger framework of existing social structures. As such, if post-liminality is characterized by a move toward a new "relatively stable" meaning system (Turner, 1982), then pre-liminality can usefully be understood as a status marked by emergent "detachment" from a formerly workable and "earlier fixed point in the social structure" or "set of cultural conditions" (Turner, 1969, p. 94).

Liminality.

As defined by Turner (1982), liminality is a state of "social limbo" that exists between the concrete structures of meaning associated with the pre-liminal and post-liminal phases in ritual (p. 24). This is the phase where the work of transition and new social identity production gets done through a process of suspending the conventions which ordinarily guide social structure in favor of an anti-structural space that exists outside of the "profane space-time" of everyday life (p 27). Within this alternate "sacred space-time," liminal subjects are exposed to "subversive and ludic (or playful)" re-workings of culturally meaningful symbols in order to highlight alternative systems of symbolic interpretation or meaning that were opaque or unknown to the liminal subject in

her or his previous structural identity (p. 27) . It is ultimately in the process of illuminating these systems of meaning that the liminal subject becomes possessed of sufficient sacred knowledge to effectively occupy their post-liminal station.

Post-liminality.

According to Turner (1982), post-liminality is marked by a completion of the ritual process of passage. Post-liminal subjects have thus been “ritually prepared for a whole series of changes in the nature of the cultural and ecological activities to be undertaken and of the relationships they will then have with others” as the changing exigencies of their societies and meaning systems dictate (p. 25). Post-liminality represents a return to structure, but a structure that is substantively different or transformed from the one that the pre-liminal subject occupied.

Processes of ritual associated with the redress stage *within* social drama are also marked by political flexibility/possibility. This argument is substantiated by theoretical work on ritual conducted outside of the Turnerian framework. Both Bell (1997) and Lukes (1975), for example, argue that ritual can be a site for resisting existing networks of power, and even Turner (1982) himself states that symbol use within the *communitas* of liminality is often “subversive” (p. 26). This subversive possibility is also anecdotally evident in rhetorical analyses that operate outside the bounds of ritual as an overarching explanatory schema. Bennett (2009), for example, suggests that gay men who donate blood in spite of a ban on the practice are subversively (re)appropriating a citizenship ritual that is actively designed to exclude them. Foss and Domenici (2001) also chronicle

ritualistic protest, focusing on the silent procession and ludic symbol use employed by Argentinian women whose children have been disappeared.

Potential Contributions of Rainbow Sash Rhetoric to the Study of Ritual (Rhetoric)

Drawing upon ritual theory writ large, then, as well as Victor Turner's dramatic formulations for social conflict and ritual processes, offers much in understanding sash wearing rhetoric. To revisit Jasinski's (2001) assessment that ritual assists rhetorical theory in moving beyond an understanding of symbol use as "information dissemination and/or exchange," bringing ritual to bear upon the RSM and the RSA calls for an analysis that understands the groups' signature symbol use as more than a nonverbal complement to its verbal calls for LGBT inclusion in the Church. Rather, Turner's framework demands answers to vital, compelling and highly contextual questions concerning whether and to/for whom the performance at hand constitutes a breach to be redressed, a mechanism of redressing existing liturgical crises, and/or a liminal reworking of sacred symbols intended to transform structures instead of maintain them.

Analysis of rainbow sash rhetoric stands to contribute in turn to to the body of theory surrounding ritual, in that the group's rhetoric defies easy categorization into often bifurcated "religious" or "secular" spaces (Patvoet, 2006, p. 162). Turner (1982) himself describes liminality as necessarily being outside the realm of the "profane" and within the realm of the "sacred" (p. 27). As LGBT Catholic groups, however, the RSM and RSA raise the question of what happens when both everyday and ritual space-times are explicitly sacred. After all, it is certainly easy (and consistent with Turner's treatment of the ritual space-time) to deem the churches sash wearers enter as sacred spaces. But in

the numerous months and weeks of the year in which members of the RSM and RSA *are not* engaged in self-identification as LGBT Catholics, their community occupies a cyberspace that is no less spiritually/religiously oriented. Additionally, analysis of the RSM's sartorial self-identification as LGBT Catholics makes full use of ritual's potential in promoting understanding of corporeality in rhetoric (McKerrow, 1998).

Conclusion

I conceive of this project as readily entering and potentially articulating three scholarly conversations. First, the RSM and RSA's shared devotion to full acknowledgement and inclusion for LGBT people within the Catholic Church embeds the organizations and their members within a diverse and often contentious body of social theory concerned with the politics of LGBT identities and the potential of those identities to alter social relations of power and domination more broadly. Second, the broad circulation of discourses about sash wearing that circulate online places the discourse of the RSM, the RSA, and its observers within the purview of rhetorical, mass media, and sociological inquiries that ask what the internet can do for and to marginalized groups. Finally, both the formulaic nature of sash wearers self-identification strategy, and the sacred space in which that strategy plays out, call for an examination of ritual and the manner in which it is used to contest and redress social conflicts.

Having introduced rainbow sash rhetoric, justified its study, and explored its foundations within existing scholarship, I turn toward the specific substance of my own research in the remaining three chapters. Specifically, Chapter Three to follow reports the methodology of the study by outlining my commitments as a researcher,

characterizing my specific approach to rhetorical criticism, and describing the processes of data collection, data textualization, and data coding ultimately used to produce the analysis and conclusions described in Chapters Four and Five respectively.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the RSM and RSA's eponymous activity of wearing rainbow sashes to Pentecost mass as well as the sense-making discourse that is generated by the RSM, the RSA, and other Catholics surrounding that activity. In doing so, I seek to: (1) contribute to overall understanding of, and potentially expand upon, the array of rhetorical strategies that are deployed by LGBT and/or dissident religious groups in order to navigate the institutions in which they are marginalized; and (2) engage in the ongoing scholarly conversation concerning the nature of rhetorical agency by offering an account of its circulation grounded within a contemporaneous set of discourses that spans multiple media and multiple subject positions. In pursuit of these goals, I employ rhetorical criticism as a method of data analysis. In this chapter, I elaborate upon my epistemological and axiological commitments with respect to rhetorical criticism, rainbow sash rhetoric as a set of texts, and LGBT politics more broadly. I then offer a brief justification for the use of rhetorical criticism as a method before laying out the steps of criticism in general and explaining how they are enacted in this particular project.

Positioning the Researcher

Pinpointing the role of the researcher is an important element of methodology, but it is particularly important in this instance. While one could argue that most (if not all) researchers have a vested interest in what they study and what they discover, my interest in rainbow sash rhetoric is rooted in highly significant personal experiences. I was raised in the Catholic Church and ultimately left it due in large part to my perception that its

tenets were incompatible with my sexual identity. Definitionally, the RSM and RSA avow and embody a different set of choices in response to the same dilemma. My close ties to the Church and my familiarity with balancing its tenets and practices with non-normative sexual identity will offer me insight and sensitivity other researchers might lack. Nevertheless, my intimate connection with the object of inquiry in this study makes it important to outline my axiological and epistemological commitments at greater length.

Axiologically, I eschew notions of researcher objectivity in favor of articulating my political commitments and working to forward those commitments through the work I produce. I am invested as a researcher in selecting topics of inquiry and forwarding analyses that work to minimize the violence, stigmatization, and limitation of potential that frequently attend individuals' and groups' perceived difference from the norms of gender and sexuality. Following Bennett (2009), I combine the more pragmatic and material goals of LGBT rights perspectives with the ideological insights of more radical "queer" perspectives. Methodologically, this means that the criticism undertaken in this thesis is undertaken with an eye toward creating political possibilities and/or agency for LGBT people and LGBT (religious) communities. By the same token, I explicitly critique parties, practices, discourses, and perceptions/experiences that seem to limit those possibilities.

The cornerstone to producing ethical scholarship within the critical paradigm involves a concerted effort on the part of the researcher to first engage in nuanced interpretive work that thoroughly justifies the findings it reports. I depart from purely interpretive approaches, however, in that I do not "bracket, or "set aside preconceived

beliefs and values” (Miller, 2005, p. 58). I conducted the analysis in a spirit of charity and in recognition that the symbols and experiences I engage with are important and meaningful to others irrespective of the political valence attached to them. Far from being a concession, I believe this approach is in keeping with the axiology outlined above. After all, such charity discourages the prescriptive rejection of systems of meaning that may very well be central to LGBT and other marginalized/stigmatized groups.

Finally, I adopt a transactional model of meaning and a constructivist ontology. With respect to the former, I recognize communication as “a processes in which there is constant mutual influence of communication participants” (Miller, 2005, p. 6), where message producers not only “constantly influence each other,” but are also “influenced by the context in which they interact” (p. 7). The conclusions drawn in this study are one among multiple possible interpretations of the available data with material consequences that may delimit the future viability of alternative interpretations. In sum, I recognize that by electing to study rainbow sash rhetoric I am inserting myself into a system of meanings and technologies for living that I inevitably alter. I have striven to ensure those alterations are for the better rather than for the worse.

Justifying Rhetorical Criticism

At its most basic level, rhetorical criticism is “a qualitative research method that is designed for the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes (Foss, 2009, p. 6). Beyond the facile (though valid) claim that rhetorical criticism is an appropriate methodology for this study

because it explains the *rhetorical* process of LGBT Catholic identity construction, rhetorical criticism is uniquely suited to the analysis at hand because: (1) it empowers researchers to plumb the social significance of symbolic artifacts rather than symbolic activities in situ; (2) it has a rich history of usage in examination of social change/reform movements by LGBT and other marginalized groups; and (3) it is marked by immense and necessary flexibility in the varieties of symbol use it can systematically analyze *and* juxtapose. Although I do not mean to suggest that other methods could not be usefully brought to bear upon sash wearing and the discourse that surrounds it, rhetorical criticism thus affords a constellation of features that increases its analytical scope, explanatory power, and ability to circulate among other research focused on similar topics.

Rhetorical criticism directs its inquiry toward matters of broad societal import. However, rhetoric's origins in the study of (great) public speeches for their ability to inform public deliberation allows for insights on matters of social consequence by plumbing "artifacts," or lasting evidence of situated symbol use (Foss, 2009, p. 6). Studying the (frequently) online discourse that surrounds sash wearing necessitates the analysis of texts produced and subsequently archived over the span of several years. On a more practical level, the period of time in which this research was conducted did not coincide with Pentecost, rendering direct (rather than artifactual) observation of sash wearing itself impossible. Rainbow sash discourse, then, is most readily apprehended through the study of textual artifacts, something which Foss suggests "most critics use . . . as the basis" for analysis. This tendency, while certainly not unique to rhetorical criticism makes the method ideal for the project at hand when combined with its robust history and

broad contemporary applications within the communicative study of socio-cultural change.

Social movements are part of rhetorical studies, and there are nearly countless examples of scholarship that employs rhetorical criticism to understand everything from women's suffrage movements, to labor organizing, to civil rights movements, to environmentalism (e.g. Campbell, 1986; DeLuca, 1999; Enck-Wanzer, 2002; Olson, 1997; Zaeske, 2002). LGBT organizing is no exception, and rhetoric represents one of the most robust and contextually diverse fields in the discipline for inquiry surrounding non-normative gender and sexuality (e.g. Bennett, 2003; Bennett, 2009; Brouwer, 1998; Chávez, 2004; Darsey, 1991; Morris III, 2002; Slagle, 1995; Rand, 2008; Sloop, 2000).

Finally, rhetorical criticism has sufficient analytical flexibility to take up the divergent collection of symbols and communicative strategies that are associated with sash wearers and those who produce discourse surrounding them. Since rhetorical criticism utilizes broadly defined symbolic "texts" as data, rhetorical critics are able to analyze and juxtapose symbols of many varieties, ranging from linguistic phenomena, to visual images, to performances. This makes the method ideal for systematically dealing with sash wearing discourse, which consists of meaning making that ranges from the silent and situated use of patterned sashes, to photographs and videos, to written position statements on the actions of the Catholic Church, to written position statement on the actions of sash wearers, to direct correspondence between members of the Catholic episcopacy and members of the RSM and RSA. By utilizing rhetorical criticism, I was thus empowered to place these disparate forms of symbol use in dialogue with one

another by taking them up holistically rather than tailoring a specific methodology to each. Having attested generally to the utility of rhetorical criticism as a method, I turn in the next section to the specific manner in which rhetorical criticism played out in this project.

Procedures

As adapted from Foss (2009) rhetorical critics engage in the following processes:

(1) they pose research questions about symbolic texts that concern at least one of the “four basic components of the communication process – the rhetor, the audience, the situation, and the message” (p. 11), they (2) “code” symbolic texts “in general” to bring the central features and patterns of the text into clearer relief (p. 387), they (3) use their initial coding to develop an “explanatory schema,” or a tentative “framework for organizing your insights about the artifact coherent and insightful way” (p. 394); and they (4) re-code their texts “in-depth” (p. 400), allowing the text and the explanatory schemata to reflexively nuance and refine one another until a complete and coherent theory of the text can be forwarded as a response to the research question(s).

As is implied by this description, itemizing the procedures for any individual rhetorical criticism presents difficulty in that the method is expressly designed to allow for analytical procedures and emergent features of the symbolic text to reflexively shape one another. Method and analysis thus become intertwined to a greater extent than they would within methodological approaches that stress the prescriptive application of research procedures. As a means of parsing method and analysis for the purposes of this chapter, though, the remainder of this section consists of a lengthier individual

description of each of the general procedures associated with rhetorical criticism and uses those descriptions as lenses for systematically understanding how those procedures manifested within this thesis. It cannot be an item-by-item account of “steps” that were followed in achieving the analysis in the chapter to follow. Instead it offers a processual account for the analysis as it emerged from my recursive and (re)iterative movement between rainbow sash rhetoric and the procedures I am explicating here.

Procedure 1: Posing Research Questions about Symbolic Texts

It is easy to conceive of research questions as precursors to research design, but within the realm of rhetorical criticism they represent methodological choices unto themselves. This is the case in that symbol use and meaning making are definitionally “continuous and complex and cannot be arbitrarily isolated” (Miller, 2005, p. 5). As such, the act of posing questions about symbols or symbol use, and the nature of those questions, inherently brackets or delimits them from the ongoing stream of other symbol use and meaning making in which they are embedded. Thus, to pose research questions concerning symbol use as it occurs and is situated in the world (as rhetoric most often does) is to textualize a finite set of symbols for analysis, and to select a critical lens that will “focus attention on certain dimensions of an artifact and not others” (Foss, 2009, p. 10). The primary and subsidiary research questions I pose regarding rainbow sash rhetoric are:

1. How is sash wearing used to rhetorically construct LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church

- a. How do sash wearers appropriate and/or interrupt ritual as a rhetorical strategy?
- b. How do the RSM and RSA's publicly available online discourses work to supplement, alter, or augment the meaning of their eponymous activities?
- c. How do other Catholics' publicly available discourses about sash wearers supplement, alter, or augment the meaning of the sash wearers' eponymous activities?

In the subsections to follow, I describe how I textualized rainbow sash rhetoric in response to these questions and what critical lens guided my criticism.

Textualizing rainbow sash rhetoric.

Although I have referred to rainbow sash rhetoric unproblematically until now, there are of course important implications to what is and is not included within the purview of that rhetoric. After all, a critic's choices of which artifacts to include within a particular rhetorical "text" are ideologically loaded, and therefore immensely influential in terms of the analysis the critic is ultimately able to render. In the end, my textualization of rainbow sash rhetoric proceeded in two steps. The first step involved defining what symbolic data fell under the rubric of rainbow sash rhetoric and collecting data accordingly. Upon collecting the data, however, I was forced to engage in a second and initially unanticipated step. I found that the artifactual subcategories that I laid out in my research questions and pursued in my data collection (i.e. the rhetoric of sash wearing, the rhetoric of sash wearers, and the rhetoric of non-sash-wearing Catholics) were not sufficiently specific to be meaningfully used in conducting the rhetorical criticism. Thus,

in my second step toward textualization, I parsed the rhetoric of sash wearers into the rhetoric of the RSM and the rhetoric of the RSA. I also parsed the rhetoric of non-sash-wearing Catholics into the rhetoric of the episcopacy and the rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics. To offer further detail on these steps and the manner in which they informed the final text, I have separated them here.

Step one: Data collection.

I looked directly to my sub-research questions in selecting the sites from which I gathered the constituents of rainbow sash rhetoric as a single text. Guided by the sub-question *how do sash wearers appropriate and/or interrupt ritual as a rhetorical strategy?*, I included a corpus of primarily nonverbal symbol use associated with actual sash wearing. Guided by the sub-question *how do the RSM and RSA's publicly available online discourses work to supplement, alter, or augment the semantics of their eponymous activities?*, I included both the websites' aggregate content within the final text. Finally, the sub-question *how do other Catholics' publicly available discourses about sash wearers supplement, alter, or augment the semantics of the sash wearers' eponymous activities?* guided me in collecting 42 almost exclusively verbal articles, columns, blogs, and letters authored by non-sash-wearing Catholics from a variety of sources. The basic features and collection process for each of these four textual constituents are discussed in the paragraphs below.

The RSM and RSA's eponymous act of wearing rainbow sashes to Pentecost mass is perhaps the most loosely defined constituent of the text. Because the event occurs only once a year, this thesis was unfortunately completed before any personal observation of

the activity in question. In lieu of this direct observation, description, depiction, or discussion of this activity that emerged from the RSM and RSA's websites allowed me to piece together a relatively cohesive characterization of the activities that occur. I also noted a few instances in which details provided by other Catholics' accounts added meaningful detail to the characterizations of the activity offered by the RSM and/or RSA. Given the relative poverty of such a text, I also relied upon my own extensive experience with the Catholic mass to provide needed context to the RSM and RSA's activities.

Although I treated the RSM and RSA's web content as separate and distinctive constituents of rainbow sash rhetoric as a text, the process I pursued in textualizing them was identical so they are discussed singly here. Textualizing the RSM and RSA's online discourse is challenging in that the sites' contents change and evolve over time⁵. In the interests of keeping the volume of this discourse manageable for the purposes of coding and analysis, I saved and coded the aggregate content of each website on a single day. Specifically, I archived and coded the RSM's web content on December 11, 2010. I archived and coded the RSA's content on May 25, 2011. Although this unfortunately eliminated a more longitudinal analysis of their online rhetoric, I don't believe that this problem unduly compromised the validity of either of the sites' rhetoric as it was

⁵ I should note here that the RSM website analyzed in this thesis (www.rainbowsashmovement.com) is no longer active. My analysis was based upon the website as it appeared in December of 2010, and documentation of the site's content at that time can be made available upon request. The RSM has since developed a new website (<http://rainbowsashmovement.wordpress.com/>) but it remains under construction and features little content at the time of this writing. No public information has been made available as to the rationale for the relocation, but in the absence of an explicit disavowal of the previous site's discourse I contend that the former site's content remains relevant as a reflection of the RSM's sense-making surrounding their eponymous activity.

textualized. The RSM's website featured an extensive archive of past articles. Thus, on any given day, the past several months of the website's most substantive content was readily available to visitors. The content of the RSA's website changes much less frequently than the RSM's website did, and with the exception of annual calls for participation the most recently dated page on the site was updated in 2007 (McNeill, 2007). Both websites' content is language heavy, and thus my analysis prioritized these symbols. However, images, videos, and other features of the site were included in the process of coding.

The 42 statements, letters, editorials, and blog posts authored by non-sash-wearing Catholics were perhaps the most traditionally textual constituent artifacts included in the text, as they were almost exclusively composed of verbal content and were far more consistently dated and attributed to identifiable authors. The discourse of non-sash-wearing Catholics was also the most diffuse and heterogeneous of the four constituents of the larger text. This was due to the fact that these statements, letters, editorials, and blog posts were not concentrated in a single location akin to the RSM website or the RSA website but rather were dispersed across several sources.

In an attempt to show the comparability of this discourse to that circulated by sash wearers, this constituent of the text was comprised entirely of content that was available online (whether or not it originated there). In addition, all the artifacts were authored by an individual who was identifiable as a Roman Catholic and/or hosted/published by an organization that was identifiable as Roman Catholic. I included content found in multiple locations only once (and coded from its original website/publication where

possible). Content related to rainbow sash activities or groups outside of the U.S. was also excluded given the exclusively U.S. focus of this study. The corpus of content that I was able to locate was sufficiently small that I engaged in virtually no paring. I eliminated only a handful of articles after reading them because they made references to the RSM, the RSA, or sash wearing while otherwise focusing on a separate topic.

I located the content in a number of ways. I entered the search terms “rainbow sash,” “Rainbow Sash Movement,” and “Rainbow Sash Alliance” into the online search tools LexisNexis, Google, Bing, and Yahoo and used the search results to locate articles, letters, blogs, etc. In recognition of the primary cities in which sash wearers have demonstrated, I also input these search terms into the archival search tools provided by the websites of *Catholic New World*, *The Catholic Spirit*, and *The Tidings*, the (English language) archdiocesan newspapers of the Chicago, St. Paul and Minneapolis, and Los Angeles archdioceses respectively. I entered the search terms into the archival search tools provided by the websites of three heavily-circulated national Catholic news services: *National Catholic Register*, *Catholic News Service*⁶, and *National Catholic Reporter*. I also submitted the search terms to the internal search engine and/or archive tool of any website found to feature rainbow sash content via the search procedures described above⁷. For instance, once an article on sash wearing was located on *Catholicculture.org*, the three search terms were entered into the website’s internal search

⁶ The Catholic News Service distributes news stories to a number of Catholic Newspapers.

⁷ This strategy was subject to availability, since some of the websites on which content was published had no such search tool.

engine to find additional articles. Finally, I included two letters posted on the RSA's website. Although I did not locate these letters via the search procedures described above, they were written to Brian McNeill of the RSA by former Archbishop Harry Flynn (2004; 2005), and they were appropriate to the collection of artifacts I intended to gather.

In sum, this search process yielded a corpus of: six written letters and statements by (or on behalf of) Roman Catholic clergy, two articles published in the archdiocesan newspaper of Chicago, 16 journalistic articles published in other (predominantly national) Catholic news sources, and 18 columns, blog posts, and articles explicitly identified as partisan or opinion pieces. Like the journalistic articles, these opinion pieces were primarily derived from websites explicitly defining themselves as Catholic, but a handful derived from websites devoted to ecumenical Christian spirituality (e.g. Smith, 2010, May 18; Weldon, 2010, March 6) and one was hosted by a broadly right-wing opinion site featuring a Catholic-oriented column (Kralis, 2005, January 23).

Step two: Defining textual subcategories.

