EVERYBODY COMES OUT ABOUT SOMETHING: (RE)VISIONING COMING OUT

NARRATIVES AS A RHETORICAL GENRE

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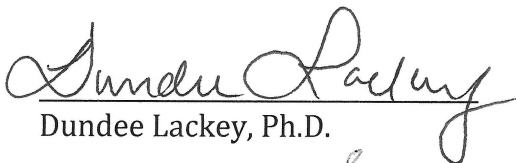DENTON, TEXAS

April 1, 2016

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jamie M. Jones entitled "Everybody "Comes Out" About Something: (Re)Visioning "Coming Out" Narratives as a Rhetorical Genre." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Rhetoric.
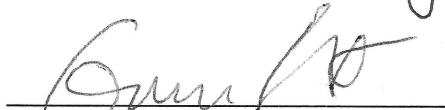
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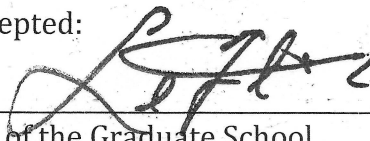
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DEDICATION

For my endlessly loving and supportive partner, Larisa Maxwell, who provided encouragement, listened to my sometimes incoherent ramblings, and supplied amazing vegan goodies to give me the energy, strength, and courage to "just keep writing."

I would also like to dedicate this to my parents, Jean and Don Jones, who nurtured my love of learning and my curiosity from the beginning, and my brother, Don, who helped remind me why I began this journey. I would like to dedicate this to my grandparents, John and Ruth Hargreaves, who mailed me newspaper and magazine articles when I was growing up, inspiring me to dive headfirst into research projects from a young age.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to all of those who bravely tell their stories for the world to hear. Your stories have power.

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Larisa Maxwell, thank you for loving me and allowing me to love you. We've had so many amazing adventures and I cannot wait to see what the future brings. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

JAMIE M. JONES

EVERYBODY COMES OUT ABOUT SOMETHING: (RE)VISIONING COMING OUT
NARRATIVES AS A RHETORICAL GENRE

MAY 2016

Though many academics seem to be turning their attention away from
coming out narratives, coming out narratives have been taken up as tools to create
social change by many marginalized and/or oppressed groups, thus reifying the
importance of the narratives. Coming out is no longer just for debutantes and queers
but is a practice that individuals who are members of marginalized and/or
oppressed groups have taken up in order to make their stories heard. In this
research I call for a (re)visioning of coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre—a
genre that creates social and rhetorical action— per the criteria set forth by Carolyn
Miller in her articles, "Genre as Social Action" and "Rhetorical Community: The
Cultural Basis of Genre," with the goal that such a (re)visioning will bring new life
and focus to coming out narratives and their functions in social movements.

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PREFACE

Over the course of the last decade, scholars seem to have turned their focus

and discussions away from "coming out" stories. This turn is likely in part the result

of fears of flattening and tokenizing queer identities (see Alexander and Rhodes;

Saxey). Though flattening and tokenization are potential risks of studying, teaching,

and foregrounding "coming out" narratives, "coming out" narratives and their

function in society are important and worthy of scholarly inquiry. Despite many

academics turning away from "coming out" narratives, "coming out" narratives have

been taken up as tools to create social change by many marginalized and/or

oppressed groups, thus reifying the importance of the narratives. "Coming out" is no

longer just for debutantes and queers but is a practice that individuals who are

members of marginalized and/or oppressed groups have taken up in order to make

their stories heard. As such, in what follows, I call for a (re)visioning of coming out

narratives as a rhetorical genre—a genre that creates social and rhetorical action—

with the goal that such a (re)visioning will bring new life and focus to "coming out"

narratives and their functions in social movements.

To date, research focusing on "coming out" has emphasized sexual "coming

out" narratives. In my research, I expand the scope to include other types of "coming

out" narratives, such as "coming out" as an undocumented immigrant and "coming

out" about having a chronic illness. Though this research is in some ways contrary to current academic trends, I implore you to read what follows with an open mind, think about the ways you and others "come out" every day, and consider the many benefits of (re)visioning "coming out" narratives as a rhetorical genre.

Everybody "comes out" about something. Sometimes we "come out" about something that we have (or have not) experienced. Other times we "come out" about big things, like "coming out" as undocumented, or "coming out" as queer. In a TEDxBoulder talk, Ash Beckham says that "all a closet is is a hard conversation" (Beckham). Though it is somewhat dangerous to essentialize the closet, and by extension, "coming out" in this way, the underlying sentiment, that we all hide something and eventually all "come out" about something, is important to keep in mind.

CHAPTER II

COMING OUT NARRATIVES AND RHETORICAL GENRES

COMING OUT

"Coming out"[1] has meant many things to the lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA[2]) communities over the course

of the last 100 years, but "coming out" has more broadly connotated an experience

in which an individual becomes a part of a larger community. This idea has been

represented and reproduced in both academic literature and popular culture.

According to Sally Munt, Elizabeth Basset, and Kate O'Riordan, "the coming out story

describes an individual's journeying towards an imagined community" (127).

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[1] The phrase "coming out" will be in quotation marks throughout this chapter in order to help the reader become accustomed to reading the phrase as it functions in this dissertation. In the remaining chapters the phrase will not be presented in quotation marks so as not to tokenize or flatten the narratives being discussed or the act of coming out itself.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, the acronym "LGBTQIA" will be used. LGBTQIA, when used in this dissertation, stands for lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. Michelle Bridgman, in a video created by Pink Therapy, a counseling group based in London, notes that the acronym LGBT, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, had been in use since the late 1980s early 1990s (Davies, Gawler-Wright, and Bridgman). Kayley Weinberg, in a statement issued by the National Organization for Women about their adoption of the acronym LGBTQIA in lieu of LGBT, notes the need for terminology to reflect the evolution of culture and identity and the terminologies that evolve alongside culture and identity. Echoing this, Jack Halberstam points out that "when you see terms like L.G.B.T.Q.I.A., it's because people are seeing all the things that fall out of the binary, and demanding that a name come into being" (qtd. in Schulman). Though the acronym LGBTQIA has evolved to become more encompassing and inclusive, it has its limitations and groups, like Pink Therapy, are advocating for terminology that is radically inclusive. Pink Therapy specifically suggests "Gender and Sexual Diversities (GSD)" (Davies, Gawler-Wright, and Bridgman). Ron Suresha suggests the term Qumunity, which is a word derived from "queer" and "community." As the terminology has not yet caught up with the evolution of the culture, identity, and/or community, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the acronym LGBTQIA.