Collectively, the act of sash wearing, the aggregate content of the RSM and RSA's respective websites, and the corpus of web content about sash wearing by non-sash-wearing Catholics constituted rainbow sash rhetoric as I initially textualized it for data collection and analysis. However, these subcategories proved too broad to be analytically useful. Thus, I engaged in a second process of categorization that involved re-reading and clustering the textual constituents into even smaller and more specific subcategories. To reiterate, these subcategories ultimately were: (1) the rhetoric of sash wearing; (2) the online rhetoric of the RSM; (3) the online rhetoric of the RSA; (4) the

rhetoric of the episcopacy⁸; and (5) the online rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics. The analysis of Chapter Four will offer further clarification (and justification) for these subcategorizations, but I offer detailed descriptions of each of these artifactual subcategories here in order to lay the groundwork for that analysis.

Sash wearing rhetoric in detail.

This sub-section discusses the details of sash wearing as they have been extrapolated from the RSM's website, the RSA's website, and in an account published by Catholic News Service.

It is worth noting that the RSM and the RSA do differ slightly in their sash wearing practices. The RSM is more geographically diffuse in its activities each Pentecost, and groups wear sashes in several cathedrals throughout the country (JMurray 1340, 2009, February 6). The RSA, on the other hand, is primarily based in Minneapolis-St. Paul (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.c), and every documented instance of the RSA's sash wearing occurred in St. Paul's Cathedral in St. Paul, Minnesota. The RSA also differs from the RSM in that it sends an annual letter to the presiding Archbishop of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis announcing its intention to don rainbow sashes, what they are intended to mean, and what mass they will be worn in (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e). Finally, in addition to the rainbow sash, the RSM's website makes mention of a white sash to be worn by straight allies instead of the rainbow sash (JMurray

⁸ I use the terms episcopal and episcopacy throughout as references to the whole clergy of the Catholic Church. These terms are relatively uncommon terms within Catholicism, but I adopt them here in deference to their frequent usage by the RSM and the RSA.

1340, 2009, February 6; The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.k). However, I was unable to find any pictographic evidence of such sashes' use or any mention of white sashes in any press accounts of the RSM's activities. Nevertheless, because my interest in sash wearing is derived from its relationship to (LGBT) Catholic identity and Catholic religious practice, and because the RSA and RSM differ more in terms of their approach to wearing rainbow sashes than in terms of their actual sash wearing, I treated sash wearing as a singular act in this study.

What is perhaps most striking about sash wearing is the minimal degree to which sash wearers actually change their behavior as church goes. Indeed, an instructional video on sash wearing posted to the RSM website explicitly instructs sash wearers to "attend the liturgy as you normally do" (JMurray 1340, 2009, February 6). Sash wearers don their sashes at the beginning of mass during the priest's procession into the Cathedral and/or upon the start of the opening hymn, "whichever comes first" (JMurray 1340, 2009, February 6). From here, sash wearers participate in the mass in the same manner as other congregants until the end of the mass during the sacrament of the Eucharist. The sacrament culminates in congregants standing, leaving their pews, and proceeding toward Eucharistic ministers tasked with distributing Communion in the form of bread and (more rarely) wine. Congregants seeking to receive Communion must be "in a state of grace," having committed no mortal sins without doing penance (1415), they must have observed an hour's fast in advance of the mass (1387), and their "bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest" (1387). Beyond these general directives, congregants seeking the

Eucharist from a Eucharistic minister must verbally acknowledge it as the Body or Blood of Christ, and are expected to receive and consume it immediately thereafter. Upon doing so, congregants return to their pews and kneel in prayer. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this portion of the mass to either sash wearers or Catholics more broadly. As a “transubstantiation” of bread and wine into the literal “Body and Blood of Christ” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1413), the Eucharist and its attendant prayers and offerings are definitive to the Mass (and Catholic identity) as a whole.

Sash wearers engage in this process to the fullest extent that they are allowed to. They stand, queue, and present themselves to Eucharistic ministers to receive Communion. In instances where they receive it, sash wearers return to their pews and kneel with the rest of the congregants. In the altogether more frequent instances when they are denied communion, they return to their pews and “remain standing” while the rest of the congregation kneels and prays (JMurray 1340, 2009, February 6).

Separating the RSM and the RSA: A justification.

There can be no doubt that the RSM and the RSA share not only an eponymous activity but a commitment to LGBT inclusion within the Catholic Church. Indeed, my own treatment of the groups throughout this thesis and in my textualization of sash wearing rhetoric above bespeaks to ease with which the groups can be conflated. Moreover, I would argue that in many contexts this conflation is warranted. Historically speaking, the groups were once a single entity (McNeill, 2007), and the Church hierarchy’s response to sash wearers in both groups has in fact become more uniform since they split (Thavis, 2005, February 4). This even bears out on non-sash-wearing

Catholics' rhetoric about the groups since they split. Much of the rhetoric produced by the episcopacy and other Catholic congregants seems blind (or perhaps apathetic) to the very fact that there are multiple rainbow sash groups. Multiple artifacts within the episcopal and non-sash-wearing lay Catholic subcategories below conflates them entirely by referring neither to the RSM nor to the RSA, but simply to "rainbow sash wearers" (e.g. Thavis, 2005, February 4, para. 1), or even just to the "Rainbow Sash" (e.g. Feuerherd, 2003, February 14, para. 4; Peters, 2010, May 17, para. 2).

In light of all this, it is fair to claim that the RSM and RSA occupy at least structurally comparable positions vis-à-vis both the Catholic Church, and my initial process of data collection actively treated them as a single site of rhetorical invention. Nevertheless, the online rhetorics to be found on the RSM and RSA sites were ultimately too divergent to be coherently accounted for as a single category. I believe that it is overly simplistic, on the basis of these differences, to suggest that the RSA and RSM exist as entirely separate entities. Nevertheless, the marked differences that emerge between the RSM and RSA's rhetoric bespeak the importance and complexity of the ways in which subtle ideological influences can shift the valence of entire corpora of rhetoric. As I'll discuss at greater length in Chapter Four, although both groups envision a more LGBT affirmative Catholic Church, The RSA's online rhetoric differs from the RSM's in that it is not only informed by an ideological commitment to a viable LGBT Catholicism, but also to a viable LGBT Christianity that actively affiliates across faiths with divergent traditions of religious practice. In light of this and other differences, I ultimately analyzed the two groups' rhetoric separately. As such, I present the online

rhetoric of the RSA and the online rhetoric of the RSM as distinctive textual subcategories in the two sections to follow.

The RSA's online rhetoric in detail.

As mentioned in the introduction, the RSA's online rhetoric is marked (relatively speaking) by a striking economy of symbol use. In addition to the site's homepage, there are only 10 other pages internal to the site. In light of the concentration of the RSA's rhetorical content across these few pages, it is simplest to simply offer a brief account of each of these 10 pages' contents.

The site's homepage features several sentences describing the RSA, its activities, and its goals (McNeill, 2011a). It also features hyperlinks to each of the other 9 pages comprising the site. These links are arranged above and below a photograph of RSA members gathered in front of a Cathedral and holding a banner emblazoned with the phrase "Catholics for LGBT Equality." Finally, the homepage offers e-mail and telephone contact information for visitors to get in touch with the RSA's organizers.

Presented in the order of their links on the RSA homepage from top to bottom, the first internal page of the site is entitled "Our Core Statement and Core Action" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e). This page offers a lengthier account of what sash wearing is intended to mean, and how it emerged for the RSA as a core form of "action" (para. 1). The next page accessible from the homepage is "History in the United States, Australia, and England" (McNeill, 2007). Here McNeill lays out a comprehensive history of the origins of sash wearing, its emergence in the U.S., and the eventual split in the U.S. movement due to the RSM and RSA's differing philosophies on leadership and

ecumenical organizing. The “Future of the Rainbow Sash Movement” page offers a list of “issues of persistent concern” for the group (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 1), and lays out an ultimate vision for the outcome of the RSA’s activities. The “Links” page offers hyperlinks to the websites of five other organizations with which the RSA affiliates (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.c). In order, these organizations are: the Australian Rainbow Sash Movement, the Minneapolis based ecumenical LGBT group *Dignity Twin Cities*, the national Catholic LGBT group *Dignity USA*, the national ecumenical LGBT group *Soulforce*, and the social justice oriented Catholic group *Call to Action*. The next link available from the RSA homepage is the “Membership” page (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.d). This page consists exclusively of empty name, address, e-mail, phone number, and message fields that visitors can fill out to reach the RSA or be added to its mailing list. The next page is an open letter from founding RSA member Brian McNeill (2011b), calling for participants in sash wearing activities at St. Paul’s Cathedral during the June 12, Feast of Pentecost. The “Archive” page (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.a), as mentioned in chapter one, offers visitors full-text versions of two of the Australian Rainbow Sash Movement’s founding documents: (1) an open letter to former Pope John Paul II, and (2) an open letter to the Catholic Church at large. The final two pages available via the homepage are also archival in nature. They offer full-text versions of letters authored by Harry Flynn, retired Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis. One writes in support of the primacy of sash wearers’ and others’ “conscience” in deciding to receive Communion (Flynn, 2004, September 9, para. 2). The other informs the RSA that they will no longer be allowed to receive Communion while wearing the rainbow sash

(Flynn, 2005, May 2). As explained in the episcopal rhetoric section below, these letters were ultimately coded as part of episcopal sense-making, and only their availability on the RSA website is of interest here.

The RSM's online rhetoric.

By contrast to the RSA site, the RSM's online rhetoric is marked by a specifically, explicitly, and extensively Catholic perspective. The RSM website was updated regularly, offered a huge and often theologically dense body of symbol use reflecting the perspectives of a relatively small body of identified authors. As the RSM website was several times the size of the RSA's website, it is impractical to itemize each of its internal pages as I did for the RSA. Rather, I review the website here by referring to a series of categories that the site's content fell into and offer examples of each.

The first type of content that abounded on the website consisted of what might be called foundational information. This foundational information included a series of articles and pages that focused primarily on the RSM's history, its stance on Catholic teaching, its goals as an organization, and the meanings it attaches to sash wearing. Some of the prominent examples of this type of content were the RSM's "About Us" page (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a), a separate article it offered exploring the meaning of the rainbow sash (Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.b), instructional material concerning when and how to wear the rainbow sash (Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.a; The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.l), and an LGBT-affirmative priest's reflections on Church teachings (Gay, n.d.).

Commentary on contemporary issues was another category of content frequently available on the site. Although these articles frequently reiterated foundational positions of the RSM, they were largely topic based discussions surrounding the Catholic Church and its hierarchy. The commentary was most frequently negative, expressing theological objection to the positions or actions of high-ranking members of the episcopacy. Examples of critical articles included in this study are a summary of LGBT issues omitted at a meeting of the USCCB (O'Connor, n.d.a), an article implying that the U.S. Church has declined under the leadership of current USCCB president Archbishop Timothy Dolan (O'Connor, n.d.b), and an article criticizing the Archbishop of Washington entitled "Cardinal Weurl Separates Theology from Social Justice" (Murray, n.d.a). A much smaller proportion of commentary on the RSM site was positive in its valence. Typically, this too was directed at high ranking members of the episcopacy, lauding them for positions or decisions in keeping with the RSM's stated beliefs. Prominent among these articles was a statement in which Murray (n.d.b) celebrates Pope Benedict's decree that condom use was acceptable in certain instances to prevent the spread of HIV.

I call the final two categories of content on the RSM site archival tools and networking tools respectively. I list them together here for the sake of brevity. Both were typically stand alone pages that offered little content unto themselves. As such these were subsidiary artifacts within my ultimate analysis. I define archival tools broadly here, as any and all web content which functioned to efficiently aggregate more content. By way of example, such tools included the RSM's "Archives" page (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.b), which aggregated older commentary, as well as its external "Links"

page (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.h), and its “News” page (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.i). It should be noted that these archival tools, while rarely illuminating in and of themselves, often provided links to commentary artifacts that were substantive to the analysis, such as the aforementioned statement on condom use (Murray, n.d.b). Networking tools included a “Contact” page visitors could use to be added to the RSM mailing list (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.d), two country specific contact pages international visitors could use to be added to mailing lists abroad (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.c; n.d.m), and a state-by-state listing of LGBT-affirmative (Roman) Catholic parishes (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.j). Although I suspect that these were powerful tools for many visitors to the site, they figured very little into my analysis as this project specifically examines publicly available rhetorics.

Separating episcopal and lay rhetoric: A justification.

As was the case with the online rhetorics of the RSM and the RSA, I also found that it would be analytically burdensome to treat all non-sash-wearing Catholic’s rhetoric as a single subcategory. Although it was not altogether unexpected that clerical rhetoric would differ from lay people’s rhetoric, it was my sense that the rhetoric deployed by witnesses to sash wearing (irrespective of their positionality within the Church hierarchy) might collectively differ in important ways from rhetoric produced by sash wearers themselves. While this was indeed the case, I ultimately decided that the body of non-sash-wearing artifacts was ultimately too large and unwieldy to do justice to either episcopal rhetoric about sash wearing or non-sash-wearing lay Catholics’ rhetoric about sash wearing when treated as a single symbolic corpus. As I’ll elaborate upon at greater

length in Chapter Four, this was due to the fact that both groups' rhetoric was permeated not only by a conspicuous consciousness of sash wearers themselves, but also by a consciousness of the considerable power of clerics to police sash wearer's participation in the mass. Thus, whether or not an individual rhetor was affiliated with the Catholic episcopacy was not simply a contextual consideration (as I had originally planned to treat it), but central to the substance of the rhetoric they produced. Accordingly, I parsed the episcopacy and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics into separate analytical subcategories. I offer a detailed description of episcopal and lay rhetorics as separate textual subcategories in the two sections to follow.

Episcopal rhetoric.

I was able to analyze the relatively small and diffuse body of discourse I am calling episcopal or clerical rhetoric by stitching together my observations surrounding two markedly different kinds of rhetorical artifacts. First, I examined a small collection of letters and statements authored by members or recognized representatives of the clergy. These letters are all written by (or on behalf of) Archbishops or Cardinals in the Catholic Church. While their addressees range from members of the RSA and RSM (e.g. Flynn 2005, May 2; Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28; Tamberg cited in *Diogenes*, 2005, May 16), to members of the Catholic Church more broadly (e.g. Flynn, 2004, September 9), to commentators covering sash wearers (Arinze cited in *Kralis*, 2005, January 23), they each have a topical focus on sash wearing or sash wearers. Second, I supplemented these letters and statements with news articles about sash wearing published by the Catholic News Service (CNS hereafter). While this is

admittedly a counterintuitive source for episcopal rhetoric surrounding sash wearers, and most of the article's authors are not in fact identified as members of the clergy, the Catholic News Service is a "division of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops" (Catholic News Service, n.d., "CNS Personnel," para.1), and the themes within these reports closely mirror those emerging from the clerical letters and statements.

By including the CNS in my reading of episcopal rhetoric my intention is not to impugn their editorial independence or journalistic integrity. Rather, I seek only to enhance my analysis of episcopal rhetoric by capitalizing on the strong concordance of CNS' rhetoric with that of the clergy. Although the dates of these articles and their authorship vary considerably, they universally engage either with various Archbishops' response to sash wearers (Catholic News Service, 2005, April 1; Martin, 2004, June 2; Thavis, 2004, December 14) and/or the Vatican's position on developing a uniform policy surrounding sash wearers (Catholic News Service, 2005, January 27; Thavis, 2004, December 14; Thavis, 2005, February 4).

Across both types of artifacts, the bulk of the episcopal rhetoric constructed sash wearers negatively, but two letters expressed support for sash wearers: one was written by Archbishop Harry Flynn (2004, September 9) of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and the other was written on behalf of Cardinal Roger Mahoney of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (Tamberg cited in Diogenes, 2005, May 16).

Non-sash-wearing lay Catholic rhetoric.

The rhetorical artifacts included under the umbrella of non-sash wearing lay Catholic rhetoric are the most content diverse body of data offered by any of the textual

subcategories. I coded more than 30 artifacts in my analysis of this subcategory, but broadly speaking, two types of texts are represented in the corpus: Catholic newspapers and Catholic blogs. I discuss these types of texts in turn in the paragraphs below.

The Catholic newspapers can be further divided into sub-types based upon the sort of content they offered. There was very little national coverage to be found on sash wearers except for the CNS articles I included in my analysis of episcopal rhetoric. The other national Catholic newspaper to feature substantial coverage of sash wearing was the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR hereafter). The NCR has a reputation as a progressive news source within the Catholic Press, and bills itself as “one of the few, if not the only truly independent, journalistic outlet for Catholics and others who struggle with the complex moral and societal issues of the day” (National Catholic Reporter, n.d., para. 1). Both NCR news reports (e.g. Coday, 2004, June 18; Feuerherd, 2003, February 14; Lefevre, 2000, November 24) and NCR editorial content were included in the final corpus (e.g. Sweitzer-Beckman, 2010, October 14; Winters, 2010, October 8). The evaluative valence of the NCR content was mixed in its take on sash wearing. Beyond national newspapers, three articles from Archdiocesan newspapers of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Chicago were included in the corpus (Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, 2009, May 27; Martin, 2004, June 6; Wiering, 2010, November 4). Perhaps unsurprisingly, these articles were oriented strongly against sash wearers in their editorial slant. Finally, a handful of news-oriented content published by exclusively online sources representing themselves as Catholic and/or Christian news providers rounded out the journalistic portion of the corpus (e.g. California Catholic Daily, 2010, May 19; Catholic

Media Coalition, 2005, February 10; Lifesitenews.com, 2010, May 18). As with the Archdiocesan paper, these articles also adopted a consistently anti-sash-wearing perspective.

The Catholic blogs included in this corpus were not distinguished from the journalistic sources in terms of their editorial slant. As noted above, opinion pieces were included from the NCR as well. Rather, these blogs were distinguishable in that their sites and authors made no claim to be oriented toward news production or dissemination. Their content generally presumed a like-minded readership, and where blogs were hosted by larger websites and/or organizations, these websites and organizations readily avowed similar ideological and religious commitments as the individual blogs that were coded.

As was the case with the news-based content, the blogs can easily be conceived of as falling into sub-types as well. The first and largest sub-type is comprised of a running blog hosted by CatholicCulture.org (n.d.), a conservative website “working to shape an authentically Christian culture in a secular world” (“Our mission,” para. 1). This blog, entitled “Off the Record” is the closest approximation of an anti-sash website available. With nearly a dozen different postings criticizing sash wearing, the blog features articles articulating why sash wearers violate church teaching (e.g. Diogenes, 2004, May 26a; 2004, May 29; 2005, January 28), assessing members of the episcopacy on their handling of sash wearers (e.g. Diogenes, 2004, May 26b; 2004, December 17; 2005, May 16; Fr. Wilson, 2004, June 2), and/or celebrating lay Catholics who have challenged sash wearers (Fr. Wilson, 2004, June 2). A second subset of three anti-sash postings from other sites was also included in the corpus (Fournier, 2010, May 16; Kralis, 2005, January 23;

Peters, 2010, May 17). Finally, two pro-sash blog posts were included (The Progressive Catholic Voice, 2009, May 28; Weldon, 2010, March 6).

I (sub)categorized and named the various constituents of rainbow sash rhetoric for the sake of clarity and to avoid insinuating that the rhetorical artifacts collected for this study are all similar in either their formal style or their evaluative take on sash wearers. To the extent that the textual subcategorizations I identified here deviated from those called for by my initial sub-research questions, I still strove toward centering my core research question at all times. The manner in which I ultimately divided and textualized the many constituents of rainbow sash rhetoric foreshadows the complex and nuanced interplay that emerged in my analysis between individual rhetors' positionalities vis-à-vis the Church, and the meanings those rhetors produce concerning sash wearing.

Before offering that analysis, however, I return to my discussion of the procedures associated with rhetorical criticism. Having accounted for the research questions I posed and the symbolic texts I selected to answer those questions, I now turn to the critical lens I adopted in approaching/conducting the rhetorical criticism.

Adopting a critical lens.

While few would argue with rhetorical criticism's designation as a research method, scholars have certainly taken different approaches to the theory that undergirds that method. Rhetoricians have, to offer a few examples, variously trained their attention on rhetoric and/or rhetorical study's capacity to: apprehend narrative logics (Fisher, 1984), construct and delimit who is party to a rhetorical act (e.g. Black, 1970; Morris III, 2002; Wander, 1984), interface with material reality (e.g. Greene, 1998; McGee, 1982),

achieve mutual understanding rather than persuasive effects (Foss & Griffin, 1995), and promote, reproduce, and challenge various ideological regimes (e.g. Cloud, 1994; McKerrow 1989; Slagle, 1995; Wander, 1984). These orientations or critical lenses guide and are guided by the research questions posed about symbolic texts. As Foss (2009) puts it, each approach to criticism “has its own procedures for analyzing an artifact” and applies different “units of analysis” in coding a text’s notable features. Insofar as one’s coding and analysis is driven by the research questions they’ve posed, then, those research questions inherently designate certain features of a symbolic text as inviting greater scrutiny than others.

The critical lens I adopted in this project falls within the broad realm that Foss (2009) identifies as “ideological criticism” in that it is expressly concerned with the way “pattern[s] of beliefs” inform “a group’s interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (p. 209). Ideological criticism elucidates these patterns of beliefs by engaging with symbolic texts in three ways. First, it identifies “presented elements” of the text, or its “basic observable features” (p. 214). Second, “the critic articulates ideas, references, themes, allusions, or concepts that are suggested by the presented elements” (p. 216). Finally, the critic makes ideological claims about the text by organizing the “suggested elements” she or he identified into “ideational clusters, themes, or ideas” that account for “all or most” of the suggested elements. Despite this unity of general purpose and analytical approach, Foss rightly notes that ideological criticism is undertaken by scholars with divergent notions of ideology and divergent political commitments with respect to the ideologies they study.

In narrowing my approach to ideological criticism, I relied principally upon McKerrow's (1989) work on "critical rhetoric" (p. 91), and secondarily on Brummett's (1976) theory on rhetoric's postmodernity. McKerrow's (1989) essay on critical rhetoric was of particular use to me in that it adopts an axiological approach to rhetorical scholarship that is aligned with my own. McKerrow conceives of critical rhetoric as a process of rhetorical study that "seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power" while also adopting a distributed view of power that embraces "the prospect of permanent criticism – a self-reflexive critique that turns back on itself even as it promotes a realignment in the forces of power that construct social relationships" (p. 91).

For McKerrow, embodying the "praxis" of critical rhetoric involves eight principles which guide one's "orientation" in analyzing symbolic texts (p. 100). Among these, four principles were particularly important in guiding my orientation to rainbow sash rhetoric. First, McKerrow suggests that "rhetoric constitutes *doxastic* rather than *epistemic knowledge*" meaning that rhetoric is not a tool for the discovery of Truth (p. 103), but rather is a tool for "concealment and unconcealment" that influences "what we believe, what we know, and what we believe to be true" (p. 104). As this relates to the rhetoric I analyzed, I did not orient my examination toward approximating the "real" semantics of sash wearing, but instead worked toward an understanding of how different parties constructed meanings, beliefs, and evaluations surrounding the act. Second, McKerrow asserts that "naming is the central symbolic act of a nominalist rhetoric" and "the power of language to constitute subjects . . . is a justifiable principle to incorporate in a critical perspective" (p. 105). This principle invited me to focus upon how actions,

groups, and individuals were named as part of rainbow sash rhetoric. Far from being implicit or relegated to Foss' (2009) "suggested elements" (p.216), I found that much of the ideological content that manifested itself within my text was on the surface: who was naming whom and how? Third, McKerrow (1989) warns that "absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluating symbolic action" (p. 107). Thus, I examined my text not just for who/what was named and by whom, but who and what wasn't named. This proved particularly vital in coming to terms with the differences between the RSM and RSA's respective online discourse. Given the groups' shared history and their shared activities, the ideological distinctions between them resided as often in omission as it did in declaration. Finally and perhaps most importantly, McKerrow asserts that "fragments contain the potential for polysemic rather than monosemic interpretation" (p. 107). Indeed, this principle animates the study as a whole in that it calls on researchers to look for dominant and subordinate readings of social texts. My research questions are designed to apprehend precisely this phenomenon in that they inquire as to how different parties with different investments in the Catholic Church and its teachings make sense of sash wearing in different ways.

In addition to McKerrow, I am also indebted here to Brummett's (1976) work on postmodern rhetoric. Brummett's work dovetails nicely with this final principle in that he not only attests to the polysemy of social texts, but goes on to argue that that polysemy is mitigated by an "intersubjective" rhetoric that fixes reality as we ultimately understand it (p. 28). In defining reality as the aggregate of multiple realities rhetorically advocated among multiple subjects, Brummett's work encouraged me not just to examine how

different subjects within my text articulated different meanings for sash wearing, but to examine how those meanings were informed by their respective rhetors' awareness of other subjects and the interpretations of sash wearing that they were advocating. Put more simply, Brummett's intersubjective theory of rhetoric revealed that the polysemy of sash wearing is not a static feature, but a dynamic force that compels sash wearers, the clergy, and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics to dialogically negotiate their interpretations with one another.

Having explicated the manner in which I textualized rainbow sash rhetoric to respond to my research questions, and having outlined the theoretical outlook I adopted to respond to my research questions, I now turn to my actual engagements with the text and explain the approach I took to its initial coding.

Procedure 2: Initial Coding

The procedure of initial coding is designed to offer the critic a first read of the text to help them "discover its central features" (Foss, 2009, p. 389). Since the ideological criticism I conducted is not a purely inductive approach, however, I began the process of initial coding with several key terms already in mind based upon my research questions and the critical lens I describe above. In specific I coded for: (1) subject terms including RSM, RSA, the Church (where referred to/personified as a subject), Catholics (where referred to as a collective identity), members of the episcopacy, and proper nouns which were used to refer to these subject terms (e.g. Archbishop Harry Flynn was coded as a subject because he is clearly a member of the episcopacy); (2) terms referencing the actual act of sash wearing or its context including sash wearing, Eucharist, and

communion; (3) terms that evaluatively characterize sash wearing such as protest, political, disruptive, celebration, and self-identification. As is evident from the array of exemplars for each key term, I followed Foss in defining key terms very loosely for the purposes of initial coding. Thus, these key terms were identified and coded not only where they expressly used the kinds of language listed above, but also where they were evoked by novel or unanticipated language, or by nonlinguistic elements of the text such as images, colors, or the performed activities associated with sash wearing. Upon completion of initial coding, the key terms that actually emerged through engagement with the text informed the creation of an explanatory schema to account for the prominent features of the text. The details of this procedure are discussed below.

Procedure 3: Development of Explanatory Schemata

Once initial coding has revealed central features of a symbolic text, rhetorical critics develop an “explanatory schema” that offers a tentative but coherent account for the key elements that they observed through coding. This explanatory schema fulfills two functions for the critic: (1) it represents a preliminary account for the text’s observable qualities and/or their relationship to the research question(s), and (2) it offers the critic a more nuanced set of key terms and themes with which to code the text in greater detail.

My own initial coding didn’t lend itself to the development of a single explanatory schema, but yielded three themes that nevertheless were pertinent to my research questions and offered new lenses with which to re-read the text. First, four core subject positions emerged from the text: (1) sash wearers, (2) righteous members of the episcopacy, (3) misguided/sacrilegious members of the episcopacy, and (4) non-sash-

wearing lay Catholics. This was somewhat unexpected, in that I had anticipated the subjects in the text to adhere more closely to the collective rhetors represented in my research questions (e.g. sash wearers, non sash wearers including members of the episcopacy). Second, although the text was rife with diverse and sometimes contradictory sense-making surrounding sash wearing, it was marked by remarkably consistent definitional discourse surrounding the Eucharist itself. The Eucharist functions for nearly all rhetors as a performance of Catholic identity and a proxy for the cohesion of Catholic believers. Third (though related to the subject positions above), each rhetor's expressed relationship to other subjects was filtered through the lens of their relationship to sash wearers. Thus, while many judgments might function to separate faithful versus sacrilegious members of the episcopacy, nearly all of these assessments were made in terms of individual clergymen's responses to sash wearer's rhetoric. Similarly, the unity of the Catholic community was virtually equated by all parties with contemporaneous or eventual uniformity of Church members' responses to sash wearers.

With these themes in mind, I returned to the text and re-coded it as a means of producing my final analysis. This final procedure of rhetorical criticism is discussed below.

Procedure 4: Re-Coding and Theorizing the Text(s)

In light of the explanatory themes I generated, I returned to the text with a more nuanced set of analytical units. According to Foss (2009), critics code symbolic texts after the generation of explanatory schemata as a method of "testing the proposed schema against the data of your artifact and developing your schema further" (p. 400). Thus, the

process of re-coding isn't simply a process of applying the schema or mining data from the text that are in keeping with the schema. It is a process of re-examining the text with a narrowed sense of purpose while continuing to let intense, frequent, or otherwise notable features of the text itself shape and refine the explanatory schemata being applied. The end of this reflexive process, of course, is a cohesive and coherent grounded "theory" of the text that responds to the research question(s) driving the rhetorical criticism.

In recognition of the explanatory themes that emerged from my initial coding, I returned to the text with two new topics guiding my reading. First, I searched the text for references to unity and/or disunity between the various subject positions identified above as well as references to unity and/or disunity between each of those subject positions and Catholic belief or practice or teachings. to apprehend the contexts in which they emerged. Second, I unpacked the significance of the Eucharistic ritual within the text by coding for references that expressed the nature of the relationship between the subject positions I identified and the sacrament. These references most frequently took the form of assertions as to who could or couldn't have the Eucharist, who should or shouldn't have the Eucharist, who does or does not understand the Eucharist, who was politicizing the Eucharist, and who was or was not respecting/honoring the Eucharist, and who was or was not protecting the Eucharist.

Through multiple iterations of these procedures, the analysis that I ultimately developed rests on the centrality of the Eucharist in each and every one of the rhetors' formulations. Irrespective of individual rhetors' position within the hierarchy of the Church, and irrespective of their evaluative take on the compatibility of Catholicism and

non-normative gender/sexuality, one rhetorical formation remained constant across the entire text: the collective subject positions that rhetors avowed for themselves, the collective subject positions they ascribed to others, and the relationships they posited between those collective subject positions and Catholic teaching/belief were all couched in terms of those subject positions' respective relationships to the Eucharist as a proxy for Catholic Identity as a whole.

This centrality of the Eucharistic sacrament to rainbow sash rhetoric, seemed to me to be consonant with Turner's (1969; 1974; 1980; 1982) emphasis on ritual as central to both the maintenance/constitution of ordered social roles and the enactment of controlled social (role) change. Proceeding from the observation, I coded the texts for references to change, transformation, conversion, and/or any reference to the prevention of these phenomena. Using Turner as a theoretical pathfinder in this way, I found that ritual logics permeated the sense-making of sash-wearers, clergy, and non-sash-wearing laypeople alike. After Brummett's (1976) notion of intersubjectivity, however, it is only in placing their respective rhetorical appeals in dialogue that a full understanding of their respective sense-making is possible.

What ultimately emerged from ideological rhetorical criticism of rainbow sash rhetoric I have just described is what Grimes (1990) has called "ritual criticism," or the "interpretation of a rite or ritual system with a view to implicating its practice" (p. 16). As I will expound upon in the following chapter, it is my contention that the central sources of rhetorical agency within rainbow sash rhetoric are neither sash wearers themselves, nor the clergy, nor the non-sash-wearing laypeople that comment on their activities. Rather,

theirs is a derivative agency channeled from the queered Eucharistic rite around which they all radiate.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

In this chapter I offer my analysis of rainbow sash rhetoric as developed through ideologically-oriented rhetorical criticism. I employed a single research question in this study along with three sub-questions meant to narrow analytical focus on specific constituents of rainbow sash rhetoric as a whole text. This question and its subordinates are:

RQ1. How is sash wearing used to rhetorically construct LGBT Catholic identity and its

position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church?

- a. How does sash wearing appropriate and/or interrupt ritual as a rhetorical strategy?
- b. How do the RSM and RSA's publicly available online discourses supplement, alter, or augment the semantics of their eponymous activities?
- c. How do other Catholics' publicly available discourses about sash wearing supplement, alter, or augment the semantics of the sash wearers' eponymous activities?

These questions were designed to explore how sash wearing represents a potentially new way for LGBT Catholics to articulate their religious identities with their non-normative sexualities/genders. They were also posed as a means of mapping rhetorical agency, or how “the capacity to act” manifests itself among/between the multiple rhetors, audiences, media, and symbolic acts that comprise rainbow sash rhetoric as a whole (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). Ultimately, these questions allowed me to do just this,

but the answers they yielded are best presented in a manner that deviates from the way in which they were originally formulated.

As such, this chapter is not (and I believe cannot be) organized in a manner that lays out each (sub-)research question and responds to it in turn. Instead, the chapter is presented as follows: first, I offer a brief answer to my core research question; second, I take up each of the constituents of my overall text (i.e. the rhetoric of sash wearing, the rhetoric of the RSM, the rhetoric of the RSA, the rhetoric of the episcopacy, the rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics) and account for its rhetoric in light of my propositions surrounding rainbow sash rhetoric more broadly. Finally, I close the chapter by presenting a rhetorical network model that graphically accounts for each of the constituents I've analyzed in relationship to one another.

Rainbow Sash Rhetoric: Compelled (Identitarian) Sense-Making

RQ1. How is sash wearing used to rhetorically construct LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church?

Sash wearing isn't *used to construct* LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church. It *necessitates the construction* of LGBT (Catholic) identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church. There are multiple rhetors included under the umbrella of rainbow sash rhetoric as I textualized it for this project. They include sash wearers themselves, supportive and non-supportive clergy, and supportive and non-supportive lay Catholics. Despite these rhetors' diversity of opinion, and despite the heterogeneity of their respective relationships to Catholic teaching on matters of non-normative gender/sexuality, each of these rhetors primarily engage with

sash wearing as what Bitzer (1968) would call an “exigence” – an “imperfection marked by urgency” – to be rendered intelligible and thereby resolved through rhetorical processes (p. 7).

The universal perception of this “imperfection,” is a result of the Eucharistic ritual in which sash wearing intervenes. As Thomas (2006) notes regarding the communicative dynamics of ritual, it is easy to misperceive rituals as “grammatical” but essentially “meaningless” because “quite often even practitioners cannot give a reasonable account of the meaning of their acts” (p. 325). Although this is debatable with respect to the Eucharist in specific, Thomas’ observation suggests that rituals’ meanings can become so deep-seated and so embedded “within the overall economy of social communications” as to escape easy articulation (p. 326). In altering this ritual grammar, then, sash wearing creates an exigence that is easily perceived, profoundly felt, and semantically elusive for anyone for whom the Eucharistic ritual already possessed meaning. The real interpretive labor, rhetorical invention, and rhetorical contention that emerges surrounding the rainbow sash, then, is not in wearing the rainbow sash at all. It is in determining: (a) what kind of exigence sash wearing creates/constitutes/illuminates, (b) what its scope is relative to LGBT and/or Catholic identity, politics, and Catholic teaching, and (c) by what means it should be resolved.

I therefore offer three principles to account for how rainbow sash rhetoric operates in relationship to LGBT Catholic identity construction and its relationship to the Roman Catholic Church. First, as mentioned in the closing lines of chapter 3, sash wearing during the Eucharist represents an agentic and exigent core from which the impetus for

symbol use and meaning making radiates. Second, that impetus radiates to three different categories of rhetors, each with different relationships to Church teaching and sash wearing: (1) sash wearers themselves, (2) members of and spokespeople for the Roman Catholic episcopacy, and (3) Catholic practitioners who function neither as sash wearers nor as members of the Catholic clerical hierarchy. Third, the rhetoric deployed by rhetors in each of these categories relies on ritual logics as a means of sense-making and is ideologically reflective of both the rhetor *and* the sense-making rhetoric deployed by other rhetors.

The remainder of my analysis is oriented toward clarifying and exemplifying this macro-level description of rainbow sash rhetoric and the manner in which it emanates from an altered Eucharistic ritual as an exigence. The sub-sections below offer a more grounded discussion of each of the constituents of the wider text. I begin by offering my rhetorical analysis of sash wearing as an agentic and exigent action. I then turn to the rhetoric of the episcopacy in recognition of their frequent role as the first public interpreters of sash wearing. I then discuss the rhetoric deployed by other Catholics in response to sash wearing, and finally offer my analysis of the rhetoric of the RSM and RSA themselves.

The Rainbow-Sashed Sacrament: The Agency of a Queer(ed) Form

I argue in brief above that rituals, like the Eucharistic one that sash wearing intervenes in, have automatic weight as rhetorical exigencies when their “deep-seated logic” or “grammatical form” is violated (Thomas, 2006, p. 324). But to carry this grammatical metaphor a step further, it is not fair to say that all grammatical violations or

errors are qualitatively the same. Nor is it reasonable to claim that all violations of grammar provoke the same responses from interlocutors. To account for the profusion of rhetoric surrounding sash wearers' violation of the grammar of the Eucharistic ritual, it is necessary to apprehend precisely *how* their action alters the sacrament. In the proceeding rhetorical analysis of sash wearing, I specifically argue that the activity queers the Roman Catholic mass and its attendant Eucharistic ritual. Having built this argument, I then adapt Rand's (2008) work on queer texts and rhetorical agency to argue that sash wearing not only queers the Eucharist but renders the Eucharist a "queer form" of symbol use (p. 309), thereby endowing it with sufficient rhetorical agency to compel diverse and unpredictable sense-making efforts that transcend the control of rhetors.

Sash Wearing as Queering

In coming to grips with sash wearing and the immense capacity I suggest it has to compel sense-making rhetoric, I believe that it is useful to appeal to the concept of queering. The review of literature in chapter two touches upon queer approaches to gender/sexuality as well as queer political commitments surrounding non-normative gender/sexuality. The notion of queering emerges from these theoretical and activist discourses, but has taken on a different (and frequently broader) meaning. According to Sullivan (2003), the expanding usage of the term "queer" within contemporary scholarly and activist discourse has elicited controversy among queer theorists. One can argue, for example, that queer's use as a placeholder or umbrella term for identitarian sexuality labels (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual) is counterproductive in that queer theory was formulated specifically as a critique of these notions of identity. Similarly, queer's use as

a label for anti-assimilationist politics can also be deemed problematic in that this usage can “inform an overly simplistic view of what or who is deemed to be queer, and what or who is not” (p. 48). In light of these tensions, Sullivan suggests that “it may be more productive to think of queer as a verb (a set of actions), rather than as a noun (an identity, or even a nameable positionality formed in or through the practice of particular actions).” (p. 50). By adopting this perspective, queer “comes to be understood as a deconstructive practice” (p. 50): queer becomes queering.

Reworking queer as a deconstructive practice necessarily expands its scope beyond the critique of subject-oriented sexual politics: one could ostensibly queer any normative discourse, irrespective of the degree to which it was concerned with gender/sexuality at all. Indeed, Edelman (2004) suggests that non-normative gender/sexuality possesses the potential to queer politics altogether by destabilizing its foundational premise of an always emergent future and the social imperative to shape it correctly. Queering thus derives power from its capacity to threaten systems of meaning from within: to menace social structures by exposing the semantic contradictions and polysemy they are built upon while offering no stable or stabilizing alternative.

Defined in this manner, I think that the performance of sash wearing accomplishes a queering of the Eucharist. I base this argument on three features which are evident within the practice of sash wearing *and* definitionally implicated in the practice of queering: (1) intentional intervention in deeply held beliefs, (2) use and reversal of those beliefs’ symbolic resources, and (3) refusal of a clear alternative to deconstructed beliefs. I unpack these features in the subsections to follow.

Intentional intervention in deeply held beliefs.

The deeply held beliefs surround the sacrament of the Eucharist and its meaning(s). Although it is accurate to say that sash-wearers are known for wearing sashes at mass, the reality is that their sash wearing has more to do with communion than with the mass as a whole. This is evident in the way sash wearers participate in the mass. As the detailed description of sash wearing I offer in the previous chapter attests, short of actually putting the sashes on at the beginning of mass sash wearers do nothing liturgically out of the ordinary until it is time to receive the Eucharist. It is in this moment that sash wearing becomes an active rhetorical performance, and the centrality of the Eucharist as sash wearers' focus is further undergirded upon congregants' return to their pews after its distribution: whether sash wearers stand or kneel is solely contingent upon whether or not they are allowed to participate in communion.

Sash wearer's intervention within the Eucharist is, in fact, explicitly acknowledged on the RSA's website. The group describes sash wearing as "sacramentally expressing the truth of our lives" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e, para. 3), and as an "ongoing expression of sacramental witness" (n.d.b, para. 3). Indeed, they state that "in wearing the Rainbow Sash, members change the actual story, the 'event' of the Eucharist" (para. 4). The choice to intervene specifically within the Eucharist bespeaks the deconstructive impulse associated with queering. If deconstruction "works away at the very foundation" of "absolute essences and oppositions" embedded within its critical object (Sullivan, 2003, p. 50), then there is nothing in Roman Catholic religious practice

more foundational and ripe for deconstruction than the sacrament in which “is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324).

Use and reversal of normative symbolic resources.

The second feature of sash wearing that allows it to queer the Eucharistic sacrament is its heavy citation of the very systems of meaning it is destabilizing. Sash wearers are not disrupting the Eucharist outright, they are acting within the ritual grammar of the Eucharist and they are doing so in a manner that emphasizes their fluent command of the Roman Catholic symbolic lexicon. Excepting the rainbow-patterned sash itself, which I discuss at greater length below, the fidelity with which sash wearers adhere to convention when celebrating mass is an important dimension to their performance. Sash wearers’ familiarity with appropriate Catholic religious observance underscores the intentionality with which they undertake their intervention in Eucharistic ritual. After all, a practicing Catholic is far more likely to fully understand the religious and cultural implications of the Eucharist within Catholic teaching. Moreover, the visibility and potentiality for change that sash wearing is intended to foster seem all the more likely to be grounded not only in abstract beliefs about LGBT exclusion within Catholic teaching but also in lived experiences of exclusion as members of the Catholic Church.

Beyond sash wearers’ general command/observance of catholic religious practice and the intimacy that that command conveys, sash wearing itself cites important memes of Catholic symbol use even as it violates their conventions. The fact that sash wearing is silent, for example, is significant. Among the forms of ritual that Goffman (1967) deems important to social life is the “avoidance ritual” (p. 62), in which an individual or

individuals are obliged to exhibit behavioral or interactive “circumspection” (p. 63). Though Goffman was primarily interested in the dynamics of interpersonal interaction, I contend that silence constitutes a form of “circumspection” that plays out frequently within the Roman Catholic mass (p. 63). In as much as the order of the Catholic liturgy and the spoken utterances associated with it are largely prescribed, so too is the absence of utterance, or silence, that exists between them. Thus, sash wearing’s status as a nonverbal act appropriates the already semantically invested silences of the Catholic Mass in the service of its own visibility. In doing so, however, those silences become divested of their usual semantic content, and interpreters have little context with which to ascertain why the silences of the mass have been put to a new use and precisely what that use is intended to mean.

Similarly, that sash wearers specifically elect to don a sash on a prescribed day of the Church calendar cites and plays upon the liturgical colors already deployed as symbols within Roman Catholic religious practice. According to Morrisroe (1908), the Church has instructed that priest’s vestments, altar adornments, and other visual elements should be green, white, red, violet, black, or rose to reflect the specific religious significance of the mass being celebrated, and Pentecost is one of only a handful of occasions on the liturgical calendar in which the red of “burning charity and the martyrs’ generous sacrifice” is used (para. 11). For sash wearers, then, to choose Pentecost as a day on which to adorn themselves with rainbow patterned sashes queers the occasion both in the sense that it denaturalizes the traditional liturgical symbolism used by the Church, and in the sense that it does so by proliferating visual imagery commonly associated with

LGBT identity and rights. These features strongly embody Edelman's (2004) contention that queering derives its power largely from its capacity to destabilize systems of meaning from within them. So long as the queer is understood to be unequivocally outside of the existing regimes of truth or power, those regimes can use queers to sustain themselves by treating queers as an Others against which the values and identity of the dominant group can be contrastively defined. Queering, Edelman suggests, works precisely because it refuses to be outside of and other than. By disrupting normative regimes from within, one raises the possibility that the ideological contentions, contradictions, and/or cleavages one reveals were, in fact, there all along. Thus, by reworking the symbolism surrounding the Eucharist from within the Eucharistic ritual and within the Catholic Church more broadly, sash wearers suggest that the Catholic teaching and Catholic religious practice might always have born the seeds of its own disunity.

Refusal of a clear alternative to deconstructed beliefs.

The final means by which sash wearing queers the Eucharist is its omission of a clear alternative or resolution in the face of the disruption it visits upon the ritual and, by implication, Catholic religious practice/identity. The silent and sartorial form of sash wearers' symbol use doesn't just facilitate its intimacy and internality as described above. It also functions to occlude more explicit symbol use that might resolve the disorientation sash wearing produces. Sash wearing is fundamentally neither deliberative nor easy to ignore. So, while one can glean from sash wearer's activities that they are familiar with Roman Catholic religious practice, and one can glean that sash wearers are using the logic

and symbols of religious practice to augment or disrupt the sacrament of Eucharist, one cannot glean from sash wearing how that disruption can or should be resolved.