George Chauncey, in *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1980-1940*, briefly traces the history of the phrase "coming out." The origin of "coming out," according to Chauncey, was the debutante balls in which a young woman was "formally introduced to…the society of her cultural peers" (7). Inspired by this pre-World War II (WWII) tradition, the gay community held drag balls in major cities throughout the United States (Chauncey 7). At these events, which were attended by homosexual and heterosexual people alike, gay people would "come out" into the "gay world" or "homosexual society" (Chauncey 7). Chauncey highlights the troubling point that homosexuals went from "*coming out into*" (7, his emphasis) the world before WWII to "*coming out of*" (7, his emphasis) the closet after WWII.

In looking at the evolution of the meaning of "coming out," this shift from "*coming out into*" (Chauncey 7, his emphasis) to "*coming out of*" (Chauncey 7, his emphasis) is apparent. In the 1920s, "coming out" "referred to the initiation into the gay world" (Chauncey 8), and when used more narrowly "to refer to the process by which someone came to recognize his sexual interest in men" (Chauncey 8), Chauncey points out that it did not indicate a "solitary experience" (8). By the 1950s "coming out" was used to refer to a gay man's first homosexual encounter, and in the 1970s, "coming out" was used to refer to "announcing one's homosexuality to straight friends and family" (8). Chauncey notes the shift in audience from members of the "gay world" (8) to members of the "straight world" (8).

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The shift in audience that Chauncey acknowledges coincides with shifts in

dominant cultures' opinions about homosexuality. "Coming out" as LGBTQIA often

involves high levels of risk because of the personal, emotional, psychological, social,

political, and economic ramifications encountered by LGBTQIA people when

"coming out." By "coming out," a LGBTQIA person risks losing their[3] family, their

home, their financial support, and in some devastating circumstances their lives.

Every day, members of the LGBTQIA community encounter situations in which they

must decide if they are going to come out yet again. In her groundbreaking text,

Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out that "The gay closet is

not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is the

fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however

courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their

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[3] The history of the use of a singular "they" in lieu of "he" or "she," and similarly, "their" in lieu of "his" or "her," is long and includes uses by the likes of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Austen. Gretchen McColloch traces the written use of "they" to the 1300s. In her article, McColloch provides examples from the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Austen in which the authors' use the gender-neutral "they," and cites Dickens, Elliot, Wilde as frequently using the singular "they" in their works as well. In recent years, there has been an uptick in the uses of the gender-neutral "they." McColloch writes that "the increasing visibility of genderqueer and non-binary folks who prefer to be referred to as 'they' has pushed this acceptance along even faster" than the growing number of organizations and publications that have been moving toward the use of gender-neutral pronouns, including "they," and titles, including "Mx." As of December 2015, the American Dialect Society acknowledged "they" as a "gender-neutral pronoun" (Guo) because of "its usefulness as a way to refer to people who don't want to be called 'he' or 'she'" (Guo). In addition to acknowledging "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun, the American Dialect Society also named "'they' their word of the year for 2015" (Nunberg).

With all of this said, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun. In "'Ze' or 'They'? A Guide to Using Gender-Neutral Pronouns," Poon discusses some of the limitations of the use of "they" and provides a table of "invented pronouns" (the table was curated by the Gender Neutral Pronoun Blog), as well as a four-step guide (based upon suggestions by Sam Dylan Finch and Dani Heffernan) to determining which pronouns one should use when one has just met someone for the first time.

immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence"

(68). Though Sedgwick wrote about the role the closet plays in the lives of the

queer[4] community two decades ago, it is, unfortunately, still relevant.

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[4] The origins of queer theory, and the use of the term queer in academia, date back to the 1990s when the term was used in the title of a special edition published by the journal differences, which was edited by Teresa de Lauretis (Hall, *Queer Theories* 55). In the issue, de Lauretis uses "the catch-all phrase" (Hall, *Queer Theories* 55) "queer theory." Even in its origins, "queer theory" was used as an umbrella term. This is in part likely because definitions of the term "queer" vary. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word 'queer' itself means across—it comes from the Indo-European root –*twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (traverse), Latin *toquere* (to twist), English *athwart*…Keenly, it is relational and strange" (qtd. in Hall, *Queer Theories* 12).

Sedgwick's definition demonstrates the complexity and encompassing nature of the term "queer." Donald Hall suggests thinking about "the adjective 'queer' in this way: it is to abrade the classifications, to sit athwart conventional categories or traverse several" (Hall, *Queer Theories* 13). By this definition, everyone is queer, which again demonstrates the encompassing nature of the term. María Deguzmán notes, "the term 'queer' covers not only 'homosexual' but also the absurd, crazy, atypical, deviant, exceptional, extraordinary, preternatural, strange, and uncanny" (214). Deguzmán's definition of "queer" is also broad and encompassing. When used as a verb, the term "queer" is used in a way that is typically intended to "undermine the system" (Hall, *Queer Theories* 14). As can be seen in the various, yet all broad, interpretations of the definition of "queer," it is easy to see the potential intersectionality and interconnectedness that might be engendered by "queer theory." "Queer theory," as Hall defines it, "work[s] to challenge and undercut any attempt to render "identity" singular, fixed, or normal" (Hall, *Queer Theories* 15). Hall's definition of "queer theory" is one that many scholars tend to agree upon (though scholars do often elaborate upon this definition).

The beauty of Hall's definition of "queer theory" is that it gets right to the reason for queer theory's existence. Queer theory is one way in which societal norms can be subverted, transgressed, and complicated. Queer theory allows the (re)visioning of society and the hierarchies that exist within society. Alan Sinfield notes, "hierarchies of gender, age, and class, and race also, are hard to expel from our personal lives because they constitute the principal hierarchies that structure our society" (Sinfield 57), and via queer theory, these hierarchies can be dismantled, thus making queer theory of great importance to society.

According to Hall, "gender theory [or queer theory] is not a twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon alone" ("Gender and Queer Theory" 102). Hall traces the examples of homoerotic and homosexual imagery and characters throughout antiquity ("Gender and Queer Theory"102-03), demonstrating that queer is nothing new. As queer theory has gained recognition as a lens through which to view and interrogate the world, complications have arisen, specifically the way in which queer theorists have addressed intersectionality within queer theory. Hall notes "if there are some discernible emerging challenges in the field of gender theory [queer theory], they reflect that multiplicity and the need for reflection on the continuing, naturalized assumptions that we bring to sexuality and identity" ("Gender and Queer Theory"112-13). To expand upon this idea that the ways in which sexuality and identity must be (re)visioned, so must the representations of the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and nationality as (un)represented by queer theory.

Robert Espinoza complicates these notions of what it means to "come out," noting that "coming out means naming the complicity of institutions and everyday people, often silent and well-intentioned, and at times violent and unrelenting" (Espinoza). Espinoza's perspective on "coming out" seems to be rooted in the radical feminist tradition. As such, it is not surprising that "coming out" narratives have been taken up as tools for creating social change by communities and movements beyond the LGBTQIA community.

Sedgwick also acknowledges the power of "coming out" narratives and their use beyond sexual "coming outs" (72). "Coming out" stories, stories that typically involve revealing private information, often sensitive in nature, to the public, are everywhere because everyone comes out about something at some point in their lives. As such, I posit that "coming out" narratives of all kinds should be (re)visioned as a rhetorical genre. "Coming out" narratives exhibit the characteristics of a rhetorical genre set forth by Carolyn Miller in her article "Genre as Social Action" and in her follow-up discussion of rhetorical genres, "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre." Such a (re)visioning of "coming out" narratives could serve as a means for harnessing the power of "coming out" narratives to create social change, celebrate difference, and resist assimilation and erasure.

Broadening the discussion of "coming out" narratives to include instances of "coming out" that are not sexual or gender related "coming outs" is by no means intended to diminish what it means to "come out" as LGBTQIA, but to highlight that

"coming out" narratives are in fact a rhetorical genre that expands beyond, but very much includes, sexual "coming out" stories. "Coming out" as LGBTQIA is typically viewed as ritualistic, perhaps in part because of the early meanings of "coming out" and perhaps in part because of the amount of risk that was later associated with "coming out" (Bacon 251). For many, "coming out" as LGBTQIA opens the door to a new world, a new culture, and a new lexicon. Though other instances in which people "come out" may not have celebratory origins or such high risks associated with the "coming out," these "coming out" stories share many similarities to queer "coming out" stories. The fact that the moves are reproduced and employed by other communities strengthens my claim that "coming out" narratives ought to be (re)visioned as a rhetorical genre because they have identifiable features, are reproduced, and are used to create social action between and within individuals, within communities, and in society at-large.

Social action, even in the crudest sense, is generated by "coming out" narratives. Viewing social actions from a Weberian[5] perspective, "coming out" narratives generate actions and reactions both for the actor (the person "coming out") and the audience. For example, Person A comes out to a friend, Person B. The friend's reactions will impact Person A's future actions, both with Person B and with others. Furthermore, Person B's future actions will be impacted by Person A's initial

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[5] Max Weber was a sociologist who developed a theory of social action. Weber theorizes that action is social when the actor takes the thoughts, behaviors, and (re)actions of others into consideration before determining which action to take (see *Basic Concepts in Sociology*).

action ("coming out"). Though the social action created is not inherently positive, it seems possible that by (re)visioning "coming out" narratives as a rhetorical genre it is possible to identify basic features and strategies that more often than not lead to more positive social actions.

"Coming out" narratives themselves are constantly evolving, as demonstrated by the expanded uses of "coming out." The "coming out" narratives not only create social action, but they also arguably contribute to the creation of identities, just as identities contribute to the creation of "coming out" narratives. The recursive natures of storytelling and identity development have not gone unacknowledged. Plummer astutely observes that "stories need communities to be heard, but communities themselves are also built through story tellings" (174). Likewise, Saxey explains that "the flow of influence [between stories and identities] is far more complex, passing in every direction at once between personal experience, recollection, identity, text, genre and society" (2). Given the complexity of "coming out" narratives and their being ever-present in society, it seems that "coming out" narratives ought to be considered and interrogated in more nuanced ways. I suggest that one potentially fruitful way of viewing "coming out" narratives is as a rhetorical genre.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON "COMING OUT" NARRATIVES

Perspectives on "coming out" vary. There are, however, two points that seem to reappear in media coverage and scholarly literature on "coming out," especially

queer "coming out": "coming out" as a confession and "coming out" as shameful. First, "coming out" is sometimes viewed as a confession, as demonstrated by headlines and leading stories in the media, such as "The Reason Behind Ellen Page's Coming Out Confession!" (wochit Entertainment). Viewing "coming out" as a confession seems to go hand-in-hand with the second perspective that reappears, the shame-based perspectives of difference that are perpetuated in society (Kaufman and Raphael 6). As Kaufman and Raphael note, "being seen as gay or lesbian *equals* being shameful. Being seen as gay or lesbian therefore unavoidably targets anyone for shaming" (6). Likely in part because of such shaming and the risks often associated with "coming out" in the queer community, "coming out" is a complex and ritualistic social act that bridges the private and the public. Because of the impact "coming out" has on the lives of LGBTQIA individuals, it is important to change how society and scholars view "coming out" narratives. "Coming out" and the stigmas often associated with "coming out" are not limited to the LGBTQIA community. Take, for instance, someone "coming out" as an undocumented immigrant, someone "coming out" as HIV+, someone "coming out" as living with mental illness, someone who lives in a primarily Republican state "coming out" as Democrat (or vice versa), someone who passes as White "coming out" as Native American, Latina/o, or Black, or someone who appears to be able-bodied "coming out" about a disability.