To be sure, sash wearers adhere more closely to the conventions of the Catholic mass in instances where the Eucharist is made available to them: they kneel in prayer after communion rather than remaining standing if they are allowed to participate in the sacrament (JMurray 1340, 2009, February 6). Indeed, in 2005 RSM members in Los Angeles even elected not to wear sashes to mass at all as an acknowledgment of Archbishop Roger Mahony's consistent support (Bono, 2005). Even in these instances, however, the usually unarticulated meanings and social conventions surrounding the Eucharistic ritual have been altered by the visible presence of rainbow sashes (or in the case of the Los Angeles RSM, their past and potential future presence). Whether members of the Catholic episcopacy elect to withhold the Eucharist from sash wearers or not, the actions they take operate within a context of a ritual that is obviously and irrevocably altered. The silence of sash wearing, along with sash wearers' tradition of donning sashes during rather than before mass, are also effective in deferring any easy interpretation/resolution. This silence not only leaves sash wearers' ultimate vision for the Church and its rituals opaque, but also denies at least the immediate possibility for dialogue or deliberation that members of the episcopacy or other congregants might use to mediate or mitigate the polysemy that sash wearing adds to the Eucharist.

This semantic and ideological uncertainty is not simply a consequence of queering, it is queering's stated goal and source of praxis. Sullivan (2003) rightly notes that "deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction" (p. 50), and the goal of

queering is not to dismantle institutions, discourses, or subjectivities, but to trouble ontological stability. Such an assertion is surely relevant to sash wearing, which in no way seeks to dismantle the Eucharist or its religious significance. It is equally important to note, however, that deconstruction is distinct from and sometimes obviates (re)construction. Queering endorses and capitalizes upon the “inherent instability” of meaning because of the spaces it creates for alternate ways of being, knowing, and acting. I do not mean to suggest here that sash wearers themselves are devoted, as poststructuralists are, to a constant and iterative process of deconstruction or queering. Indeed, my later discussion of the RSM and RSA’s web-based rhetoric suggests that they do have a clear vision for a (re)constructed LGBT-inclusive Catholic Church. I am suggesting, however, that sash wearing unto itself is incapable of articulating this. Sash wearing can and does queer the Eucharist as a means of creating interpretive possibility surrounding LGBT Catholic identity and the Catholic Church’s teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality. As I will discuss in the section below, however, that potentiality emanates from a queer(ed) rhetorical form that defies the sovereignty of the RSM the RSA or any other rhetor.

A Queer(ed) Form

Thus far my analysis of sash wearing has centered sash wearers as agents in the production of rainbow sash rhetoric, and sash wearing is a unique form of rhetorical invention that should in no way be minimized. To revisit my core argument, however, it is my contention that rainbow sash rhetoric as a whole emanates from sash *wearing* as a rhetorical exigence, not from sash *wearers* as rhetors. In this section, I move toward this

more diffuse model of rhetorical production by adapting Rand's (2008) work on rhetorical agency and "queer forms" (p. 309). Although Rand does not explicitly speak to notions of rhetorical exigence, she offers a theory of queer textual agency that I believe accounts for the diverse array of sense-making rhetoric produced in response to sash wearing. In other words, Rand allows me to move beyond my earlier contention that violations of ritual grammar are perceived as an exigence, and suggest why queered rituals constitute exigencies that are particularly flexible in terms of the rhetoric they elicit. After all, births, marriages, deaths, and a host of other experiences are exigent in so far as they are perceived to be grounds for rhetoric (and frequently ritual). However, each of these occasions can be said to elicit relatively conventional and readily recognizable rhetorical forms within the bounds of particular (co-)cultures. Sash wearing, on the other hand, elicits wildly different rhetorics from each of the stakeholders party to it (i.e. RSM members, RSA members, members of the episcopacy, and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics) and is put to use in promoting a wide range of ideological and theological interests. To account for this phenomenon, I argue after Rand that by queering the Eucharistic ritual of the Catholic Church and (by virtue of that ritual's religious significance) queering LGBT Catholic identity relative to the Church and its teachings, sash wearers reconstitute the Eucharist as a "queer form" marked by such semantic ambiguity that it wields rhetorical agency independent of and greater than that exerted by sash wearers themselves (p. 309).

Rand is helpful to me here in that her definitions of queerness and rhetorical agency both apply to rainbow sash rhetoric. Rand develops both definitions in light of the

polemics of HIV/AIDS activist Larry Kramer. Kramer is famous for his inflammatory speeches and prose accusing the government and the LGBT community itself of being complicit in the deaths of thousands of gay men in the opening decade of the AIDS epidemic. Rand argues that Kramer's rhetoric was hugely influential, but not just in producing the public policies he advocated. She notes, for example, that his rhetoric became a touchstone for many early queer theorists who defined themselves and their politics in opposition to his.

In light of this, Rand defines rhetorical agency not in terms of the rhetor but in terms of the text and its context, calling it "the capacity for words and/or actions to come to make sense and therefore to create effects through their particular formal and stylistic conventions" (pp. 299-300). To account for the diverse response to Kramer's polemics within this definition, Rand claims that polemics are formally and stylistically queer. Importantly, Rand insists that by queerness she does "not mean to suggest that it is a form essentially suited to queers, that it marks gendered or sexual difference, or that it promotes resistance or opposition" (p. 298). Rather she suggests that queerness is merely "the lack of a necessary or predictable relation between an intending agent and the effects of an action" (p. 298). Thus de-politicized, Rand claims that queerness is endemic to texts generally but is more or less prominent in particular textual forms. She argues that exceptionally queer texts produce multiple rhetorical responses for two interlocking reasons. First, queer texts possess an immense amount of symbolic ambiguity, thereby offering rhetors the raw resources with which to construct multiple meanings from the same text. Second, this profusion of semantic potential drives rhetors to produce

meanings in order to limit that ambiguity. Conceived of in this manner, “rhetorical agency arises from a . . . provisional gesture that defers temporarily the possibility of acting or speaking otherwise” (p. 312).

Sash wearers shape the features of the Eucharistic ritual such that it is an exceptionally queer form despite the fact that none of the rhetors associated with rainbow sash rhetoric espouse queer politics. The queerness of the Eucharistic ritual necessitates that sash wearers, Catholic clergy, and non-sash wearing lay Catholics each deploy sense-making rhetoric that “defers” this queerness by advocating for an interpretation that suits their ideological interests (p. 312). To do so, these rhetors creatively frame the “formal features” of the ritual text in ways that differentially create the possibility for “radical transformation” or “retrenchment” of LGBT Catholic identity and Catholic teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality (p. 314).

In the remainder of this chapter I explicate the approach that the episcopacy, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, RSA members, and RSM members respectively take in making sense of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual that sash wearing creates. In keeping with Rand’s emphasis on the features of the text as an interpretive restraint on textual agency, my analysis will explain how each party’s sense-making rhetoric is enabled by logics of ritual.

Communion (Anti)Politics: Episcopal Sense-Making Rhetoric

The network model of rainbow sash rhetoric that I offer in Figure 4.1 proposes that each discrete body of sense-making rhetoric surrounding the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual exerts ideological influence that shapes the others. Put differently, the rhetoric of

the episcopacy partially shapes the rhetoric of sash wearers, which partially shapes the rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, which partially shapes the rhetoric of the episcopacy, and so on ad infinitum. By suggesting the mutuality of ideological influence, however, I do not mean to imply that this influence is exerted in equal measure by all rhetors at all times. I offer my analysis of clerical sense-making rhetoric first because I believe that the clergy occupies a particularly influential position within the network of ideologically influenced sense-making that I claim is at work. The episcopacy enjoys some degree of interpretive primacy by virtue of the spiritual and bureaucratic positions of leadership they occupy within the hierarchically organized Catholic ecclesia and, by extension, the role they play within the Eucharistic ritual. Though it may be queered by the presence of sash wearers, the Eucharist and its distribution is still primarily arbitrated by members of the episcopacy. In keeping with this role, much of the sense-making rhetoric deployed by lay Catholics and by sash wearers themselves is formulated partially in response or as a rebuttal to episcopal sense-making.

In my analysis of episcopal sense-making I argue that members of the clergy (and others who reflect their interests), essentially work to de-queer the Eucharist by narrowing the boundaries and the meanings of the rite such that sash wearing is not construed to occur within its confines. These rhetorics function to reassert the role of the clergy in policing the sacrament and thereby allow the episcopacy to: (1) rework the symbolic threat sash wearing poses as one that is external to the Eucharist itself, and (2) foreclose the need for apologia surrounding Church teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality. I unpack these rhetorical moves in the subsections below.

De-Queering the Ritual

Two core, but not altogether consistent, themes emerge from episcopal sense-making rhetoric that allows that rhetoric to narrow the scope of the Eucharistic ritual to the exclusion of sash wearers. First, episcopal sense-making rhetoric heavily emphasizes notions of unity in its rendering of the Eucharist and what it means to the Catholic ecclesia. Second, in a move that partially undercuts the first theme, the episcopacy's rhetoric accounts for sash wearer's denial of the Eucharist by condemning it as a form of protest. I discuss each of these themes in the subsections below.

Articulating the Eucharist as communion with Church teaching.

The episcopacy's sense-making rhetoric surrounding sash wearing is permeated by references to communion as unity with the Catholic Church. What is interesting about this recurring characterization of the Eucharist, though, is that specific meaning of Communion as unity is itself somewhat elusive. In the paragraphs to follow, I will outline two separate meanings affixed to the rhetoric of Communion as unity and account for why this semantic slippage serves the ideological interests of the Church hierarchy in dealing with sash wearing.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2000) notes that there are multiple names for the sacrament of the Eucharist and suggests that "each name evokes a certain aspect of it" (1328). The term Eucharist itself is said to evoke "thanksgiving to God" (1328), while "Holy and Divine Liturgy" invokes the orientation of the Church's "whole liturgy" around the sacrament (1330). Meanwhile, "the Eucharistic assembly" refers to the sacrament's celebration "amid the assembly of the faithful" (1329), and the frequently

used “Holy Communion,” or simply Communion, references how “in the sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ” (1331). Given the complexity and nuance with which Catholic teaching theorizes the Eucharist, what is remarkable about the strategic discourse of the episcopacy that emerged from the text is the simultaneous specificity and inconsistency with which it characterized the sacrament. Unity or communion with the Catholic Church is the overriding sense in which the Eucharist is understood, with unity not only permeating rhetors’ direct characterizations of the Eucharist, but also monopolizing their attention in comparing different church officials’ stances on sash wearers receiving the Eucharist.

Archbishop Flynn (2004, September 9) explicitly refers to the Eucharist as a “source of healing and unity” in a letter he writes to congregants defending both sash wearers’ and pro-choice politicians’ embattled eligibility to receive Communion (para. 1). Importantly though, Flynn (2005, May 2) also makes an appeal to unity in a later letter informing sash wearers that he will no longer allow them to receive the sacrament, saying he hopes that RSA members will refrain from wearing the sashes in future so as “to advance the unity of the Church” (para. 5). As indicated above, unity with the Catholic Church is certainly not the only or even the primary manner in which the Catechism (2000) conceives of the Eucharist’s significance. Yet unity with the Church is cited again and again as the central concern in determining sash wearer’s access to the Eucharist, irrespective of the position individual members of the episcopacy ultimately stake out on the issue. Flynn’s two letters are particularly illustrative in this regard, in that they demonstrate how Communion as unity can be deployed (by the same rhetor) to both

justify and reject sash wearers' participation in the Eucharist. The shift in Flynn's judgment is also illustrative of the manner in which the meaning of unity can be subtly and strategically reworked so as to support different claims about sash wearing and its theological significance. It is of note that in Flynn's (2004, September 9) pro-sash letter he refers to Communion as a "source" of unity with the Church (para. 1), while his anti-sash letter refers to sash wearers' participation in the Eucharist as a threat to that unity (Flynn, 2005, May 2). In the former instance, then, Communion as unity refers to the unifying power of the sacrament itself. In the latter, however, Communion as unity refers to the sacrament as a performance or enactment of a unity with the Church that already exists.

Through appeal to the relatively uncontroversial claim that Communion is (or means) unity, then, clerics opposed to sash wearing can claim that Communion requires unity with Catholic teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality. Over and over again, episcopal rhetorical artifacts center sash wearers' *full* acceptance of Church teaching (on non-normative gender/sexuality) as paramount to participation in the Eucharistic ritual. For example, Cardinal Francis Arinze, "the Vatican's top liturgy official" (Thavis, 2005, February 4, para. 1), explicitly insists that sash wearers "disqualify" themselves from communion by manifesting their "opposition to Church teaching on a major issue of natural law" (Arinze cited in Thavis, 2005, February 4, para. 6). Likewise, Archbishop Harry Flynn's (discontinued) practice of allowing sash wearers to receive the Eucharist is attributed to the fact that "members of the movement had assured him in writing" that the sash did not constitute an objection to the Church's teachings (Catholic News Service,

2005, January 27, para. 10). Even Cardinal Roger Mahoney, who has remained supportive of sash wearers, articulates that support by centering the possibility of LGBT Catholics' eventual endorsement of Catholic teaching, insisting that the churches in his Archdiocese will "be respectful and inclusive" to sash wearers because "all of us struggle to be better Christians" (Tamberg cited in Diogenes, 2005, May 16, para. 2). While Mahoney remains moot on precisely what this better Christianity would look like, his statement at least implicitly signals that sash wearers or their sexual proclivities fall short of the ideals identified within Catholic teaching.

Archbishop John Nienstedt (cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28) is perhaps the most sweeping in his rendering of Eucharistic participation as contingent upon full acceptance of Church teaching on sexuality. In a letter to the RSA, Nienstedt informs RSA members that they will not be offered the Eucharist as they have "broken communion with the Church's teaching" (para. 7). But Nienstedt goes even further as the letter continues, eventually foreclosing the very possibility of the "dialogue" the RSA calls for surrounding issues of LGBT gender/sexuality (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e, para. 1). Nienstedt (cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28) states that before such dialogue could occur, "it would first be essential that you state clearly that you hold with the conviction of all that the Church teaches on matters of human sexuality, if you do not believe, then there cannot be dialogue" (para. 8). Unity with the church on issues of gender/sexuality thus becomes a prerequisite not only for the receipt of Communion, but even for non-ritual deliberation of the matter with Church leaders.

The high priority placed upon unity of sexual ethics/beliefs is not limited to discussions of sash wearers themselves. There is a parallel discourse throughout the episcopal artifacts that centers on the need for uniformity among members of the episcopacy in handling the RSA and RSM. Martin's (2004, June 2) article on sash wearers, written when RSM members were being denied the Eucharist in Chicago and RSA members were allowed to participate in the Eucharist in St. Paul and Minneapolis, repeatedly returns to the "different tack" taken by Cardinal George and Archbishop Flynn respectively (para. 4). It acknowledges that the USCCB "has not enunciated" a policy on treatment of sash wearers (para. 10), but cites Cardinal George's speculation that since sash wearers had been denied the Eucharist at "a USCCB Mass" in Washington D.C., "it could be understood as having national implications" (para. 12). Subsequent CNS articles focus on the Vatican's perspective concerning Archbishop Flynn's decision to treat sash wearers in a manner "unlike some other bishops" (Thavis, 2004, December 14, para. 2), the Vatican's announcement that "ideally all of the bishops who have pastoral care for the members of this movement should seek to adopt a uniform approach" (Flynn cited in Catholic News Service, 2005, January 27, para. 5), and the ultimate decision by the Vatican that "sash wearers disqualify themselves from receiving holy communion" (Thavis, 2005, February 4, para. 1). This concern for pastoral uniformity even emerges within the letter Archbishop Flynn (2005, May 2) writes to the RSA reversing his earlier position of allowing sash wearers to receive the Eucharist. He states that "the Vatican has communicated to me that it does indeed consider the wearing of the Rainbow Sash during

reception of Communion to be unacceptable, a directive that I believe all Bishops will adhere to” (para. 2).

By readily equating congregants’ eligibility for Communion with the degree to which they convey unity with the Church on issues of non-normative gender/sexuality, episcopal sense-making rhetoric semantically (re)installs the episcopacy *between* sash wearers and the Eucharistic ritual. By focusing on the ways in which sash wearers “disqualify themselves” from receiving the Eucharist (Thavis, 2005, February 4), episcopal sense-making rhetoric effectively narrows the scope of the Eucharistic ritual such that sash wearers are rendered external to it. Thus, sash wearers may be queer or act queerly, but they are not in a position to queer the Eucharist. Instead, sash wearer’s lack of communion with the Church’s teachings demands that priests (uniformly) stop them at the point of ritual entry and the semantic and cultural threats posed by a queer(ed) Eucharist are thereby mitigated.

Despite the efficacy of this rhetoric for making sense of the queered Eucharistic ritual in a way that empowers members of the episcopacy to de-queer it, construing clerics’ role as policing access to the Sacrament is not without its critics. A second, not altogether consistent, account for sash wearers’ exclusion from the Eucharist is also deployed within episcopal rhetoric. This account, which focuses on the publicity and politicization of one’s objections to Church teaching, is the focus of the subsection below.

Articulating the Eucharist as apolitical.

In a 2004 letter published in St. Paul and Minneapolis’ archdiocesan newspaper, Archbishop Harry Flynn (2004, September 9) explicitly rejects clerics’ role in assessing

who may or may not receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. He deems it an unnecessary form of “political judgment” (para. 1), and contends that it robs people of the capacity to rely on an “examination of conscience” in assessing whether they are ready “to eat and drink of the body and blood of our Lord” (para. 2). In the letter that he authored a year later announcing that he would not allow sash wearers to participate in the Eucharist, Flynn (2005, May 2) expressed a similar sentiment, stating that “the criterion for the reception of the Eucharist is the same for all” the “judgment rests with an individual Catholic’s conscience” as to whether they have met those criteria (para. 4). In this instance, however, the assertion was qualified. Flynn states that “the wearing of the sash is more and more perceived as a protest against church [sic] teaching” (para. 2), and he asserts that despite the role of conscience in the decision to receive Communion, “it has never been nor is it now acceptable for a communicant to use the reception of Communion as an act of protest” (para. 4).

Archbishop Flynn’s calibration of his position to include an explicit condemnation of politics is illustrative of the second theme that emerges from the episcopal sense-making I analyzed. As is the case with the strategic reworking of Communion as unity discussed above, there is also a slippage in the episcopal discourse that accounts for clerics’ denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers. The first iteration of this discourse is reflected in the preceding subsection, in which I argue that the Eucharist is positioned as communion with Church teaching on non-normative sexuality, and that exclusion from the Eucharist functions to render sash wearers external to ritual they

queer. The second iteration of this discourse, I argue, accounts for objections to the first while simultaneously elaborating on it by expressing what the Eucharist is not: political.

These discourses are inconsistent in that they offer two similar but fundamentally different justifications for cleric's denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers. In this second variation, it is not simply that sash wearers are not in full communion with Church teaching; sash wearers' exclusion from the Eucharist is instead attributed to the fact that they publicly protest those teachings.

In the sense-making rhetoric of clerics, sash wearing is referred to using explicitly ideological and politicized terms. It is called "demonstrating" (Thavis, 2005, February 4, para. 1), a "public act of dissent" (Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28, para. 6), "protest" (e.g. Flynn, 2005, May 2, para. 2; Martin, 2004, June 2, para. 5; Thavis, 2004, December 14, para. 14), "disruption" (Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28, para. 7), and a "political statement" (Thavis, 2004, December 14, para. 13). Similarly, clerics refer to sash wearers as "gay rights" activists (Catholic News Service, 2005, January 27, para. 1; Martin, 2004, June 2, para. 2; Thavis, 2004, December 14, para. 1) and "protesters" (e.g. Martin, 2004, June 2, para. 1; Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28, para. 6). The effects attributed to sash wearers' activism are also diverse. Archbishop Flynn accuses sash wearers of using "Pentecost as a cause célèbre" (Flynn, 2005, May 2, para. 5), while Archbishop Nienstedt condemns them for disrupting "those who will gather on Pentecost to pray (Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28, para. 9), and

showing “disrespect and irreverence for the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ” (Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28, para.6).

Articulating protest as opposed to just disagreement with teaching as the offense which “disqualifies” sash wearers from Communion has two consequences (Thavis, 2005, February 4, para. 1). First, it occludes the need for a theological defense of Church teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality. While many of the artifacts of episcopal rhetoric cite Church teaching on sexuality (e.g. *Catholic News Service*, 2005, January 27; Flynn, 2005, May 2; Thavis, 2004, December 14; Thavis, 2005, February 4), and one CNS article even discusses episcopal concerns about the clarity of those teachings (Thavis, 2004, December 14), they neglect to explain or account for terms like “natural law,” and “objectively disordered,” that form the liturgical basis for understanding non-normative gender/sexuality (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2000, 2357). By centering the denial of the Eucharist on the act of protest, the nuances (or validity) of the Church’s teachings on non-normative gender/sexuality become, like sash wearers themselves, removed from the boundaries of the Eucharistic ritual. Indeed, this seems to be the thrust of Cardinal Francis George’s (cited in Martin, 2004, June 2) encouraging but ultimately noncommittal statement that “we can talk this through in other places, but not make the Eucharist a statement” (para. 3). It also accounts for one CNS reporter’s somewhat unusual reliance on a gay rights activist to critique sash wearers (Martin, 2004, June 2). She reports that Cardinal George “and several gay activists said the problem wasn’t that the protesters were identifying themselves as homosexual but that they were using the Eucharist for a political statement” (para. 1). Elaborating on this claim, Martin

introduces gay activist Rick Garcia “who receives communion nearly every day, and has never been turned away” (para. 20). She goes on to quote Garcia (cited in Martin, 2004, June 2), who invites that “if you have a problem with the cardinal, take it to the chancery, not to the altar” (para. 22).

Second, episcopal rhetoric’s protest-oriented account for the exclusion of sash wearers from the Eucharist functions as a counter-claim against those who, like Archbishop Flynn (2004, September 9), express reservations about the role of clerics in parsing whose beliefs do and do not sufficiently coincide with Catholic teaching to warrant inclusion within the Eucharistic sacrament. Many Catholics disagree with one or more tenets of the Catholic faith. Yet most of these Catholics are nevertheless well equipped to receive the Eucharist “with no fuss” (Martin, 2004, June 2, para. 21). By appealing to a religious practice that should transcend politics, however, sash wearers can be denied Communion without threatening those who disagree with the Church’s teachings with respect to contraception, women’s ordination, clerical celibacy, or anything else.