Discussions of "coming out" narratives have been approached from several different perspectives by researchers. Early discussions of "coming out" narratives focused primarily on them in terms of a literary genre or a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*[6]. In the 1990s, discussions of "coming out" narratives crossed-over into the realms of culture and politics, thus somewhat altering perspectives on "coming out" narratives in terms of a literary genre or subgenre. The evolution of the discussion of "coming out" narratives tells a compelling story of genre and the evolution of genre.

In *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity,* Esther Saxey tells the nuanced tale of "coming out" stories as a literary genre. As noted on the back cover of the paperback edition of Saxey's text, "despite the ongoing popularity of coming-out stories, this [*Homoplot*] is the first book-length study of the genre." Saxey masterfully sifts through critical commentaries of "coming out" stories and "coming out" novels and anthologies, detailing the evolution of the genre and the identities the genre represents and shapes and is shaped by. The text is organized into six chapters. The first chapter focuses on the connections "coming out" stories share with feminist narratives and testimonies, as

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[6] *Bildungsroman* is a genre of literature that focuses on the growth of the protagonist. The term *Bildungsroman* is sometimes used interchangeably with "coming of age" story, though the term *Bildungsroman* is far more nuanced and refers to very particular types of growth, to include psychological, spiritual, and moral growth. Related genres that also are sometimes referred to as the more general "coming of age" story are *Erziehungsroman*, which focuses primarily on growth related to education, *Küntslerroman*, which focuses primarily on the growth of an artist, and *Entwicklungsroman,* which is most closely aligned with the "coming of age" story in that the *Entwicklungsroman* focuses on overall growth.

well as with feminist consciousness raising. The next two chapters are focused on gay male "coming out" stories, while lesbian "coming out" stories are central to chapters four and five. Chapter six provides a look at "coming out" stories by "Queers of Color and Bisexuals" (Saxey "Table of Contents"). Though the text is organized in such a way that "coming out" stories as told by gay males, lesbians, queer people of color, and bisexuals can be perceived to be very different, there are many points of similarity as "coming out" narratives have an underlying set of basic features that make them "coming out" narratives. This idea is briefly touched on by Saxey. However it is beyond the purview of her research that is recounted in *Homoplot*. The reproducibility of "coming out" narratives and the application of "coming out" to other social contexts is central to this dissertation and the rhetorical genre claim being made.

In the "Epilogue" of *Homoplot,* Saxey suggests that the "coming out story will maintain a foothold as long as sexual identity itself holds a power to inspire writers and touch readers" (146), noting that these stories will "persist for another generation at least" (146). I would like to complicate this assertion by suggesting that "coming out" narratives will exist as long as they serve a rhetorical function and can inspire rhetorical and social action. In the last two lines of the text, Saxey observes that "the story will branch, diversify, return to its most basic form and to its most arch extremes of self-awareness. We grow with the coming out story, and grow from it, but we do not entirely grow out of it" (146). This astute observation

highlights some of the aspects of "coming out" narratives that I would assert merit making a rhetorical genre claim for "coming out" narratives.

Saxey's discussion of "coming out" stories from a literary perspective is not the only one, but it is amongst the most comprehensive. Saxey brings many discussions of "coming out" stories from literary perspectives together within the text, thus my discussion of "coming out" narratives in terms of a literary genre and as literature refers primarily to Saxey's text. Though there have been studies of "coming out" narratives that consider political, social, and cultural facets of "coming out," the studies focus only on sexual "coming out" narratives and they do not focus on "coming out" narratives in terms of the rhetorical and social action, nor do they consider "coming out" narratives as a rhetorical genre and envision the benefits of such a consideration.

Yong Wang, Jen Bacon, and Sandra Tawake each interrogate the political, social, and cultural facets of "coming out" narratives. Wang's discussion is rooted in Lacanian theory and focuses more on the political action associated with "coming out," whereas Bacon focuses on the cultural rhetoric of "coming out." Tawake builds upon what Bacon asserts, citing Bacon throughout an interrogation of Ihimaera's novel, *The Uncle's Story.*

Wang discusses "coming out" narratives as political acts using a Lacanian theoretical lens, positing that the transition from the hysteric's discourse to the master's discourse marks a point at which political action becomes possible, noting

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that "identification always involves conscious decision, which opens the space for political and ethical actions" (244). While Wang provides an interesting exploration of "coming out" narratives highlighting differences in constructionist and deconstructionist viewpoints via Lacanian theories, Wang's discussion of "coming out" as a political act is abbreviated.

"Coming out" as a political act is also discussed peripherally by Bacon in her discussion of lesbian "coming out" narratives in terms of cultural rhetoric. Bacon looks at "coming out" narratives and the ways in which they function in the construction and maintenance of identity in "social and political context[s]" (249) and advocates for a shift in how we view cultural rhetoric (258). She notes that "to really be 'out' as a queer, we must deny straight people the possibility of assuming we are straight, we have to challenge heteronormative assumptions with our very 'being' so that we aren't constantly involved in a rhetorical exchange on the topic" (Bacon 250). Bacon problematizes "coming out" stories by noting what "coming out" means to different groups (254). She points out that heterosexuals tend to view "coming out" differently than those who members of the LGBTQIA (my use of the acronym, not Bacon's) community (Bacon 254). She further complicates the notion of "coming out" when noting the different types of "coming out" stories LGBTQIA people tell depending upon the situation and audience (Bacon 254). Bacon calls for a shift in the way that rhetoric is viewed and used, specifically drawing attention to the default assumption that rhetorical practice is simply persuasion (257). She

challenges her audience to consider "a rhetorical practice that seeks to negotiate understanding rather than persuade" (Bacon 255), noting that "coming out" stories provide such a rich site for locating rhetorical constructions of the self" (Bacon 257). Bacon's article presents many important and interesting questions, many of which are left unanswered, thus providing ample points on which to build upon her research.

Building upon Bacon's research, Tawake explores Witi Ihimaera's novel, *The Uncle's Story*, in terms of cultural rhetoric. Tawake comments that "the discourse of the fictional coming-out narratives in Ihimaera's book reveals a logic or rhetoric that does not work in favour of oversimplification but rather articulates multiple possibilities and a multi-layered reality" (375). Though the "coming out" stories told in the novel are fiction, according to Tawake, Ihimaera presents intersections of identity, specifically gay and Maori, which come together to weave "a more complex truth even if it did not happen" (379). Tawake provides a postcolonial queer reading of *The Uncle's Story* that is based upon Bacon's suggestion that "coming out" stories contribute to the creation of a cultural rhetoric. Tawake further complicates this notion of cultural rhetoric, showing that identity is, in many ways, a palimpsest[7].

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[7] The word *palimpsest* in this context is a reference to textual editing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a palimpsest is "a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing." A secondary (and related) meaning, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is an "extended use: a thing likened to such a writing surface, esp. in having been reused or altered while still retaining traces of its earlier form; a multilayered record."

David Roseborough approaches "coming out" stories from a perspective that could arguably be considered a facet of cultural rhetoric. Roseborough discusses gay men's "coming out" stories as faith narratives, likening them to parables. He proposes "coming out" as one such situation that prompts a re-evaluation of one's world view and which can ideally lead to psychological and spiritual growth" (59). Roseborough goes on to imply that most narratives can be viewed in this way due to the tendency to revise these narratives as time lapses. Though Roseborough's approach to "coming out" narratives differs in many ways from those of Wang, Bacon, and Tawake, Roseborough, like Wang, Bacon, and Tawake, seeks to understand the function and importance of "coming out" narratives in society.

Given the importance of stories in general, and "coming out" stories in particular, as demonstrated by Wang, Bacon, Tawake, and Roseborough, it is by no means surprising that "coming out" narratives have drawn the attention of rhetoricians and compositionists. Jonathan Alexander and Elizabeth Losh wrote a chapter for *LGBT Identity and Online New Media* titled "'A YouTube of One's Own?": "Coming Out" Videos as Rhetorical Action." In this chapter, Alexander and Losh seek to determine "what kinds of normative discourses discipline the production of coming out videos, as well as what kinds of productive resistances form in response to pressures to produce (and reproduce) particular coming out narratives through the affordances of "vlogging"" (25). Alexander and Losh highlight the importance of the Internet in the lives of LGBTQIA people and posit that "coming out videos will

continue to be a robust genre that invites production, elaboration, response, and remediation" (34). The authors find that whether a "coming out" video has been created by an amateur or for commercial use, the impact they make is stronger when considered as a collection of narratives rather than individually (Alexander and Losh 32, 34).

Of particular relevance to this dissertation, Alexander and Losh observe that "coming out videos are in their very nature rhetorical: they presume the presence of an addressee, they are oriented around a transformative speech act, they respond to discourses around community building, and they recognize enduring ambiguities in the construction of sexual orientation, sexuality, and gender" (34). This observation draws upon notions of speech genres and rhetorical genres set forth by Mikhail Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke, and Carolyn Miller, though the theorists are not cited and the concept of genre is not invoked. The characteristics of "coming out" narratives that Alexander and Losh identify as being rhetorical in nature are some of the very same characteristics that I posit make "coming out" narratives a rhetorical genre and that make "coming out" narratives valuable to people, groups, and movements beyond just LGBTQIA communities.

Interestingly, "coming out" has also served as a pedagogical tool. There are several excellent scholarly accounts of "coming out" as a pedagogical tool, including Rebecca Willman's approach, which she shares in her article, "Coming Out When You're Not Really In: Coming Out as a Teachable Moment." Willman interrogates

"coming out" from the perspective of an instructor "coming out" as a pedagogical

tool. She recounts how she learned the value of using "the element of surprise as a

'teachable moment' for "coming out" in the classroom." Using Jane Gallop's

"anecdotal theory" (cited in Willman 205), Willman lets her students "discover"

(205) her sexuality in an offhanded manner and uses the moment of "discovery"

(205) to challenge their assumptions about gender performance. Willman discusses

a strategy she has adopted for "coming out" in the classroom environment, though

to say "coming out" is really a misnomer in this instance because her approach is

that she was never "in" (206); therefore she is not "coming out." She suggests using

the moment of "discovery" (205) as a "teachable moment" (205) by having some

possible leading questions for a discussion about why the students assumed that she

was heterosexual. By doing this, Willman creates a different sort of discourse

regarding homosexuality and heteronormative ideas within the classroom.

Harriet Malinowitz also creates a different discourse and classroom

environment, but her approach differs from Willman's in a number of ways,

including the use of sexual orientation and gender identity as a course theme.

Malinowitz, from the outset of her course, asks that students "read and think about

lesbian and gay experience and … write critically about the politics and

representation of multiple sexualities" (148). The result is what Malinowitz calls a

"queercentric environment" (26) in which the intersections of identity and the

impact of "homophobia and the silencing of lesbian and gay discourse" (28) even

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"on students who do not define themselves as lesbian or gay" (28). Malinowitz observes that oppression and "the silencing of any social group creates cognitive gaps for the whole community" (28). "Coming out" narratives, in the environment that Malinowitz seeks to create, are likely to make their way into the classroom and can also serve as pedagogical tools within that classroom.