In this section I have argued that episcopal sense-making appeals to rituals’ definitionally bounded nature in order to narrow the boundaries of the Eucharistic ritual to the exclusion of the Sash wearers who queer it. This allows the episcopacy to uphold the Church’s current teachings on matters of non-normative gender-sexuality while simultaneously diminishing the threat that sash wearers pose to the legitimacy of that teaching. It accomplishes this by way of two different but interdependent semantic slippages. First, it deploys the widely (and theologically) endorsed discourse of

Communion as unity while strategically (re)defining that discourse to mean that those who are not in full unity with Catholic teaching on gender/sexuality are ineligible for the sacrament. Second, offers two different accounts for refusing Communion to sash wearers. One account relies on the reworked discourse of Communion as unity mentioned above by citing sash wearers' fundamental ineligibility to receive the sacrament by virtue of their lack of unity with Church teaching. The other occludes sash wearers' internally held beliefs altogether and instead attributes sash wearers' ineligibility for the Eucharist to their political use of the sacrament as a form of public protest against Church teaching. In spite of and because of these slippages, episcopal sense-making rhetoric is empowered to simultaneously de-queer the Eucharist and limit sash-wearers' and other Catholics' capacity to demand substantive apologia for the Church's more controversial teachings.

Ritual Dramatized: Non-sash-wearing Lay Catholics' Sense-Making Rhetoric

The rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics is the second subset of the corpus I gathered of rhetorical artifacts produced by Catholics who do not wear the rainbow sash. I present this node in my proposed rhetorical network second because it bears greater textual and ideological similarity to episcopal sense-making rhetoric than to either source of sash wearers' rhetoric. Despite their similarities however, the rhetoric of the episcopacy and that of non-sash-wearing differ markedly in the manner in which they respectively cope with the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual. The distinctive rhetorical sense-making of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics can be partially understood in light of the group's positionality relative to sash wearing and the Catholic ecclesia as a whole.

It would be unfair and inaccurate to characterize all lay Catholics who witness (but do not participate in) sash wearing as somehow being passive parties to meaning making. Indeed, the large volume of discourse they produce online suggests that they are active participants in meaning making, and there are even documented instances of lay Catholics actively intervening on behalf of and in opposition to sash wearers. Nevertheless, it is most accurate to characterize these Catholics largely as invested spectators. The performative role that they play within the space-time of the actual mass is minimal: they are not the rhetors primarily responsible for queering the Eucharistic ritual, nor are they responsible (with the possible exception of lay Eucharistic ministers) for allowing sash wearers access to the Eucharist. As a result, their rhetoric is broader in its scope than that of the episcopacy and its supporters. Specifically, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics conceive of the provision or denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers not as a response to sash wearers' queering (as the Episcopacy does), but rather as a constituent of sash wearing and its meaning.

Although the bulk of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics' sense-making rhetoric is consistent with the Church hierarchy's standpoint on sash wearing, their rhetoric differs from the episcopacy's in that it does not disavow the involvement of politics in the Eucharistic ritual. Rather, lay Catholics' openly acknowledges the power exchange involved in the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual and correspondingly understands the actions of both sash wearers and clerics as concerted attempts to contest (LGBT) Catholic identity and Catholic teaching. As such, I argue that non-sash-wearing lay Catholics' rhetoric is undergirded by logics of social drama, which conceive of sash wearing as a

potentially transformative and/or ruinous breach within Catholicism as a community of believers.

Picking Sides in the Social Drama

Non-sash-wearing lay Catholics construct a relatively broad-based account for the queered Eucharistic ritual sash wearing creates. Rather than articulate the episcopacy's denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers as a discrete action, they view the episcopacy and sash wearers as intertwined with one another within a social drama that implicates potentially radical change for (LGBT) Catholic identity and the Church at large. Three themes in the laity's sense-making rhetoric relate to Turner's conception of social drama. First, sash wearing is constructed as a breach of the social order. Second, the actions of the episcopacy are constructed as (failed) redressive mechanisms. Third, and importantly in light of the diversity of lay Catholic rhetoric, individual rhetors stake out a position within the social drama by affiliating with either the episcopacy or sash wearers.

Sash wearing as a breach.

The ways in which non-sash wearing Catholics construct the actions of sash wearers relates to the breach stage of social drama in that their sense-making rhetoric constructs the activities of sash wearers as intentionally designed to violate the existing norms of Catholic teaching and Catholic religious practice. In this way, the discourse of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics mirroring the themes of protest and politicization that resound within episcopal sense-making. One news article, for example, announces that "homosexual activists plan to disrupt Masses" by donning the "colors of the homosexual rights movement" (California Catholic Daily, 2010, May 19, para. 1). Another warns that

the RSM “descends on churches this Pentecost Sunday” (Block, 2010, May 19, para.1). Indeed, even supportive articles were dismissive of or completely silent on sash wearers’ claims that their activities do not constitute protest. Only one blog post, available via the website *Queering the Church*, adopts the RSM’s explanation of sash wearing as “self-identification” (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 5). Even this article, though, conveys a strong conviction that this self-identification is interpreted by others as a breach, calling sash wearers’ self-identification “confrontational” (Weldon, 2010, March 6, para. 4).

The sense that sash wearing constitutes a breach is also reflected in comparisons between the activities of sash wearers and the activities of other individuals or groups that seem to diverge from socially normative conceptions of appropriate behavior. Striking in this regard is the coverage of the relatively progressive *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR hereafter). No less than three of the newspaper’s articles actively conflate sash wearers with a host of other groups whose beliefs diverge from Church teaching (Feuerherd, 2003, February 14; Lefevere, 2000, November 24; Lefevere, 2001, November 23). These articles conflate sash wearers with the ecumenical LGBT group *Soulforce* (Feuerherd, 2003, February 14, para. 6); individuals who celebrate mass while holding signs and verbally calling for an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Lefevere, 2000, November 24; 2001, November 23); individuals who celebrate mass while holding signs and verbally calling for the ordination of women (Lefevere, 2000, November 24; 2001, November 23); and “Catholic schoolteachers seeking better wages” (Lefevere, 2000, November 24, para. 1).

Diogenes (2004, May 29; 2004, May 29) goes even further in his comparisons between sash wearers and others who have breached normative social structures. Comparing sash wearers to secular activists, Diogenes (2004, May 26) offers a vivid account of what he perceives as sash wearer's culturally disruptive intentions:

gays want to do to Pentecost what rad-fems have done to Valentine's Day (with the annual *V Monologues* controversy) - - i.e., to overwhelm the traditional meaning of the feast with political shock tactics so that, by a kind of Pavlovian stimulus-response, to think of Pentecost is to think of rainbow sashes is to think of gays is to think of . . . herpes simplex [ellipses in original] (para. 4)

In another blog post, he offers fictional scenarios to analogize the disruptive intent that he ascribes to sash wearers, claiming that if "cheerfully race-baiting Louisiana Klansman" David Duke entered a Catholic church and demanded the Eucharist, no one would object to the idea that he was "playing politics with the sacrament" (Diogenes, 2004, May 29, para. 1). He also suggests that sash wearers consider how they would feel if activists entered cathedrals wearing sashes demanding the freedom of Aaron McKinney and Russel Henderson, "the Wyoming men who bound, robbed, and pistol-whipped Mathew Shepard and left him to die" (para. 2).

These final examples construct sash wearing as an intentional and activist violation of the norms of the Catholic mass designed to elicit institutional change. Moreover, sash wearers are construed to be of a kind with many others who desire to alter Catholic teaching or Catholic identity.

The Eucharist as a redressive technology.

Just as non-sash-wearing lay Catholics construct sash wearing as a breach of Catholic religious practice or teaching, they also construct redressive mechanisms to deal with that breach. Turner (1980) argues that redressive mechanisms can range from “personal advice and informal arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery (and to resolve certain kinds of crises) to the performance of public ritual” (p. 151).

Remarkably, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics appeal to nearly all of these redressive mechanisms. Wiering (2010, November 4), for example, refers approvingly to the sash wearers being “invited to remove their sashes and stand in unity with other Catholics” (“Challenge of Chastity,” para. 4). This particular strategy is a sort of “informal arbitration” in dealing with sash wearers (Turner, 1980, p. 151). Meanwhile, Peters (2010, May 17) makes use of Turner’s (1980) “juridical and legal machinery” in his anti-sash blog post (p. 151). He speculates:

I believe it is a crime to disrupt a religious gathering in a religious space (i.e., a Catholic Mass), so it should be straightforward enough to call local police when this group shows up. Can anyone corroborate this? (Peters, 2010, May 17, para. 4)

Opponents of sash wearing have even explored direct action by lay Catholics during mass as a means of redressing sash wearing. Coday (2004, June 18) reports that “about 35 men from a group called Ushers for the Eucharist disrupted a Pentecost Mass, forcing people wearing rainbow sashes, as well as most other church members, to walk around or over them to receive Communion” (“Communion line, Scrum Line,” para. 1).

These redressive mechanisms are certainly interesting and speak to the array of perspectives at work among non-sash-wearing lay Catholics. However, in keeping with Turner's model of redress, those possessing structural power and influence *within* a social system are typically looked to not only to identify breaches and the crises they can cause, but also to undertake redressive mechanisms in order to resolve them. Within the scope of the Catholic ecclesia, it is fair to say that members of the episcopacy occupy this space of structural power. As such, clerics' denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers figures into lay Catholics' sense-making rhetoric as the primary technology by which sash wearers and sash wearing are redressed.

This figuration bears out within the rhetorical corpus I analyzed primarily through a phenomenon I call *policing the episcopacy*. Policing the episcopacy is a strategy by which anti-sash lay Catholics evaluate the success of individual clerics based on their willingness to redress sash wearers' breach of the Eucharistic ritual. On a few occasions within the corpus, this policing was affirmative in its valence, meaning that sash opponents lauded the good work of clerics who have consistently denied sash wearers the Eucharist and/or forcefully rebuked them in other ways. Diogenes (2004, May 26b), for example, calls Cardinal Francis George's reasoning "dead on target" when reporting that George "has instructed his priests to refuse" the Eucharist to sash wearers (para. 1). Similarly, Fournier (2010, May 16) calls George one of the "great Churchmen of the United States" when reporting on sash wearers' intention to "openly confront" him (para. 2).

More often, though, this policing of the episcopacy took on a negative valence by targeting clerics who have been welcoming to sash wearers for criticism. Somewhat ironically, those who criticize sash wearers for their disloyalty to the Church are themselves comfortable leveling scathing critiques at members of the clergy. Examples of this critical policing include Kralis' (2005, January 23) condemnatory rhetorical question: "Will Cardinal Mahoney [sic] [Archdiocese of Los Angeles], Bishops Clark [Rochester], and Gumbleton [Detroit] distribute the Eucharist to the sash-wearing sodomites once again in open dissent from Church teachings?" (para. 19). Diogenes (2004, December 17; 2005, May 16) is similarly hostile toward clerics who refuse to redress sash wearers through the denial of Communion. Of Los Angeles' Cardinal Mahony, Diogenes (2005, May 16) laments that he is not "just another example of an over-promoted buffoon" that can be treated "as a figure of fun" (para. 6). Rather, Diogenes claims, "he is a successor of the Apostles, charged with the care of souls . . . who find themselves under fierce temptations" (para. 6). Diogenes (2004, December 17) also critiques Archbishop Flynn of St. Paul and Minneapolis, composing this poem: "Whoever your six colors wears, his [Archbishop Flynn] monochrome conviction bares. O Rainbow Sash, O Rainbow Sash, he shares your sole affection!" (para. 11-12). While Diogenes might reasonably deny that he was implying Archbishop Flynn himself was gay, it is interesting to note that this would not be the only artifact in the corpus in which members of the episcopacy are critiqued by impugning on their (heterosexual) masculinity. The Ushers of the Eucharist (Cited in Wilson, 2004, June 2), who blocked the aisles of St. Paul's Cathedral in order to prevent Archbishop Flynn from distributing the Eucharist to sash wearers, similarly

sought to emasculate pro-sash clerics while attributing their own actions to the episcopacy's failure. They state that "the authority of the Catholic bishops is being challenged at a fundamental level," and that the bishops are being "cast as helpless *eunuchs unable to protect the Eucharist in the face of the crushing secular power of the feminist and homosexual movements* [Italics mine for emphasis]" (para. 2).

Non-sash-wearing lay Catholics' sense-making rhetoric, then, constructs the episcopacy's denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers as a redressive mechanism that is every bit as constitutive of the overall social drama as the initial breach committed by sash wearers. While their discourse does offer glimpses at other redressive mechanisms, real and imagined, lay Catholics' rhetoric seems largely to adhere to Turner's (1980) conception of redress emanating from those who possess institutional power within the social structure being challenged.

Avowal of the potential for change.

Lay Catholics' rhetoric also relies on social drama as a sense-making logic through its explicit willingness to affiliate with either sash wearers or the episcopacy. Both Turner's theories of ritual and of social drama are powerful rhetorical lenses because they avow the potential for social structures to be changed as well as reinforced. Turner designates the last stage of social drama as being marked either by reintegration or by the recognition of schism. This underscores his sense that social dramas are substantive processes with lasting implications for social structures and the systems of meaning that sustain them.

While it is likely obvious from the textual examples offered in the previous two subsections, the rhetoric deployed by non-sash-wearing lay Catholics is fully invested in this potential for change. Put simply, the rhetorical artifacts in this corpus reflect a sense that politics are deeply embedded not only within the activities of sash wearers, but also within the activities of the episcopacy. Both the rhetoric of lay Catholics critical of sash wearing and the rhetoric of those that support it actively cite the possibility for social change that inheres within sash wearing, and theorize the implications of that change for good and ill.

Even a cursory examination of the anti-sash lay Catholic rhetoric that I cite above will attest to these Catholics' conviction that: (a) sash wearing has the potential to transform Catholicism, and (b) that the episcopacy can deploy institutional power of its own to quash that potential transformation. However, I offer two of the articles that express support for sash wearers as illustrations here. As the sections analyzing the RSM and the RSA will illustrate, sash wearers' sense-making rhetoric is marked by greater modesty in the transformative power they affix to sash wearing. Non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, on the other hand are much bolder in suggesting what sash wearing, as a breach of Catholic social structure, directly means for the Catholic Church. Sweitzer-Beckman (2010, October 14), for example, explicitly connects the Church's response to sash wearing with the rash of LGBT teen suicides of late 2010. He argues:

The church has a choice. It can either choose to join the bandwagon that is calling for dignity and respect for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters,

or it can continue the course of standing idly by while injustices and abuses are committed (para. 23-24).

Weldon (2010, March 6) similarly argues that sash wearing is in fact, “confrontational” and utterly necessitated by “the absence of any structures for quiet, peaceful discussions with ecclesiastical authorities” (para. 4).

These forceful enunciations stand in contrast to the sense-making rhetorics deployed by sash wearers themselves surrounding their titular activities. Unlike non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, sash wearers’ online rhetoric takes pains not to characterize sash wearing as a two-way political power exchange. Rather, sash wearers sense-making rhetoric mirrors that of the episcopacy in the sense that both rhetorics position their opponents as the only individual’s interested in politicizing sash wearing or the relationship of sash wearing to the Eucharist. Where non-sash-wearing lay Catholics rely on the logics of social drama to conceive of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual as a direct confrontation between the ritual incursions of sash-wearers and the redressive powers of the episcopacy, sash wearers themselves rely on less direct conceptions of transformation. In now turn to the online sense-making rhetorics of the RSA and the RSM respectively.

Ceremonial Ecumenicism: The RSA’s Sense-Making Rhetoric

More than any of the other bodies of sense-making rhetoric I examined, the online rhetoric of the RSA seems to float above the frequently rancorous and condemnatory discourse circulated within episcopal rhetoric, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics’ rhetoric, and even the rhetoric of the RSM. Moreover, the RSA produced by far the lowest volume of rhetoric among the nodes I examined. This is, on first glance, difficult to

account for. There is no reason why the rhetorical agency that emanates from the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual should compel less sense-making from the RSA than from others. Indeed, one might reasonably expect the RSA to be one of the richest sites of rhetoric in the text as whole. After all, an immense amount of direct critique of the RSA (and the RSM) emerges from the sense-making rhetoric of the episcopacy and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics. In light of this, one might reasonably expect the RSA to produce (much as the RSM does) a relatively sizeable volume of rhetoric solely in the service of rebutting those criticisms.

However, the RSA in reality deploys very little rhetoric surrounding the contemporaneous activities of the Catholic Church, and even less rhetoric in explicit response to the episcopacy and others' (typically negative) constructions of sash wearing. In accounting for this and several other features of the RSA's rhetoric described below, I ultimately argue that the RSA represents an embodiment of Turner's (1976) suspicion about the capacity for ritual to retain its social force in religiously heterogeneous societies. Turner believed that for ritual to have its full meaning and social influence, the social group engaging in ritual must share a common deontology. Building off of this contention as well as Gluckman & Gluckman's (1977) work distinguishing between religious rituals and secular ceremonies, I extend Turner's claim beyond actual rituals to encompass the ritual logics and ritual grammars examined in this analysis. In doing so, I argue that the embeddedness of the RSA within ecumenical rather than exclusively Catholic networks of meaning fundamentally alters (and in fact minimizes) the importance its rhetoric ascribes to sash wearing as a stand-alone act.

From Queer(ed) Eucharistic Ritual to Queer(ed) Eucharistic Ceremony

At the core of both Turnerian ritual and social drama is the assumption that the participants within these processes occupy the same institutional structure and thereby rely on the same symbolic systems of meaning. Indeed, Turner (1976) goes even further than this, suggesting that a fundamental requirement of true ritual is that it occurs *within institutionalized religion*. Certainly this seems true of the RSA, as a group primarily comprised of LGBT Catholics who engage in sash wearing at Catholic masses. However, further exploring the implications of Turner's contention offers insight into the RSA's sense-making rhetoric as it differs from that of the RSM and other nodes within the network of rainbow sash rhetoric. Turner's (1976) sense that rituals must be religiously institutionalized requires that they be theorized differently within post-industrial society than within tribal societies. In tribal society, according to Turner, "all life is pervaded" by collectively intelligible spiritual "influences," whereas in industrialized societies religion is "regarded as something apart from our economic, political, domestic, and recreational life" (p. 507). As a consequence, while Turner regards formal ritual to be a possibility within the confines of modern religious institutions, he does not believe formal rituals are possible across society as a whole because the ritual activity relies on religious meanings "individualized to certain specific groups" (Deflam, 1991, p. 17).

Theorists of ritual have attempted to make sense of this contemporary cultural fragmentation and secularization in a number of ways. For Turner (Cited in Deflam, 1991), this meant positing a second, "liminoid" ritual state that exists within religiously heterogeneous social groups to parallel the liminal state that ritual produces within tribal

societies and religious institutions (p. 17). Gluckman and Gluckman (1977), on the other hand, posit a distinction between ritual and ceremony. They suggest that ceremony functions in patterns similar to ritual, but relies on secular meanings rather than sacred reference points. Douglas (1978) contests the need to rethink ritual in terms of an increasingly secular contemporary culture at all, claiming that even religiously homogeneous tribal cultures engaged in purely secular rituals.

In my analysis to follow, I appropriate Gluckman and Gluckman's (1977) notion of ceremony as similar to but distinctive from ritual and argue that the RSA's sense-making rhetoric is guided by ceremonial rather than ritual logics. By this, I do not mean to insinuate that the RSA constructs sash wearing as a secular phenomenon. I do mean to suggest, however, that its sense-making rhetoric construes the significance of sash wearing as being much broader than LGBT people's place within Catholicism. To demonstrate this, I unpack two themes within the RSA's online rhetoric in the subsections to follow. First, I discuss the RSA's emphasis on historicizing rather than theologizing its activities. Second, I denote its promiscuous citation of Catholic, ecumenical, and secular publics in characterizing the site and scope of those activities.

Sash wearing as history rather than theology.

In contrast to the sense-making rhetoric of the episcopacy and even that of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, the rhetoric on the RSA's website focuses very little on theologizing its position on sash wearing or its significance. This is not, of course, to say that the RSA doesn't invoke religious faith in making sense of its actions. However, the way in which it does so is fairly general. If one looks to pinpoint their theology on the

basis of the website, one is relegated to a handful of statements that characterize non-normative gender/sexuality as part of God's design. Non-normative gender/sexuality is characterized as a "sacred gift" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e, para. 1), as having been "gifted us" from God (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 5), and as being part "of the diversity of God's marvelous creation" (McNeill, 2007, para. 13).

The RSA is similarly basic in its approach to explaining sash wearing and its religious significance. The site states that sash wearing allows people to "become a living symbol of the grace and presence of lgbt [sic] people in the heart of the Church" and that "members change the actual story" of the Eucharist by "becoming visible as lgbt [sic] members of God's people (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 4). As with the quotes in the paragraph above, these statements bespeak a conviction that LGBT individuals are divinely intended to be members their spiritual communities and, indeed, are members of those communities already. The RSA's rhetoric doesn't even couch its current exclusion from the Eucharist in terms of theology. It neither makes an extensive religious case for sash wearer's inclusion in the sacrament, nor characterizes the episcopacy's decision to exclude sash wearers in terms of their misunderstanding/misapplication of theology. Rather, the church is called to reconcile with its LGBT communicant's in very personal terms: the RSA's website urges the Catholic hierarchy toward "a conversion of heart" (McNeill, 2011a, para. 2), and calls for the Church "to embrace a new day of integrity and freedom" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e, para. 4).

Beyond these claims, and the website's assertion that "we take seriously the gospel's command to love our enemies" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 2), the RSA

does little to address its critics at all. In particular, the site's is almost completely devoid of references to the specific ideas or arguments leveled at sash wearers by members of the episcopacy and critical lay Catholics. A single statement on the site points out that "the Vatican perceives it [sash wearing] as a protest of Church teaching, which it is not. The Rainbow Sash is a celebration of glbt [sic] sexuality" (McNeill, 2007, para. 13). No additional commentary or elaboration on this point is offered, and site is absent any citations of Church teaching, biblical references, or catechetical references.

This stands in stark contrast to the extensive citation (and often direct quotation) of opponents undertaken in the rhetorical artifacts associated with the episcopacy, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, and the RSM. Each of these rhetors seems devoted to the task of theologizing their own take upon non-normative gender/sexuality in Catholic teaching and practice. Concomitantly, each of these groups of rhetors take pains to (mis)represent the positions of those opposed to them and speak to their theological flaws. This is evident in the episcopacy lay critics' repeated charge that sash wearers misuse and politicize the Eucharist, and it will be evident below in the RSM's repeated claims that the episcopacy lacks a fully authentic Catholic faith. By contrast, the RSA's rhetoric seems deliberately disinclined either to refute the claims of anti-sash Catholics or to forward specific theological claims of its own. In being so disinclined, I argue that the RSA effectively occludes the significance of these theological claims by omission. Its online rhetoric seems content to assume that its visitors need no convincing with respect to the theological compatibility of Catholic identity and non-normative gender/sexuality, and its sense-making rhetoric is directed elsewhere.