Another way "coming out" narratives can make their way into the classroom is via technology. Alexander and Banks claim that "both sexuality and technology studies are concerned with intertwined issues of space and identity" (Alexander & Banks 274), and as such are integral to the composition classroom. In their introduction to the "Sexualities, Technologies, and the Teaching of Writing" special issue of *Computers and Composition*, Alexander and Banks suggest that LGBT[QIA] websites could be explored in composition classes to ask complicated questions, such as, "what new illusions of acceptance or safety are these sites [LGBT/queer websites] creating for LGBT and nonLGBT visitors? Students may equate the number of LGBT sites with legitimacy, but is such a notion valid?" (278). These questions, according to Alexander and Banks could lead to discussions of "audience, purpose, and the persuasive value of extrinsic evidence" (278). Alexander and Banks go on to note that these questions "are even more relevant in computer-mediated classes because they demonstrate the rhetorical uses of technologies to effect social change, or at least the illusion of change" (278). Though Alexander and Banks see great potential for the inclusion of sexuality and queer studies in composition

classrooms, they emphasize that "to discuss or appropriate LGBT people, lives, texts, and issues as *only* oppressed is to do harm; these lives and texts are more complicated than that" (277). To present queer lives and texts in such a way would be to flatten them.

Though "coming out" narratives are valuable rhetorical and pedagogical tools, it is important to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of "coming out" narratives. Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, in their article, "Flattening Effects: Composition's Multicultural Imperative and the Problem of Narrative Coherence," discuss the risks associated with using "coming out" narratives in the composition classroom and the potential erasure of identity that can result from the presentation of these narratives as single-dimensional stories (431). Alexander and Rhodes highlight the importance of presenting the multifaceted and unknowable nature of identity. Presenting "coming out" narratives as multifaceted and multi-dimensional stories is one method of minimizing the potential flattening effects. Though there are potential pitfalls of "coming out" narratives, particularly when they enter the sphere of the classroom, there are benefits discussed later, and frankly, it is near impossible to leave identity at the door when one walks into a classroom or any other space.

GENRE

The etymology of the word *genre* is seemingly stable in that, over the course of time, *genre* has had two primary meanings that are interconnected. According to

the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), genre is a "kind; sort; style" or "a particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose." Despite this apparent stability that is gleaned from the *OED*, genre is nuanced and definitions and applications of genre vary.

Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, in their discussion of the term *genre,* point out that "the term *genre* itself remains fraught with confusion, competing with popular theories as text type and as an artificial system of classification" (3). Bawarshi and Reiff go on to identify differing perspectives on the function(s) of genres as the root of the confusion. They observe that discussions of genres vary based upon "whether genres merely sort and classify the experiences, events, and actions they represent…or whether genres reflect, help shape, and even generate what they represent in culturally defined ways" (Bawarshi and Reiff 3).

For the purpose of this research, genres are not simply classification systems, but they are "a powerful, ideologically active, and historically changing shaper of texts, meanings, and social actions" (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). The notion of genre as a regulative tool used to organize established activity (and texts) is restrictive and fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of genre with discourse and action (Bawarshi and Reiff 339). Genres shape and are shaped by discourse and ways of knowing.

At the most basic level, genres are categories that are formed based upon shared characteristics, conventions, or features. In short, genre is a classification

system that has many possible applications and limitations in these applications. Genre, as it functions in this research, will be approached from several standpoints/perspectives, specifically literary genres and rhetorical genres, with the emphasis being on rhetorical genres, though references to literary genres are in some ways foundational to the considerations being made.

RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENRE

Discussion of genre from a rhetorical perspective is not new. Aristotle established three audience-centered genres of rhetoric in *The "Art" of Rhetoric.* According to Aristotle, "The kinds of rhetoric are three in number, corresponding to the three kinds of hearers" (33). These three genres are deliberative, which pertains to politics and persuasion; epideictic, which pertains to ceremony; and forensic, which pertains to the law. Like Aristotle, Cicero approached genre from a rhetorical perspective, delineating two genres of rhetoric: demonstrative, which is akin to Aristotle's epideictic rhetoric, and deliberative, which, like Aristotle's deliberative rhetoric, pertains to politics and persuasion (Hart and Dillard; Too; Morrow).

Genre for Aristotle and Cicero was, in great part, a classification tool. Interestingly though, the classifications established by Aristotle and Cicero are associated with action. Take for instance Pericles'[8] funeral oration, which is an example of Aristotle's epideictic rhetoric. The speech was given after an early battle

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[8] Though it has been posited that the speech was actually written by Aspasia of Miletus (Ritchie & Ronald 1-2).

of the Peloponnesian war in order to honor those who had died in the midst of the battle, and aimed to comfort, to give hope, and to inspire Pericles' fellow Athenians to continue to defend democracy (Thucydides Book 2.34-46). The speech was generated out of action in order to inspire action.

Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad and his discussions of genre, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's discussions of speech genres, help to highlight the ways in which genre inspires action. Burke emphasizes situation (or context) and motivation in his Pentad, as well as in his discussions of genre (*Grammar* xv). As previously noted, the key features that can be used to test genre claims emphasize situation and motivation. Miller observes that "A classification of discourse will be rhetorically sound if it contributes to an understanding of how discourse works—that is, if it reflects the rhetorical experience of the people who create and interpret the discourse" ("Genre" 152). Burke's Pentad can function as a tool to highlight the ways in which "coming out" narratives function in society. For example, the Pentad can be used to underscore the recurrent nature of the situations, or scenes, that arise and elicit the act of "coming out," as well as to discern the motives for doing so. As "coming out" narratives are rhetorical, social, political, economic, and personal acts (one point that this research seeks to support and demonstrate), it is necessary to understand the contexts in which these narratives originate and the motivations of those telling the stories.

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The contexts in which "coming out" narratives originate and the motivations for the narratives are important, but equally important are the ways in which the narratives are constructed. In order to analyze the construction of "coming out" narratives, this research draws upon Bakhtin's speech genres. Primary speech genres, or simple genres, include "rejoinders of everyday dialogue or letters found in a novel" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 62). According to Bakhtin, secondary speech genres are "more complex...highly developed and organized cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical, and so on" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 62). Secondary speech genres "absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 62), thus the primary speech genres "lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the utterances of others" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 62). Expanding Bakhtin's notions of primary and secondary speech genres beyond the novel and considering them in terms of discourse (and in terms of "coming out" narratives), secondary speech genres are directed toward a particular audience and implicitly expect a responsive listener. The discourse that results from secondary speech genres not only is indicative of socio-cultural, socio-political, and ideological perspectives of those parties involved in the communication, but it could be argued that the discourse creates (at least the potential for) social action.

CAROLYN MILLER'S RHETORICAL GENRE STUDIES

Drawing upon previous research on genre in literary and rhetorical studies, Carolyn Miller wrote the article "Genre as Social Action." According to Carolyn Miller, there are "particular features" ("Genre" 163) that can be used to test genre claims. In other words, there are particular criteria that are required for "a collection of discourses…to constitute a genre" ("Genre" 163). Miller theorizes that in order for a discourse to qualify as a genre, it "acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose" ("Genre" 163), it "is interpretable by means of rules" ("Genre" 163), it "is a fusion of lower-level forms and characteristic substance" ("Genre" 163), it "serves as the substance of forms at higher levels" ("Genre" 163), and it "is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence" ("Genre" 163). In "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre," Miller elaborates and clarifies several points from "Genre as Social Action," and proposes "that we see genre as a specific, and important, *constituent* of society, a major aspect of its communicative structure, one of the structures of power that institutions wield" ("Rhetorical Community" 71). Miller's criteria are discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.

GOAL OF THIS DISSERTATION

I posit that "coming out" narratives should be viewed as a rhetorical genre because they meet the criteria set forth by Miller ("Genre" 163) and when viewed as

a rhetorical genre, "coming out" narratives provide insights into the socio-cultural and ideological situations or contexts in which they originated (Bawarshi and Reiff 27). In addition demonstrating that "coming out" narratives should be (re)visioned as a rhetorical genre, I seek to demonstrate *how* "coming out" narratives are rhetorical and highlight *why* this matters. These insights can prove useful in community organizing and education, as well as within many other institutions. Esther Saxey, in *Homoplot: The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity*, addresses gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) "coming out" stories as a genre; however, she does so in a manner that excludes the plethora of ways in which people come out, and does not examine "coming out" stories as a *rhetorical* genre, which is inherently different than a literary genre because of the rhetorical, social, political, economic, and personal actions associated with rhetorical genres as described by Carolyn Miller and others.[9] Considering "coming out" narratives only as a literary genre results in a limited analysis of the narratives and generally overlooks the ways the narratives function in society.

In addition to drawing upon scholarship in the area of Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) explored by Carolyn Miller, this research also draws upon Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad and his discussions of genre, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's discussions of speech genres. Though some theorists might argue that Miller,

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[9] To include Anis Bawarshi, Mary Jo Reiff, William Benoit, and others discussed throughout this dissertation.

Burke's, and Bakhtin's views of genre are incompatible, there is evident overlap in their notions of genre. For example, each theorist posits that in order for a type of action or category of utterance to be considered a genre the situation eliciting the action or utterance must be recurrent in society and of significance to the discourse being created (Miller, "Genre" 163; Burke, *Permanence and Change* 35; Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres" 60). Additionally, each theorist acknowledges the importance of the relationship between the speaker and the audience and the impact it has on the discourse that is created (Miller, "Genre" 163; Burke, *Permanence and Change* 35; Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres" 61).

Viewing "coming out" narratives as "a collection of discourses…[that] constitute a genre" (Miller, "Genre" 163) reveals facets of "coming out" narratives that are not otherwise evident. Viewing "coming out" narratives as a genre also emphasizes the rhetorical and social actions the narratives exert. A (re)visioning of "coming out" narratives is necessary because of the impact the taboo and shame associated with "coming out," something that is particularly applicable to those "coming out" as LGBTQIA. "Coming out" is a point at which the private sphere and the public sphere meet and it is within such liminal spaces that change is possible.

Interestingly, "coming out" narratives have yet to be discussed in terms of a rhetorical genre, nor have "coming out" narratives beyond sexual "coming out" stories been considered. Everybody "comes out" about something. Discussion of "coming out" narratives has also been restricted primarily to those sexual "coming

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out" narratives that mark the first point at which a person "comes out." People, however, have **many** "coming out" stories. Thus, I propose that we (re)vision "coming out" narratives of all varieties as a rhetorical genre. While these narratives vary in degree of risk associated with the type of "coming out," the revelations being made demonstrate the inability to know anyone completely, let alone know any group completely. To this end, in order to not flatten stories, like "coming out" stories, Alexander and Rhodes suggest complicating the texts we use in the composition classroom (442). Though many seem to be moving away from the use of "coming out" narratives in the classroom (Alexander and Rhodes; Saxey), I posit that by (re)visioning "coming out" narratives as a rhetorical genre that includes different types of "coming outs," as well as "coming out" narratives from all stages in life, it is possible to highlight and celebrate differences, as well as explore the narratives as sites of conflict and uncertainty and illustrate that one instance of "coming out" is not representative of an individual's or a group's experiences and the multiplicity of identities they claim.

I would like to suggest that one possible method of subverting the flattening of "coming out" stories is (re)visioning "coming out" narratives as a rhetorical genre. Genres are not simply classification systems, but are "a powerful, ideologically active, and historically changing shaper of texts, meanings, and social actions" (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). The notion of genre as a regulative tool used to organize established activity (and texts) is restrictive and fails to acknowledge the

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interconnectedness and interdependence of genre with discourse and action

(Bawarshi and Reiff 339). Genre shapes and is shaped by discourse and ways of

knowing. (Re)visioning "coming out" narratives as a rhetorical genre, a genre whose

function goes far beyond that of classification, highlights the interconnectedness

between marginalized groups, movements, and oppressions. "Coming out"

narratives help to increase visibility and presence those who are oft-silenced, thus

helping to overcome shame and break taboos. It is important to note that while

increasing visibility and presencing those who are often erased or rendered

invisible, it is vital that "coming out" narratives not be used for assimilative

purposes. Fictionalized "coming out" stories sometimes work toward this end, as do

literary genres, which align more with the genres that are used to merely classify.