What the RSA lacks in theological specificity, it makes up for in historical specificity. The RSA offers extensive background on the origins of sash wearing, and it takes care to articulate the ways in which sash wearing has transformed over time. With respect to accounting for the origins of sash wearing, the RSA's "History Page" describes in detail not only the first use of the rainbow sash in London, but also the birth of the International Rainbow Sash Movement in Australia (McNeill, 2007, para. 2). It reprises the story in whole or part on two other pages of the site as well (Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.b; n.d.e). The site also affiliates itself with the origins of sash wearing through primary texts. As noted in Chapter Three, the only two texts included on the site's archive page are letters drafted by the Australian Rainbow Sash Movement (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.a). This is despite the fact that the RSA corresponds at least yearly with the Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis announcing its plans to wear sashes at Pentecost Mass (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e).

The RSA's website is particularly remarkable with respect to the attention it devotes to chronicling the changes sash wearing has undergone over time. Uniquely among the sources of rhetoric analyzed in this study, the RSA's constructs the rainbow sash as possessing multiple meanings that have changed over time. One sees this in its history of sash wearing, for example, which not only recounts the practice's origins, but also chronicles the process by which the RSA splintered from the RSM as a means of becoming more ecumenical and democratic (McNeill, 2007). One sees this even more directly in the tidy summation the site offers reflecting on the shifting semantics of sash wearing in its page devoted to the "future of the rainbow sash movement" (Rainbow Sash

Alliance, n.d.b, para. 1). It states: “The Rainbow Sash Movement began as a question. It developed into a new form of visibility and challenge. Today it is deepening into an ongoing expression of sacramental witness and an embodied call for justice” (para. 3). Immediately following this summary, it adds “the rainbow sash is also a gift,” further performing the multiplicity of meaning the site attests to (para. 4).

Singularly among the nodes of rhetoric examined in this study, the sense-making rhetoric of the RSA seems reconciled to the polysemy of the rainbow sash, the queered Eucharistic ritual, and its impact on the Catholic faith. Indeed its point of reference for understanding the rainbow sash doesn’t seem to be Catholic faith, Catholic practice, Catholic identity, or Catholic teaching at all. Rather the RSA’s rhetoric treats sash wearing as its own point of historical reference, chronicling the sash’s changing significance for those who have donned it rather than positing any fixed or “True” set of implications sash wearing has for LGBT Catholics and/or the wider ecclesia.

Extending from Turner’s (1976) suggestion that full-blown rituals are only possible among groups for whom “all life is pervaded” by collectively intelligible spiritual “influences” (p. 507), I argue that the RSA’s emphasis on history over theology diverges from the logics of such rituals. Although the RSA certainly avows the transformative potential of sash wearing, that transformative potential is couched throughout their sense-making rhetoric in terms of sash wearing’s historical development as a practice, not sash wearing’s capacity to reveal theologically enduring “Truth” about Catholic faith/teaching, the Eucharist, or the (LGBT) Catholic identities that the Eucharist constitutes. In keeping with Gluckman and Gluckman’s (1977) concept of ceremony, the

RSA's sense-making rhetoric is conscious of the profound (and historical) ways in which sash wearing meaningfully augments the Eucharistic ritual form, but its rhetoric is also unmoored from (and, I would argue uninterested in) a singular *theological* understanding of the queered Eucharistic ritual's social significance. In the subsection to follow, I build upon this claim by expounding upon a second theme that emerges from the RSA's online rhetoric. Specifically, I demonstrate that the RSA positions itself and its activities at the intersection of multiple religious and secular systems of meaning, thereby limiting its ability to fix the meaning of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual as Turner's work predicts.

Citation of multiple (counter)publics.

If one takes seriously Turner's (1976) suggestion that the processes of ritual he describes can only fully transpire within either explicitly religious institutions or within religiously unified societies, then it is unsurprising that the RSA's rhetoric fails to comfortably fix the meaning of sash wearing within a framework of ritual. Indeed, the rhetoric of the RSA explicitly straddles multiple systems of religious and secular belief. To be sure, elements of the RSA's rhetoric bespeak and underscore a specifically Catholic identity and membership. At the top of its home page the RSA identifies itself as "an organization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Catholics" (McNeill, 2011a, para. 1). Similarly, the RSA's "Core Statement" offers that "in wearing the Rainbow Sash we call the Roman Catholic Church: to honor our wisdom and experience; to enter into public dialogue with us; to work with us for justice and understanding" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.e, para. 1). The archival documents that the RSA hosts (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.a), one of which is addressed to the former Pope, also construct the meaning

of sash wearing with an eye specifically toward Catholic religious practice, Catholic teaching, and Catholic identity.

Strikingly though, the bulk of the RSA's rhetoric surrounding faith and religion is more open-ended in its references. It is certainly fair to read some of this religious rhetoric through the lens of RSA members' Catholicism. It is likely the case, for example that references to "the Church" are acting as shorthand for references to the Roman Catholic Church (e.g. Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 4; n.d.e, para. 3). There is, however, a current of explicit ecumenicism that permeates the sense-making rhetoric of the RSA, and this lends a different character to its theological claims. The RSA's homepage also states that "the Alliance puts a primary emphasis on working with like minded organizations in other Christian and non-Christian religious traditions" (McNeill, 2011a, para. 3). In fact, two of the five like-minded organizations whose websites the RSA offers links to, *Soulforce* and *Dignity Twin Cities*, are interfaith (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.c). The RSA also identifies "alerting the lgbt [sic] community to the dangers of right-wing religious leaders, Catholic and non-Catholic" as one of its "issues of consistent concern" (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 1). Even McNeill's (2007) account of the split between the RSA and the RSM attributes the schism to the RSM's refusal to support *Soulforce*, "an interfaith gay rights group inspired by the nonviolent reforms of Mahtma Ghandi and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.," in their "plans to hold a peaceful demonstration" outside the 2004 meeting of the USCCB (para. 12).

In light of these clear endorsements of interfaith organizing, the RSA's religiously grounded assertions take on a less certain character. It is uncertain, for example, whether

using the rainbow sash “to publicly claim our place at Christ’s table” (Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.e, para. 3) conceives of Christ’s table as the specifically Catholic celebration of the Eucharist, or Catholic religious identity more broadly, or Christian celebrations of Communion, or Christian identity more broadly. Likewise, what are the implications of the assertion “in wearing the Rainbow Sash, members change the actual story, the ‘event’ of the Eucharist” (Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.b, para. 4)? One could construe this claim to mean that sash wearing (de)ontologically changes the Catholic Eucharistic ritual which spiritually constitutes “God’s People” (para. 4), but the RSA’s rhetoric surrounding the importance of interfaith coalition building makes the statement read more as though it is simply one way LGBT Christians have managed to “become visible” as God’s People (para. 4). This ambiguity is further exacerbated by a third, secular public with which the RSA’s rhetoric occasionally affiliates. “Secular lgbt [sic] organizations” are also included within the array of groups that the RSA seeks to work with (McNeill, 2011a, para. 3), and they identify churches’ “exemption from all anti-discrimination legislation” as another of their “consistent concerns” (Rainbow Sash Alliance, n.d.b, para. 1).

By appealing to the ambiguity and polysemy of the RSA’s sense-making rhetoric surrounding sash wearing and the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual it produces, I do not mean to suggest that they are less successful than others in intelligibly channeling the rhetorical agency that emanates from the sacrament. Rather, I mean only to suggest that their robust structural and ideological interchange with non-Catholic LGBT communities and systems of meaning make the deployment of clear-cut ritual logics difficult. It is more useful

instead, to conceive of the RSA's sense-making rhetoric as ceremonializing the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual: avowing its importance *as* a ritual(istic) intervention, but straddling/citing too many theological and ideological communities to make unequivocal claims about its meaning.

This makes the RSA's rhetorical sense-making compelling in that it implies an altogether different (and larger) context in which to conceive of sash wearing and the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual it produces. On one hand, one can critique the RSA's sense-making rhetoric for potentially undercutting the significance of sash wearing. After all, the RSA's rhetoric abstains from extensive engagement with the complex and specific Catholic teachings it aims to change. Moreover, its rhetoric does little to rebut the often withering attacks leveled at sash wearers by those who oppose them. On the other hand, it is worth considering whether, to some degree, the RSA's rhetoric allows it to escape the cyclical process of ideologically contentious interpretive labor necessitated by the agency of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual. By explicitly and extensively affiliating with people for whom the queer(ed) Catholic Eucharist *does not* constitute an exigence that demands spiritual and semantic sense-making rhetoric, the RSA is able to position sash wearing as one in a constellation of viable activities to be undertaken in the service of fostering LGBT-affirmative spiritualities. If sash wearing can be rhetorically reworked such that it produces a queer(ed) Eucharistic ceremony with transformative potential for Catholics and non-Catholics alike, rather than a queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual that is definitionally bound to the Catholic ecclesia, then sash wearing can potentially open

avenues for coalition/collaboration among LGBT Catholics, other LGBT Christians, and non-Christian LGBT people.

By contrast to the sense-making rhetoric I have just explicated, the sense-making rhetoric of the RSM deploys perhaps the most comprehensive ritual logic of all the rhetorical nodes I examined. I engage with their rhetoric in the final section of rhetorical criticism below.

De-Politicizing Theological Dissent: The RSM's Sense-Making Rhetoric

For all their similarity, and despite their frequent conflation at the hands of critics and the press, the RSM and the RSA's respective web discourse present a study in rhetorical contrasts. Whereas the RSA's rhetoric sidesteps a great deal of the theological contention that surrounds sash wearing by affiliating the group with theologically diverse communities of LGBT Christians and LGBT citizens more broadly, the RSM is exclusively and explicitly Roman Catholic in its perspective. As such, it engages with the minutiae of specifically Catholic teaching, maintains running and critical commentary on the activities of (usually conservative) Catholic leaders, and ultimately deploys a richly developed rhetorical vision that simultaneously advocates for the RSM's interests and rebuts the Church hierarchy's central charge that sash wearing politicizes the Eucharist. In this section I argue that the RSM's online rhetoric relies on the ritual grammar embedded within rites of passage to make sense of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual they help to create. In doing so, the RSM's rhetoric accomplishes three things: (a) it criticizes the Church hierarchy for engaging in politics with the faith; (b) it denies the claim that sash

wearers are politicizing the Eucharist; and (c) it constructs a vision of authentic Catholic faith aligned with the beliefs of the RSM.

Strategically Positioning Liminality

Three distinctive but interlocking rhetorical themes allow the RSM to make sense of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual such that its strong dissent to Church teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality does not constitute rejection of the Catholic faith as a whole. The first theme constructs the RSM and its allies as fully-formed and authentic post-liminal members of the Catholic Church. The second positions the Church's conservative clergy and hierarchy as pre-liminal subjects who are as yet unable/unprepared to embrace authentic Catholicism as it presently exists. Finally, the RSM's use of sashes to queer the Eucharistic ritual is positioned as a symbolic intervention that is both justified and depoliticized by the "liminal" status it is intended to invoke among conservative members of the episcopacy. In the sections to follow, I lay out how the rhetorics deployed by the RSM with respect to itself, the Catholic episcopacy, and its eponymous practice respectively deploy these interlocking logics of ritual passage, ultimately allowing it to enact objection to Catholic teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality while also reversing its critics' claim that it inappropriately politicizes the Eucharist.

The post-liminal Catholicism of sash wearers.

Liminality is often deployed within communication and other literatures to theorize bodies, subjectivities, spaces, and places that exist on the literal or figurative margins of normative social regimes. Liminality has, for instance, been fruitfully deployed to understand: the postcolonial Caribbean (Hall, 2007), the legal status of

informal laborers in South Korea (Chun, 2009), infertility among women (Allan, 2007), and even the experience of dying (Anderson, 2007). In light of Catholic teaching's general rejection of non-normative gender/sexuality as sinful, and the specific symbolic/theological discipline members of the RSM are subjected to by being denied the Eucharist, liminality seems on first glance to be a fitting descriptor of their status within the Catholic ecclesia. Be that as it may, when one looks in depth at the manner in which the RSM references itself and its members, it immediately becomes clear that its online discourse isn't animated by a worldview in which LGBT Catholics are liminal subjects. On the contrary, the RSM's online self-construal is rife with references to authenticity, the new/true/universal Church, and theological/rational understanding that collectively speak directly to a post-liminal maturity of religious belief and practice.

To briefly revisit Turner's (1982) definition, post-liminality is the status enjoyed by individuals who have completed a rite of passage. In completing the rite of passage, post-liminal subjects have thus been fully "prepared" for the new social position they will occupy, the new "activities" they will be tasked with in that position, and the new or reworked "relationships" they will have with others (p. 25). The discursive themes that emerge from a close analysis of the RSM's references to itself and its allies invoke just such a newly achieved status: the RSM constructs a vision of Catholic belief which positions its perspective on the liturgy as driven by theologically appropriate responses to contemporary realities.

A core theme that emerges with varying degrees of explicitness in the RSM's discourse concerning itself is authenticity. Fr. Gay, an LGBT sympathetic priest who

writes a column (presumably under a pseudonym) for the RSM, refers to the importance of an “authentic spiritual life” which allows “one to identify and accept” ones moral choices (Gay, n.d., para. 3). Gay invokes this authenticity again later in his reflection, saying that Catholic morality is one which moves toward “authentic truth and happiness” and “refuses to allow us to settle for a morality of guilt and obligation” (Gay, n.d., para. 11). This concerted work toward an LGBT Catholicism marked by (spiritual) authenticity is mirrored in statements made elsewhere on the site by lay members of the RSM. For example, in a statement concerning the Pope’s policy on condom use for HIV/AIDS prevention, Murray (n.d.b) celebrates the Pope’s emergent inclination toward “genuinely” approaching the virus in a manner “that transcends dogmatism” (para. 4). In perhaps the most explicit articulation of the theme of authenticity as it relates to the RSM, the Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors (n.d.b) asserts that the Church’s denial of the Eucharist to RSM members “threatens the Catholic community’s ability to achieve authentic community” (para. 3). This claim, of course, fully reverses the twin episcopal claims that sash wearing simultaneously threatens Catholic unity and suggests that the wearer never was in unity with the Church in the first place.

Complementing the RSM’s repeated assertions of authentic spirituality is an equally strong trend of “theologizing” the activities of the group (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 4) In doing so, the RSM strongly departs from the ecumenical character of the RSA’s discourse, and underscores its status as an explicitly Catholic group which directs its activities at the Catholic Church and Catholic community. Roman Catholic theology and its interpretation are abundant on the RSM website, and their

treatment is all the more remarkable because accurate theological interpretation is presented as though it lies exclusively within the purview of the RSM and its allies.

Most directly, the RSM takes care in multiple instances to lay out the religious reasoning that underlies its choice of Pentecost as the day on which it conducts its sartorial self-identification (Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.a, para. 7; n.d.b, para. 5; The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.e, para. 2). It explains that Pentecost celebrates the Holy Spirit's descent onto the apostles of Jesus, empowering them to speak foreign tongues and preach the word of god throughout the world. This feast is frequently conceived of as the birth of the Christian Church as an institution, and by repeatedly citing its connection to Pentecost, the RSM rhetorically undergirds their claim to authentic Catholicism by rooting themselves in the Church's very origins. Beyond this direct reference to the archaic religious significance of the RSM's core activity though, the RSM's references to self also forward decidedly contemporary theological claims concerning the nature of Catholic morality, the nature of the (new) Church, and, importantly, degrees of spiritual understanding that lie beyond the purview of the Catholic episcopacy.

Catholic morality is repeatedly conflated with a rationalist or realist approach to the world as it exists contemporarily. Fr. Gay's (n.d.) column is exemplary in this regard, as he directly cites episcopal rhetoric that Catholic morality must ultimately "follow natural law" (para. 3), but does so to insist that morality can therefore "never" be "based on a biblical literalism or fundamentalism" (para. 4). Rather, he argues, Catholic morality (and moral truth by extension) is grounded in that which is "reasonable" (para. 4),

“objective” (para. 8), and “looks to the future” (para. 7). These assertions lend moral and theological authority to a broad array of claims the RSM makes elsewhere on its site, such as Anderson’s (n.d.) assertion that “it is time to let the oxygen of reality into our view of homosexuality” (para. 4). Anderson offers the growing diversity of the Church as evidence of a “liturgy” that has “evolved into a re-energized gathering of the People of God under the mantle of servant leaders” (para. 2). Fr. Gay’s (n.d.) contention that natural law dictates a reasonable and future-oriented theology has the added effect of undermining sash-wearers critics, who often cite the violation of natural law to account for Church teaching’s condemnation of non-normative gender and sexual practice (e.g. Arinze cited in Kralis, 2005, January 23; Catholic News Service, 2005, January 27, para. 8).

It is this sentiment, that a changed set of social realities morally mandates a changed perspective upon Catholic belief and practice, that I believe fundamentally animates the RSM’s insistence that it seeks dialogue with (not protest of) the Catholic Church. The RSM constructs itself and its allies as post-liminal subjects who’ve embraced the new system of meanings and new set of roles that “reality” (and by extension Catholic belief) dictates. Thus there is no real inconsistency between the assertion that “GLBT Catholics” seek to “be part of the conversation to further understand what constitutes our Communion with the divine in a multicultural Church” (The Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.b, para. 10), and ostensibly incommensurate contentions that “the tension between the Church’s sexual ethic and its social teaching only highlights a delusional hierarchal mindset” (n.d.a, para. 4). Instead

these disparate assertions constitute parallel rather than contradictory discourses; the former constitutes the good faith assertions of a post-liminal faith community whose belief system is animated by the realities of a “new” Catholic Church, while the latter critiques a pre-liminal Catholic episcopacy that has thus far failed to adopt this new approach to Catholic/moral/natural law. In the following sub-section I unpack the rhetorical devices the RSM deploys in constructing this pre-liminal Church hierarchy.

The pre-liminal catholicism of the episcopacy.

Pre-liminality or separation is the originary status occupied by individuals undergoing rites of passage. As noted in the introduction, both post- and pre-liminality are states marked by “a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal economic positions” (p. 96). These states of structure are different, however, in that the pre-liminal social structure and its attendant system of meanings and relationships is no longer sustainable for individuals undergoing the rite of passage whereas the post-liminal social structure can accommodate them. Ritual is therefore undertaken as a means of undergoing the necessary transition from pre-liminality to post-liminality. Having constructed itself as an exemplar of post-liminal contemporary Catholicism, the RSM’s sense-making rhetoric also works to position the (conservative) Church hierarchy as the embodiment of a pre-liminal Catholicism that exists in parallel opposition to that of sash wearers and their allies.

This diametrical opposition is most readily evident in the continued significance of the themes of rationality and theology. Rationality continues to be sutured to authentic Catholic moral truth as discussed above but, in contrast to statements that avow the

rationality of the RSM and its post-liminal Catholic allies, constructions of the episcopacy center on a lack thereof. Fr. Gay (n.d.), for example, urges LGBT Catholics “to understand their faith apart from any anger they direct against the magisterium because of their refusal to be reasonable when it comes to the lived experiences” of LGBT people (para. 12). Murray (n.d.a) similarly evokes the irrationality of members of the Church in criticisms he levels specifically at the Archdiocese of Washington; he calls their response to a Georgetown university forum on gay marriage “convoluted” (para. 4), further suggesting that the archdiocese’s cardinal and its spokeswoman need to “recommit themselves to the primacy of truth” (para. 5).

A similar pattern arises with respect to the theme of theology. Whereas the RSM rhetorically couches itself in a proper understanding of theology, the episcopacy is associated with ignorance of, misunderstanding of, and/or a lack of concern with Catholic teaching. In the same critique of the Washington archdiocese mentioned above, Murray (n.d.a) objects to the varied ways in which the Washington cardinal “continues to separate theology from social justice” (para. 4). Broader based theological critiques are also readily evident throughout the website. Indeed, one particularly telling passage directly asserts that Church teaching on homosexuality is explicitly violated in the way the episcopacy has taken up LGBT issues:

The Catechism says, that homosexual people “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.” Unfortunately, for many LGBT

Catholics these words do not reflect the reality in the Church today. (The Rainbow Sash Movement, n.d.a, para. 6)

The RSM's theological discourse surrounding the Church hierarchy even occasionally adopts the tone of advice or council, further emphasizing the post-liminal authenticity of the RSM's Catholicism relative to the pre-liminal, stunted Catholicism of Church leaders. Reflecting on the US Conference of Catholic Bishop's failure to take up issues of women's ordination, LGBT teen bullying and suicides, and the decline of parishioners, O'Conner (n.d.a) offers that "it is time for the bishops to reflect on Jacob's well, and the Samaritan woman's presence at the well. Jesus showed us how to outreach to those we felt superior to" (para. 9).

Where an overarching theme of authenticity (of faith) permeated the RSM's rhetorical construction of its own rationality and theological rectitude, the group's rhetoric substitutes a theme of corrupt anachronism to sanction the rational/theological backwardness of the episcopacy. In doing so, the RSM once again appropriates the very critiques that are leveled at it: it condemns its opponents' politicization of Catholic teaching and Catholic practice. One page of the site is particularly forceful in forwarding this vision, suggesting that church leaders' "radical dogmatism" (O'Conner, n.d.b, para. 1), "dictatorial style" (para. 2), and "arrogant involvement in the political process" are causing a decline in membership particularly among the young (para. 4). O'Conner argues that these problems are due to bishops' and others' embeddedness in a "golden era of clerical establishment that is locked into a Church that blossomed in the 1950s" (para. 6). Elsewhere, Anderson (n.d.) decries the "moral bankruptcy of the Pope and his

bishops” (para. 5), insisting that the leaders of the Church are “locked in the shadows of the past” and prefer “the symbols and the vestments of a liturgy that has long since evolved” past an era when clerics could act as “princes of Power and Sex” (para. 2).

The episcopacy is thus constructed by the RSM in a way that deploys the same notions of contemporarily-grounded rationality as moral Truth that we see in the RSM’s self-construals. However these logics are reworked as critiques through references to the Church hierarchy’s anachronism and entanglements with secular issues of power. These premises, when combined with fiercely evaluative references to homophobia, dishonesty, and other flaws, are collectively intended to attest to the need for an exacting shift in the Church leadership’s relationship to the faith as a body of thought and a body of persons.

One last theme, however, distinguishes the RSM’s discourse on the episcopacy from the outright vilification that sash-wearers and pro-sash clergy frequently suffer at the hands of critical congregants. Throughout the various documents that comprise the RSM’s website, a theme of potential (or inevitable) transformation emerges in the margins of the criticisms outlined above. Murray’s (n.d.b) statement on the Vatican’s revision of its condom policy represents a prominent example of this. Although the document as a whole remains firm in its conviction that the Vatican remains largely ensconced within a bygone system of Catholic dogma, it nevertheless “welcomes” the Pope’s “change of heart” on the matter (para. 2). Additionally, in what seems to be an implicit call for more changes of heart, the document closes with the assertion that “when the Pope speaks with the authority of compassion, the Church will listen as a unified body of believers” (para. 5). These statements convey the RSM’s conviction, after Turner’s

formulation of the pre-liminal, that the magisterium simply (though importantly) lacks a coherent system of symbols through which contemporary (spiritual) reality can be rendered meaningful. This places the hierarchy of the church in a necessarily subordinate but not irredeemable position relative to the authentic Catholicism of sash wearers and their allies. Through their appeals to pre-liminality, the RSM renders the Church hierarchy's positions on non-normative gender/sexuality definitionally transient, and invites symbolic intervention rather than structural rejection. In the final section of my findings below, I discuss how the practice of sash wearing at Pentecost mass is positioned by the RSM as just such a symbolic intervention; an intervention which is intended to bridge the pre-liminal episcopacy with the post-liminal Catholic community through symbolic appeals which approximate the ones associated with the liminal stage in rites of passage.

The queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual as liminal symbol use.

Liminality is the middle status occupied by individuals undergoing rites of passage. It can be thought of as a “social limbo” in which the relatively fixed systems of meaning and social structures associated with both pre-liminality and post-liminality are absent (Turner, 1982, p. 24). This is the phase that empowers ritual to produce social change, because the structural features that facilitate and constrain social life are briefly replaced by “anti-structure” in which radically different structures can be conceived of and/or conveyed to ritual participants (p. 27). This openness is possible because liminality occurs in “sacred space-time” rather than the “profane space-time” of everyday life (p. 27). This sacred space-time allows for “subversive and ludic (or playful)” re-

workings of culturally meaningful symbols that would be opaque or unintelligible within the structural conventions of pre-liminality (p. 27). These semantic re-imaginings in turn endow the ritual participants with the requisite knowledge to take up their post-liminal identity or status. The RSM's online sense-making rhetoric constructs sash wearing such that the Eucharistic ritual it queers can be understood as liminal meaning (re)making. From the "subversive and ludic" manipulation of symbols, to the suspension of everyday space-time, the RSM's construction of sash wearing subscribes to a vision of ritual that posits liminality as a space and mechanism for institutional change.

To understand the work done by positioning sash wearing as a form of liminal symbol use, it is necessary to further reflect on the role "politics" plays as a meme within rainbow sash rhetoric as a whole. As discussed at some length throughout this chapter, most groups of rhetors deploy a common theme surrounding the issue of politics: that the intermingling of politics with Catholic teaching and practice is unacceptable. This theme is implicitly premised on the notion that Catholic faith and particularly the Eucharist definitionally transcend worldly matters of political contention, and that the Church's deeply held beliefs, practices, and teachings are not and should not be subject to either public deliberation or ideologically/politically motivated change efforts. This, of course, differs from politics as it is traditionally understood within scholarly circles, and certainly as it is understood within a critical paradigm. Here, politics are endemic to symbol use. Nevertheless, politics, as both sash wearers and their critics take it up is a scathing accusation: to allow one's take on ostensibly secular LGBT rights to infiltrate one's engagement with the Eucharistic sacrament is to sully the sacred with the partisan.

There is, though, a definite precarity to the RSA's avowal of the same approach to politics in religion as is espoused by its critics. Given the frequency with which the episcopacy and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics use the charge of politics to attack sash wearers and impugn their eligibility for participation in the Eucharist, it is understandable why the RSM, like the RSA, might nominally disavow that their actions are political. Indeed, the RSM does precisely this by flatly asserting that "the wearing of the rainbow sash is neither confrontation/protest nor political" (Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors, n.d.b, para. 2), but rather "an attempt to tell our stories outside the framework of homophobia" (para. 2). As discussed above, though, the RSM's online rhetoric goes far beyond simply refuting that sash wearing is political: it actively indicts members of the episcopacy for their politicization of the Eucharist (e.g. Flynn, 2005, May 2, para. 2; Martin, 2004, June 2, para. 5; Nienstedt cited in *The Progressive Catholic Voice*, 2009, May 28, para. 6).

What makes this strategic discourse precarious is that the RSM does in fact cite a great deal of rhetoric that is common within the world of (secular) politics that it explicitly rejects. Most glaringly, the sashes donned by members of the RSM appropriate the imagery of the rainbow flag that symbolizes LGBT pride, LGBT rights, and LGBT liberationist politics. Beyond this, though, the website decries Catholic priests' denial of the Eucharist to RSM members, by calling it an attack on members' "civil rights" (Anderson, n.d., para. 4). Similarly, visibility politics are cited openly by the Rainbow Sash Movement Board of Directors (n.d.b) in accounting for the rainbow sashes' utility. They argue that "if no one can see you, or your struggle, it's much easier to pretend you

don't exist. Invisibility is the very thing that prevents you from achieving equality" (para. 5).

I contend that the RSM rhetorically reconciles its simultaneous citation of politics, disavowal of politics, and rejection of its critics' politics by relying upon the ritual logics undergirding liminality. Liminal sites of symbol use lay outside the boundaries of everyday space-time, and what might be deemed political protest within the everyday space-times of the pre- and post-liminal phases can instead be understood in the sacred space of the liminal phase as the ludic and/or subversive reworking of symbols which make new systems of meaning possible in the journey from pre-liminality to post-liminality. In the absence of this in-betweenness, the RSM's simultaneous rejection of secular politics for the Catholic episcopacy and appropriation of secular politics for itself would constitute argumentative inconsistency at best and hypocrisy at worst. But much in the way that a ritual rhetorical framework provides the RSM with a mechanism to pillory the Catholic Church's hierarchy while calling for productive dialogue with it, a ritual framework also allows the RSM to earnestly reject the intermingling of secular politics with Catholic faith in non-liminal everyday spaces, while actively merging the two in the production of liminal and therefore de-politicized symbol use. By deploying the logics of rituals of passage as a framework for making sense of the queered Eucharistic ritual it helps to produce, the RSM is empowered to utilize politically loaded symbols of (LGBT) visibility and rights within a sacred space-time that depoliticizes their integration into a post-liminal Catholic worldview. This move preserves the legitimacy of the RSM's indictments of clerical politics. At the same time it re-works their own

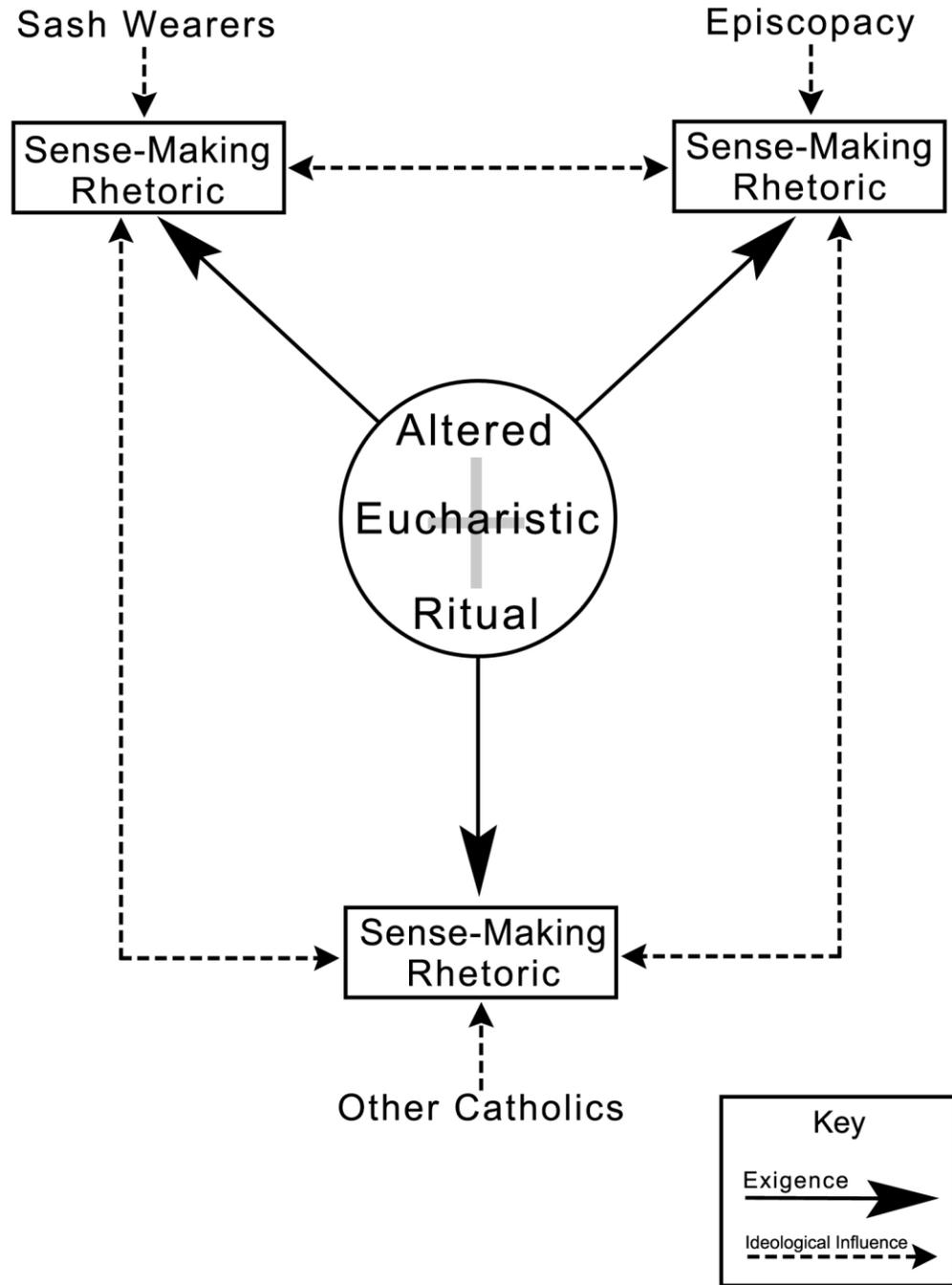
secular political citations as invitations to ritual passage rather than as acts of protest against an institution they remain ideologically loyal to.

Modeling Rainbow Sash Rhetoric: A Rhetorical Network Model

By way of summarizing this chapter, and as a means of contextualizing my findings within the scope of the research questions that originally drove my critique of rainbow sash rhetoric, I have constructed a model that speaks to the flow of ideological influence and interpretive labor within rainbow sash rhetoric as a whole. This model is intended to reflect the general principles of rainbow sash rhetoric I laid out in response to my core research question while also offering a graphic representation of how the various rhetors under the umbrella of rainbow sash rhetoric are positioned relative to one another.

To briefly revisit the principles outlined at the beginning of the chapter, I suggested that: (1) sash wearing during the Eucharist represents an agentic and exigent core from which the impetus for symbol use and meaning making radiates; (2) the symbol use and meaning making generated on the part of sash wearers, clerics, and Catholic laity are shaped by their respective ideological commitments along with their structural relationship to Church teaching, and the Eucharist; and (3) the rhetoric deployed by rhetors in each of these categories relies on ritual logics as a means of sense-making and is ideologically reflective of both the rhetor *and* the sense-making rhetoric deployed by other rhetors. These principles are all reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1



The first and second propositions are illustrated by the three solid arrows representing exigency that move from the altered Eucharistic ritual to the rhetoric of the three categories of rhetors. These arrows are unidirectional not as a means of denying the

active role sash wearers (and arguably the clergy) play in altering the Eucharistic ritual, but in an effort to highlight the subsequent interpretive labor that the altered ritual requires of all who are party to it. These one-way arrows should also be read to reflect my belief that the altered Eucharistic ritual and the differential rhetorics used to make sense of it have at least a partial role in constituting the three peripheral nodes as viable collective identities.

The third proposition is illustrated by the convergence of all arrows at the rhetoric associated with each of the three groups. Not only does the exigency and its ritual grammar shape the rhetoric deployed by each group of rhetors, but so too do ideological commitments flowing from the group itself and the sense-making rhetoric of the other two groups.

In the concluding chapter to follow, I will verbally synthesize the multiple analyses I have rendered and placed in dialogue here. I will then plumb the results of those analyses for their theoretical implications, discuss their connections to existing literature, discuss the limitations of the study, and suggest directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the opening pages of this thesis, I suggested that rainbow sash rhetoric warranted study for two reasons. First, it was an as yet unstudied form of LGBT religious rhetoric that potentially forges new ways for sexually and gender non-normative individuals to carve out a spaces for themselves within a religious tradition that formally teaches “homosexual acts” are “acts of grave depravity” that “under no circumstances can be approved” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2357). Second, rainbow sash rhetoric’s complex array of ideologically diverse rhetors and its existence across digital and ritual media left it well positioned to respond to Campbell’s (2005) call for scholars to develop “synthetic, complex views” of agency as it operates within rhetorical texts (p. 8). What has surprised me in the ensuing process of analysis, however, is the extent to which these two contributions are, in reality, interdependent. Ultimately, I believe that sash wearing constitutes a new way for sexually and gender non-normative Catholics to relate to their faith precisely because of the immense amount of rhetorical agency that emanates from the act. It compels everyone who encounters it, from sash wearers themselves to those with a strong investment in maintaining existing Church teaching, to engage in a process of rhetorical and theological world-(re)making surrounding LGBT people’s place within the ecclesia.

I believe that this and several other elements of the analysis in chapter four have important theoretical and methodological implications for future rhetorical study. Before laying out these implications, however, I will offer summary responses to the research questions that guided the thesis. In doing so, I do not seek to rehash insights from the

previous chapter. Rather, I aim to synthesize the core features of my analysis so as to better ground the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study discussed later in the chapter.

Returning to the Research Question

RQ1. How is sash wearing used to rhetorically construct LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church?

In answer to the core research question, I offer the same response that I forwarded in the opening pages of this chapter: Sash wearing isn't *used to construct* LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church so much as it *necessitates the construction* of LGBT Catholic identity and its position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church. As a symbolic disruption of the Eucharist, the core ritual of Roman Catholic religious belief and practice, sash wearing produces an imperfection or "exigence" that is readily perceived by all who are party to it (Bitzer, 1968, p. 7). This exigence in turn necessitates rhetorical action by sash wearers, the episcopacy, and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, each of whom construct LGBT Catholic identity vis-à-vis the Catholic Church in accordance with their ideological investments.

RQ1a. How does sash wearing appropriate and/or interrupt ritual as a rhetorical strategy?

The answer to this question comes in two parts. First, sash wearing *queers* the Eucharistic ritual, which involves a process of both appropriation and interruption of dominant symbols/meaning systems. Second, this queering renders the ritual a queer(ed) form of symbolic discourse. This queer(ed) form in turn compels ideologically driven

sense-making rhetoric. All parties, including the sash wearers who queered the Eucharist to begin with, are so compelled. I unpack both parts of this answer below.

Sash wearing queers the Eucharistic ritual because it doesn't simply interrupt or change the ritual, but rather violates its grammar and symbolic syntax in such a way as to destabilizes the meaning of the ritual itself. It accomplishes this in two ways. First, it appropriates symbolic resources normally associated with the Eucharistic ritual, such as liturgical colors and the practice of silence, and reverses or reworks them. Second, it offers no obvious alternative or resolution for the destabilization of meaning that it has caused. This queering of the Eucharist produces a queer form precisely because of its refusal to provide an alternative or a resolution to the disruption that it causes. After Rand (2008), this queer(ed) form is thus marked by the "lack of a necessary or predictable relation between an intending agent and the effects of an action" (p. 298). The queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual possesses rhetorical agency because all who are party to it must utilize rhetoric in order to defer its uncertainty and make sense of it. Thus, this queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual necessitates, but does not dictate, the generation of new meanings surrounding LGBT Catholics and their position vis-à-vis the Church.

The queering effect of sash wearing on the Eucharistic ritual is, therefore, the engine of rainbow sash rhetoric in my analysis. The queer(ed) Eucharist becomes a rhetorically agentic force which necessitates that the Catholic episcopacy, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics, and sash wearers themselves deploy logics of ritual in order to fix and make sense of its meaning.

RQ1b. How do the RSM and RSA's publicly available online discourses supplement, alter, or augment the semantics of their eponymous activities?

Both the RSM and the RSA deploy rhetoric online that works to make sense of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual they help to produce. The sense-making rhetoric they deploy is shaped by three factors: (1) their ideological commitments with respect to LGBT Catholic identity; (2) their role as the originator's of the queer(ed) ritual; and (3) the ideological commitments of the episcopacy and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics. Below, I discuss the sense-making rhetoric deployed by the RSM and the RSA respectively.

The RSM's rhetoric relies on rites of passage as a ritual framework for making sense of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual. This rhetoric positions the RSM, the episcopacy, and sash wearing itself within the framework. The RSM itself is construed as embodying fully authentic, post-liminal Catholicism. The (conservative) Catholic episcopacy is constructed as embodying a pre-liminal and immature Catholicism. Their anti-LGBT stance is offered as evidence of this outdated and non-functional version of the faith. Finally the act of sash wearing is construed as a subversive form of symbol use occurring within a liminal ritual space. The fact that sash wearing occurs within a liminal ritual space thereby renders it definitionally apolitical, because liminality occurs outside the everyday space-time where politics occur. In this rhetorical vision, LGBT Catholic identity is not only a possibility, it is the natural outcome of a naturally evolving Catholic faith.

The RSA's rhetoric endorses the power of sash wearing to produce change, but it does not deploy a full-blown ritual framework in order to precisely define its meaning. Because the RSA is structurally, semantically, and ideologically entangled with non-Catholic and even secular LGBT groups, its rhetoric historicizes the changing meanings of sash wearing rather than relying upon a model of Catholic theology to fix that meaning. As such, the RSA's rhetoric makes sense of the queer(ed) Eucharist not as a ritual, but as a queer(ed) Eucharistic ceremony. In this rhetorical vision, LGBT Catholic identity is valued and affirmed without fully articulating its position vis-à-vis the Catholic Church and its teachings. Instead LGBT Catholic identity is constructed in relation to broader categories such as LGBT-affirmative Christianity, LGBT-affirmative spirituality and LGBT community as a whole.

RQ1c.How do other Catholics' publicly available discourses about sash wearing supplement, alter, or augment the semantics of the sash wearers' eponymous activities?

Members of the episcopacy and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics rhetorically make sense of the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual differently. In both cases, however, the sense-making rhetoric they deploy is shaped by three factors: (1) their ideological commitments with respect to LGBT Catholic identity; (2) their respective roles as arbiters of the Eucharist and invested spectators vis-à-vis the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual that sash wearing creates; and (3) each other's ideological commitments as well as the ideological commitments of sash wearers. Below, I discuss the sense-making rhetoric deployed by the episcopacy and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics respectively.

Episcopal sense-making rhetoric firmly defines and narrows the boundaries of the Eucharistic ritual. It does so by simultaneously deploying tactically inconsistent rhetorical claims about the nature of the Eucharist and the reasons for denying it to sash wearers. On one hand, it equates one's capacity to participate in the Eucharist exclusively with one's full belief in Church teachings (especially on non-normative gender/sexuality). On the other, it defines the Eucharist as apolitical and asserts that those who politicize the Eucharist are ineligible to receive it. The first claim allows members of the episcopacy to rhetorically de-queer the Eucharistic ritual. If participation in the Eucharistic ritual requires full communion with Church teaching, then clerics are able to deny the Eucharist to sash wearers and thereby suggest that sash-wearers actions were kept outside the boundaries of the ritual altogether. The second claim, while contradicting the first, empowers members of the episcopacy to foreclose on the need to defend Church teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality. If *public* objection to Church teaching, and not objection to Church teaching in and of itself, is what disqualifies sash wearers from the Eucharist, then the relative merits of Church teaching on non-normative gender/sexuality are immaterial to sash-wearers' exclusion. The rhetorical vision deployed by the episcopacy thus constructs an LGBT Catholicism that can exist within the Church, but that must do so silently.

The rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics relies on social drama as a framework for comprehending the queer(ed) Eucharistic ritual. Within this framework, sash wearing is positioned as a breach of the existing social structure, and clerics' denial of the Eucharist to sash wearers is constructed as a redressive mechanism. Non-sash-

wearing lay Catholics' rhetoric construes sash wearers and members of the Catholic episcopacy to be directly contesting the normative structure of the Catholic ecclesia. Within this rhetorical vision, LGBT Catholic identity vis-à-vis the Church is yet to be determined, as it is subject to whether the sash wearers or the Catholic hierarchy emerge from the social drama with the upper hand.

Implications

Despite the fact that it was originally formulated as a subsidiary to my core research question, I believe that the most important insights in this study emerged from my examination of how sash wearing acts upon ritual as a rhetorical strategy (RQ1a). In answer to this question I proposed that sash wearing queers the Eucharistic ritual, and in turn creates a rhetorically agentic queer(ed) Eucharistic form that compels further sense-making rhetoric. In light of this, and in light of my own commitment to the production of what Sedgwick (2008) calls “anti-homophobic inquiry” (p. 14), I have conceived of this study's theoretical implications with queer rhetoric in mind. Below, I will discuss how this study can enhance understanding of: (1) queer rhetorical forms and precisely what makes them queer; (2) the need to parse queer rhetorics from rhetorics that are politically queer; and (3) the limits of queering as a mechanism for producing social change. Upon exploring these theoretical implications, I will then discuss the potential of network analysis in rhetorical criticism as one of this project's core methodological implications.

Theoretical Implications: Nuancing Queer Rhetoric

The first theoretical implication for queer rhetoric that emerges from this research is that queer forms are, in fact, queered forms. What I mean by this is that my findings

trouble Rand's (2008) theory of the queer form. I endorse her position that queerness, or the "lack of a necessary or predictable relation between an intending agent and the effects of an action" is the wellspring from which rhetorical agency emanates (p. 298). However, I disagree with her contention that the "formal features of texts" determine the extent of their queerness, or the degree to which they are "prone to being put to unforeseen uses" (p. 310). The formal features of texts are inarguably central to queered forms, but I believe that queerness is better conceived as the extent to which those formal features are stretched in unexpected ways. I suggest this because the Eucharist's features as a text are so ritualized and deeply internalized that one could reasonably argue it is especially prone NOT to be put to unforeseen uses; the power of sash wearing as a rhetorical strategy derives from the fact that it does so anyway. Thus, I believe that queer forms are better understood as queered forms in that their agency is derived from violating texts' normative formal features without rupturing them outright.

In this view, the polemics Rand theorizes are not a queer form because they possess the inherently protean formal features of polemics. Rather, they are queered and polemical forms because they radically manipulate and semantically obscure the features of existing, and still fundamentally recognizable rhetorical forms. Likewise, sash wearing compels rhetorical sense-making because it relegates the Eucharistic ritual to the very margins of its intelligibility. By virtue of their eponymous activity sash wearers make clear to anyone who sees them that they intend to intervene in the Eucharist, but the manner in which they do so does not seek to interrupt the sacrament or explicitly contest its meaning. Instead, clergy and communicants alike are left to continue participating in a

ritual that is liturgically constitutive of Catholic identity, knowing that it has been intentionally symbolically altered, but having few resources for ascertaining precisely what those alterations mean. Thus, it is not the formal features of the Eucharist that make it a queer form, nor are the formal features of sash wearing an inherently queer form. Rather, the Eucharist and sash wearing collectively constitute a queered form because the Eucharist, a symbolic and ritual form that is imminently recognizable, intelligible, and significant to most Catholics, is altered by sash wearing to such an extent that it is still intelligible as the sacrament, but its once well-established semantics and conventions have been rendered opaque. This queered Eucharist demands the interpretive labor it does because it is not so different as to be unrecognizable as the Eucharist, but is sufficiently different that new sense-making is required to (re)apprehend the Eucharist's religious and identitarian significance: it is queered by being placed on the margins of intelligibility.

Whereas the first theoretical implication explored above challenges Rand (2008), the second implication is indebted to her in that it expands upon her contention that queerness should be “disconnected from any particular referent” and refigured instead “as the undecidability from which rhetorical agency is actualized” (p. 299). I believe that this research demonstrates a similar need to disconnect queering as a rhetorical act, from queer political commitments. As I discuss in my analysis, queering has been used as a schema for understanding deconstructive symbolic practice surrounding not only gender/sexuality, but also a host of other topics. Despite this expansion of queering as a practice beyond the boundaries of gender/sexuality, queering is still frequently treated as

definitionally radical in its political valence. This research demonstrates that queering can be undertaken as a rhetorical strategy by individuals who expressly seek assimilation into an existing social system rather than a wholesale deconstruction of that system. Moreover, the sense-making rhetoric produced by the episcopacy and by anti-sash lay Catholics in response to the queered Eucharistic ritual demonstrates that queering does not necessitate *progressive* changes in social structures or even the systems of meaning that undergird them.

The third theoretical implication of this research for queer rhetoric extends from the second in that it also cautions critically oriented scholars not to romanticize or idealize queering as a praxis. This study suggests that queering may not always be adopted as a rhetorical strategy based upon its relative merits or because of rhetors' belief in its theoretical and ideological underpinnings. Rather, queering may in some instances function as a rhetorical strategy of necessity or last resort. This claim is premised on sash wearers' general efficacy in engaging with the Church hierarchy. In the simplest sense, the sash wearers succeed in integrating themselves into the Catholic ecclesia because their activities insert and invest them in the protocol surrounding the Eucharist: a ritual that is central to the constitution of Catholic belief and Catholic identity. Moreover, sash wearers' actions produce a queered Eucharistic form that in turn compels them, their allies, and their critics alike to (re)think LGBT people's place within the Church. While such (re)thinking has liberatory transformative potential, that outcome is far from certain and far from universal. In light of the queered Eucharistic ritual's production of both progressive and regressive narratives surrounding the possibility/propriety of an LGBT-

affirmative Catholic Church, I believe that queering may be undertaken by members of the RSM and RSA because they deem it a necessary, rather than a preferable, rhetorical approach. Both the RSM's and RSA's calls for dialogue suggest that sash wearing is not a deconstructive end unto itself, but a mechanism for producing more direct or explicit engagements with the Church on matters of non-normative gender/sexuality. Thus, for sash wearers, queering does not seem to be adopted as a strategy preferable to deliberative models of change. Instead, it is a strategy adopted in the absence of spaces amenable to effectively pursuing those deliberative strategies. In light of this, I suggest that scholars of queer rhetoric consider the potential for queer rhetorical strategies to sometimes be strategies of last resort: useful but unpredictable tools for individuals too few in number and/or too impoverished of structural/discursive resources to advocate more directly for desired change using methods such as formal deliberation/persuasion.

Methodological Implication: Rhetorical Network Analysis

Beyond this study's contributions to the study of queer scholarship, I also think that it illuminates the methodological and analytical utility of network analysis for helping rhetorical critics to conceptualize and illustrate rhetorical phenomena. The rhetorical network model I offer to represent the circulation of rhetorical agency and ideology in rainbow sash rhetoric (see Figure 4.1) was conceptualized as a marriage of McGee's (2009) "molecular" model of rhetoric (p. 30), and the descriptive empirical procedure known as "network analysis" (Reinard, 2008, p. 381). McGee (2009) offers the molecular model as a means for rhetorical critics to conceive of the elements of a rhetorical act (i.e. speaker, speech, occasion, audience, and change) in terms of a

dynamic, three-dimensional structure that can be both rotated to augment a critics' focus and viewed at varying degrees of abstraction in order to document macro- and micro-level phenomena. Reinard (2008) notes that the method of network analysis, and specifically the process of network mapping, is a means of graphically representing how information flows between individuals or "nodes" in a particular organization (p.384). Reinard also notes that network mapping has been applied to other communicative phenomena, such as "the relationship between words and their meanings" in "semantic mapping" (p. 387), but he makes no mention of its use in rhetorical studies.

Despite the absence of such a precedent, the development of a rhetorical network map with sash wearers, the episcopacy, and non-sash-wearing lay Catholics as individual nodes was immensely helpful to me in developing a cohesive account for rainbow sash rhetoric as a whole. It is easy to oversimplify discourse, especially where that discourse is marked by contention and controversy. Given the immense amount of contention, controversy, contradiction, and (frequently) vitriol imbedded within the sense-making rhetorics of the various parties to Rainbow Sash Catholicism, it was initially difficult to move my analysis beyond individual accounts for each party. But by graphically mapping the manner in which each of the groups of rhetors fundamentally responded to the same perception of an altered Eucharistic ritual, I was empowered to begin thinking about their frequently contradictory rhetorical visions in terms of a larger system of sense-making. Specifically, I was able to theorize their respective sense-making rhetorics as part of a multi-directional, radial flow of symbols rather than conceiving of them in terms of a more simplistic pro-sash/anti-sash dialectic. This, in turn, reflexively encouraged me to

re-visit my individual analyses of each node to insure that my conclusions accounted not just for those nodes' support for or opposition to sash wearing, but also for the multiple and nuanced ways in which those basic positions were formed, articulated, altered, and mitigated.

I believe that rhetorical network mapping may have potential for use well beyond this analysis. Mapping the flow of rhetorical meaning among nodes of symbol use (be they speakers, speeches, occasions, audiences, or change) would certainly embody the spirit of McGee's (2009) molecular model. After all, he argues, "a theory of rhetoric can be legitimate only when measured, directly and explicitly, against the objects it purportedly describes and explains" (p. 19). Within the scope of this claim, I would suggest that the expanded use of rhetorical network maps in rhetorical criticism would provide critics with an additional tool for epistemological and descriptive clarity in understanding the complex "ecologies" through which contemporary rhetoric circulates (Edbauer, 2005, p.20). In spite of this utility, I am also aware that this approach to rhetorical mapping is not without its limitations. I will detail these limitations as they relate to my findings later in the chapter, but first I discuss the connections between my findings and the literatures I mapped in Chapter Two.

Connections to Literature

In addition to the more novel implications outlined above, analysis of rainbow sash rhetoric yielded several connections to the bodies of literature I initially drew upon to contextualize the study. In this section, I revisit each of the three sections of my literature review and discuss how this scholarship intersects with my own findings.

LGBT Politics

The theoretical implications I identify above already gesture to some of the important intersections of my findings with literatures on LGBT politics. Review of the literature revealed, for example, that there is no direct correspondence between one's assumptions about the ontology of non-normative gender/sexuality and the politics one embraces surrounding non-normative gender/sexuality. This was certainly confirmed by sash wearers' queering of the Eucharistic ritual. Although the practice of queering emerged from an axiology that endorses radical gender/sexual difference, it was readily deployed as a rhetorical strategy by sash wearers who conceive of their sexual proclivities as essential and fixed, and who seek assimilation into existing social structures. The implication that queering may be a rhetorical method of last resort for sash wearers also underscores this point. It becomes impossible to easily equate an individual's ontological theory of gender/sexuality with their political commitments if one conceives of politics as the product of individuals' resources as well as their beliefs. While it would be fallacious to suggest that one's material resources to affect social change bear no connection to one's political beliefs, it is equally fallacious to claim that they directly correspond to one another. To revisit the axiological commitments outlined in Chapter Two, it may sometimes be the case that strategies of separatism, inclusion/reform, and/or queering have little to do with LGBT groups' sense of what non-normative gender/sexuality is, or what the ideal mechanism for combating LGBT marginalization is. In some instances individuals' choices from among these strategies may be dictated primarily or entirely by those strategies' material and discursive feasibility.

Alongside this area of agreement between my analysis and the literature, rainbow sash rhetoric also bore fruit to my speculation that the prominent role of religion in sash wearing might stretch the traditionally non-religious body of scholarship on sexual politics. Even though sash wearers strive for inclusion in and reform of the Church, their claims to that inclusion did not appeal to legally codified state protection in the manner that Morgan (2001) suggests most claims to inclusion do. Moreover, most of the rhetoric circulated by member of the episcopacy and other opponents of sash wearers eludes ontological definition altogether. It seemed largely irrelevant to those endorsing Church teaching whether non-normative gender/sexuality was static, ever-evolving, fixed at birth, or cultivated; very little of the anti-sash rhetoric I examined concerned itself with staking out a position on what non-normative gender/sexuality is or why it violated Church teaching, rather it simply avowed a position of moral authority from which to prescribe what LGBT (Catholic) people should and should not do.

Marginal Digital Discourses

Most of this study's intersections with the literature on marginal digital discourses emerged from analysis of sash wearers' rhetoric and the rhetoric of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics. As the rhetoric attributed to the episcopacy came in the form of letters and CNS news releases, it did little to illuminate this particular body of scholarship. Both Sash wearers' sense-making rhetoric as well as that of non-sash-wearing lay Catholics fulfilled Vegh's (2003) "awareness/advocacy" function of online rhetoric (p.72), circulating current developments of interest to their respective communities and interpreting them in light of the community's goals. The RSM and RSA's online rhetoric

also featured extensive “organization/mobilization” efforts to persuade others of their perspectives and encourage them to take further action. In keeping with my speculation in Chapter Two, awareness/advocacy and organization/mobilization were functionally intertwined on the sash wearers’ websites. Perhaps because of the structural role they play as invested spectators relative to the queered Eucharistic ritual, non-sash-wearing lay Catholics’ online rhetoric displayed little in the way of organization/mobilization.

This study also resonates with Howard’s (2010; 2011) work on online vernaculars. Both sash wearers’ and lay Catholics’ online content embody Howard’s (2010) central argument that online communities can become ideologically homogeneous and begin to develop their own vernacular religious beliefs and expressions. This, of course, is the central purpose of the RSM site as well as (to a lesser extent) the RSA’s: both are able to circulate non-normative Catholic religious beliefs among others who endorse those beliefs. Non-sash-wearing-lay Catholics’ rhetoric seemed even more inclined to take the ideological like-mindedness of its readers for granted. This was the case despite its diffusion across multiple online outlets. This particular phenomenon suggests that while Howard’s model of vernacular “ekklesia” is accurate (p. 729), he may not lend as much weight to the intertextuality of these ecclesiae as he might. Although he is right to focus on the insularity that the internet can afford religious groups, the rhetoric of (particularly anti-sash) lay Catholics in this study indicates that even vast networks of dozens of websites can still be trafficked by a relatively insular collection of ideologically similar individuals.

Ritual

In many ways, this entire study is embedded within the literature on ritual. As such, I will attempt to allow the ritually-based analyses I rendered in Chapter Four to speak for themselves. However, this study does bear some less explicit implications for the scholarship on ritual that warrant mention here. As I speculated in Chapter Two, rainbow sash rhetoric does in fact trouble Turner's (1969; 1974; 1976) tendency to bifurcate sacred spaces and secular, everyday, or profane spaces. In a basic sense, it does so because the queered Eucharistic ritual occurs *within* the boundaries of a space (the Catholic Church) that is itself considered sacred. On a more complex level, though, this study reveals the subjective nature of sacred spaces, profane spaces, and their boundaries. Despite the direct role of sash wearers in queering the Eucharistic ritual, for example, episcopal rhetoric (re)constructs that ritual in a manner that leaves sash wearers outside the boundaries of its sacred space. Conversely, if one adopts the rhetoric disseminated by the RSM, the episcopacy itself definitionally occupies a profane space-time by virtue of its pre-liminal Catholicism.

The flexibility and diversity of ritual frameworks deployed by the various rhetors in this study suggests that even Grimes (1990), who defines ritual as the meaning we construct around rites, doesn't go far enough in suggesting the fecundity and malleability of ritual logics. Within the bounds of rainbow sash rhetoric, ritual figures as a source of conflict, a tool for interpreting conflict, and even a rhetorical framework for resolving it. Put simply, it is the master metaphor of the entire rhetorical ecology of sash wearing.

In light of this, it is worth examining the extent to which ritual logics, both in the presence and absence of actual ritual performances, function as rhetorical strategies

within movements for social change more broadly. As I note in Chapter Two, ritual and ceremony are certainly not new concepts within the field of rhetoric. However, the present study not only attests to the power of (queered) ritual itself, but to its reach as an interpretive schema and a cultural meme. This, in my view, is the most important contribution that the present study makes to the literature. Scholars have attested to the significance of ritual for a very long time, but this study goes further by attesting not only to ritual's status as a foundational form of cultural performance and (re)production, but also to its status as a profoundly fertile site and conceptual model for queer rhetorical in(ter)vention. If the grammar of rituals is as well established and deeply internalized as Turner's work and now this study suggest, then the mere citation of those grammars wields rhetorical force that scholars of social change should not only attend to and document, but also seriously entertain as a potential model for novel efforts toward social/institutional transformation.

Limitations

As with any piece of academic research, the preceding study is not without its limitations and weaknesses. Moreover, while it is important for all research to clearly convey its own lacunae, it is all the more important within the scope of research that aspires to cultural critique. This project has taken up Rainbow Sash Catholicism from a rhetorical perspective in the conviction that humans create nuanced meanings in great volume about the things and experiences they most care about. Proceeding from that conviction, it becomes immensely valuable to catalogue, document, and excavate the vast array of symbols and artifacts that has accrued around sash wearing to understand the

insights about Catholic faith, Catholic practice, and (LGBT) Catholic identity embedded therein. Having said that, rhetorical criticism is not the only method capable of providing insight into Rainbow Sash Catholicism. Nor is this particular rhetorical criticism without its limitations. Below I discuss the limitations of this study in three areas: (1) the method of rhetorical criticism itself, (2) the approach taken to textualizing rainbow sash rhetoric for the purposes of rhetorical criticism, and (3) the scope of the rhetorical criticism.

These areas are not meant to be an exclusive or exhaustive list of all the study's limitations, nor are they presented here to undercut the claims I have made throughout this study. Rather, I hope to equip readers with tools to critically evaluate the claims I make and to contextualize them in terms of their own insights surrounding rhetorical criticism, LGBT religious identity, or any of the other *topoi* this thesis has touched upon.

Method

For all that it offers, rhetorical criticism of publicly available artifacts lacks the capacity to encapsulate lived experience. While this study may be better equipped than non-textual methods to make note of symbolic minutiae captured in artifacts of sash wearers' and others' meaning making efforts, there are other important elements of the phenomenon that it can never capture. Whatever else they are, rituals are performances, and thus the *experience* of wearing a rainbow sash – the verbal and nonverbal responses it elicits from congregants, the face-to-face denial of the Eucharist it elicits from clerics – is central to its ritual meaning. As such, had I been able to supplement my criticism with interviewing, ethnography, participant observation, or some other method oriented toward cataloguing lived experience, my analysis would have been stronger for it.

Beyond acting as gap in my account for the queered ritual at the heart of rainbow sash rhetoric, though, the absence of such a methodology also limits the degree to which this study can be placed in dialogue with similar others. Among the principal studies cited in this proposal, Brouwer (1998), Chávez (2004), and Bennett (2009) each incorporate methods explicitly designed to capture the lived experiences of the individuals and groups they study. There is also precedent for the use of qualitative interviewing in the study of online religious rhetorics. Howard (2010; 2011), for example, leans heavily upon the method in his recent works examining Christian fundamentalism online. Without a similarly mixed set of methods, it is more difficult to assess whether these studies' findings are commensurate with my own. Although critical and qualitative research is admittedly not oriented toward the production of generalizable findings, my exclusive reliance on rhetorical criticism limits the potentiality for inter-analytical insights to emerge from comparison of this study to its theoretical and topical confederates across the discipline.

Textualization

There are also potential limitations to the way this study was conducted within the methodological scope of rhetorical criticism. Most glaringly, the RSM website I coded and analyzed above is no longer active. Although the group has a new website (<http://rainbowsashmovement.wordpress.com/>) it has yet to accrue sufficient content to be usefully compared to the other nodes within the rhetorical network I presented. Only time will tell whether the new website's content comes to articulate a similar rhetorical vision as the former one did.

Beyond this limitation, which is outside my control, I also believe there is room for objection to the manner in which rainbow sash rhetoric was textualized. There can be no doubt that the diffuse nature of texts written on or about the sash wearers presents a barrier to the systematicity of the study. I have attempted to be as clear as possible in Chapter Three concerning the process employed to gather these texts, and I maintain that there is merit in relegating the analysis exclusively to public texts available via the internet. However, the heterogeneous character of this corpus of content necessitated that rhetorical artifacts of different textual genres (e.g. newspaper articles and blogposts) be coded side by side. While I believe that the rhetorical themes that emerged across these genres are all the more compelling as a result, I suspect that some nuance of analysis of individual texts was lost in the process of straddling multiple genres' features.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge limitations accompanying the nodes in my rhetorical network as I've identified them. As each of the rhetorical nodes corresponds to a collective "identity" my analysis undeniably effaces the matrices of difference that separate individual rhetors within each node. This is particularly true of episcopal rhetoric and non-sash-wearing lay Catholic rhetoric, given the size of these respective groups. My rationale in fixing these as "identities" with respect to rainbow sash rhetoric is rooted in Charland's (1987) "constitutive rhetoric" (p. 133). Charland construes identity to be situational: it is not fixed or essential, but rather the product of rhetoric's innate tendency to position people in relation to one another and in relation to their current discursive milieu. Charland calls this process of contingent identity formation "interpellation," he claims that one's identity is (re)constituted "at the very moment one

enters a rhetorical situation” or “as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed” (p. 138). Thus, none of the nodes should be construed as identities in the traditional sense of the term. Rather they are broad positionalities into which individuals are interpolated by sash wearers’ queering of the Eucharistic ritual.

Scope

The final limitation that I wish to remark upon here is the issue of scope or scale. In recognition of the contentious and inconsistent history of sash wearing in the U.S., this project looked at sash wearing on a national scale. In his treatise calling for a materially-based rhetoric, McGee (2009) notes that rhetoric can be criticized on a continuum of scales ranging from the “microrhetorical experience” of a single speech (p. 25), to the “macrorhetorical experience” of speech produced by “artificial entities animated and endowed with human characteristics” such as “‘Labor,’ ‘Government,’ and ‘the Law’” (p.27). I located this study much nearer to the macrorhetorical end of the scale, but there are valid reasons to claim that both a smaller and a larger scope would be more appropriate. In terms of the former, greater detail would have been afforded had I focused on a single sash wearing group and/or occluded either episcopal rhetoric or non-sash-wearing lay Catholic rhetoric. In terms of the latter, greater context would have been offered had rhetoric produced by and around the Australian RSM been included within this study’s text.

Future Directions

Inquiry should always invite inquiry, and as I see it this study calls for two separate research programs. The first, unsurprisingly, pursues further understanding of

rainbow sash rhetoric and Rainbow Sash Catholicism more broadly. My discussion of the limitations of this project offers guideposts for such future study. Most importantly, such future research should focus upon or at least incorporate experiential data into its findings. This data would not only add an entirely new dimension to scholarship on Rainbow Sash Catholicism, but could be used as an internal check on the rhetorical analyses put forth here and in future research. In particular, I believe participant observation and other ethnographic methods have potential here as they would allow for an integration of sash wearers' self-reported systems of meaning and the researcher's first-hand experience. Archival research and interview work, if possible, would also enhance understanding of sash wearing. Publicly available rhetoric frequently deviates from rhetoric deployed within the context of more tightly bounded networks, and it would be compelling to see whether sash wearer's self-construal or their privately expressed relationship to the Catholic Church or Catholic teaching differed from the findings reported here. Finally, rhetorical analysis of the Australian RSM is necessary in expanding overall knowledge of sash wearer's rhetoric. The Australian RSM is the progenitor of sash wearing, and their rhetoric would be compelling to study in light of its different national context. Moreover, rhetorical study of the Australian RSM would reflexively nuance the present study as the RSA remains associated with this group and the RSM is not.

The second program of research this study invites is also rhetorical in nature but would draw inspiration from this study's finding that ritual logics and ritual grammars are profoundly powerful and profoundly flexible as rhetorical frameworks. I believe that

other cultural phenomena could be rhetorically plumbed for the ritual frameworks they ascribe and/or proliferate. The rhetoric surrounding same-sex marriage seems a fruitful and topical choice for such an endeavor, but I suspect a range of topics outside the realm of LGBT discourse and politics could be ritually explored as well.

If this analysis attests to anything, it is to the considerable power of queering when it is materially enacted as a rhetorical strategy rather than as an analytical exercise. By donning a few inches of multi-colored fabric and asking to partake in the Roman Catholic Church's definitive sacrament, sash wearers produce disorientation so deeply felt that the ecclesia as a whole must (re)think its relationship to non-normative gender/sexuality. Queering the Eucharist, however, proves to be as precarious as it is powerful. The (new) rhetorical vision(s) for LGBT Catholic identity that this queering produces—an embraced one, a silenced one, an impossible one—is as elusive as the end of the rainbow.

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