"Coming out" narratives are and should be subversive. Viewing "coming out"

narratives as a rhetorical genre helps to highlight the subversive and transgressive

nature of the stories that are told. Wright claims that "'coming out'…becomes part of

the struggle against dominant/subordinate thinking" (193). "Coming out" highlights

difference and, in many instances, is a tool that is used to call for social change.

Though there are situations in which individuals who are "coming out" emphasize

that they are "just like everyone else," there is often an implicit understanding that

they are "just like everyone else, except a little different." (Re)visioning "coming out"

narratives as a rhetorical genre can potentially help us to harness the narratives'

subversive and transgressive powers so that they can be used to create change.

CHAPTER III

GENRE AND COMING OUT NARRATIVES

Despite the seeming stability of the definitions of genre, the definitions and

applications of the term are very nuanced. The nuances of definitions and

applications of the term *genre* become increasingly obvious as genres are taken out

of the realms of literature, music, movies, and the like and are applied to discourses

and other forms of communication. Bawarshi and Reiff trace the root of the

instability of the definitions and applications of genre to the ways in which genre is

approached (3). Are genres being viewed simply as classification methods or are

genres being seen as reflections of, shapers of, and reactions to culture, politics,

societal values, and ideologies? The latter perspective of genre gives way to the

discussion of rhetorical genres*.* The notion of genres as living, and thus active,

shapers of society, culture, history, ideology, politics, and the like are, according to

Bawarshi and Reiff, directly connected to "literacy acquisition" (3). "Literacy

acquisition" (Bawarshi and Reiff 3) in this particular context refers to reading,

writing, and other functional literacies, and I similarly, argue that genres as living

and active shapers of the world in which we live are imperative to the acquisition of

all literacies, specifically of interest in this research literacies associated with

identity, marginalization, and coming out. The perspective that genres are living and

active shapers of our world did not develop in a vacuum, but the concept is the result of hundreds (arguably thousands) of years of discourse. This chapter considers the history of rhetorical genres and begins to lay the groundwork for the analysis of coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre.

A search for the origins of rhetorical genres leads one to Aristotle's genres of rhetoric. Aristotle theorized the existence of three genres of speech or communication: epideictic, deliberative, and forensic/judicial. These genres of rhetoric functioned primarily as tools for classifying speeches and communication; however, it is evident that Aristotle homed in on the contextual aspects of speeches and communications that fall under the genres he set forth. For example, epideictic discourses are not only ceremonial, but in terms of rhetorical genre studies and social action, these discourses also serve the greater function of conveying stories/histories in order to shape perspectives on those stories/histories. Take, for instance, Pericles' "Funeral Oration." Pericles was tasked with justifying the deaths of Athenian citizens fighting in the Peloponnesian War and convincing Athenians that these deaths were not without purpose, and that the fight must go on in order for Athens to ascend to greatness. This speech, while it is considered an epideictic speech because it is a ceremonial eulogy, is also a rally cry in which Pericles asks Athenians to unite. Pericles' oration is remembered in the history of rhetoric and in the history of Athens as a beautifully written speech that is filled with impassioned appeals, and ultimately as a speech that is pivotal to the outcome of the

Peloponnesian War. The speech ultimately served as a shaper of history, politics, and culture.

Though Aristotelian genres do seem to account for context to an extent, the genres seem to primarily function taxonomically. The genres are vast categories that aid in organizing speeches and communications based upon vague characteristics that are seen as universal, much like the Neoclassical approaches to literary genre (Bawarshi and Reiff 14-17). While some consideration is given to context—whether a communication is political, legal, or ceremonial—the nuances of the contexts are overlooked.

There are many other instances of discourse that do not fit into these three genres of rhetoric. Cicero, like Aristotle, explored genres of rhetoric, but unlike Aristotle, he focused on two genres of rhetoric: demonstrative and deliberative. Demonstrative rhetoric is much like epideictic rhetoric, and includes ceremonial speeches, eulogies, and other such orations.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, genres are "a horizon of expectations brought to bear on a certain class of text times" ("Discourse" 428) and genre is "a concept larger than literary genre" ("Discourse" 428). He goes on to explain that "a genre both unifies and stratifies language" ("Discourse" 428). In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin describes two major genres, "artistic genres" (432) and "everyday genres" (424). Bakhtin defines "artistic genres" as "those that are reworked to aesthetic purpose and can be re-contextualized (a sonnet, a portrait, an art song)"

("Discourse" 424), whereas "an everyday genre is a mode of expression that involves conventions (a personal letter, table talk, a chat over the back fence, throwing rice at weddings)…and is rooted in specific contexts" ("Discourse" 424). These broad genres are comprised of smaller linguistic units that Bakhtin calls "utterances" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 60), which come together to create "*relatively stable types* of these utterances" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 60) called speech genres ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 60). Bakhtin highlights that "the wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 60). Though Bakhitin identifies two overarching genre classifications, the speech genres that fall within these classifications are endless. Bakhtin's concept of speech genres as genres that are dependent upon social and cultural context and social exigence are foundational to Carolyn Miller's discussion of genres as social actions (see Miller's "Genre as Social Action"). Miller, building upon Bakhtin's concept of "speech genres," identifies the reliance upon social and cultural context, social exigence, and reproducibility as key features of rhetorical genres and notes that in order to make a successful rhetorical genre claim, these features must be present ("Genre" 163).

Bakhtin's speech genres seem to be inherently connected to social action in part because of the interconnectedness between language and human activity that he visions in his discussions of utterances and speech genres. One example of this can be found in "The Problem of Speech Genres," in which Bakhtin notes that, at the time of his writing the essay, there is ongoing research about "the relation to the listener and [the listener's] influence on the utterance, the specific verbal finalization of the utterance" (61). By extension, speech genres are shaped by the speaker and addressee(s) or listener(s) as are the overarching "artistic" and "everyday" genres. The interconnected relationship between the speaker, addressee, and message can be seen in Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, an approach to analysis that was developed after Bakhtin had written about speech genres. In the Dramatistic Pentad, Burke presents five categories or elements, the act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, that are foundational to discourses and narratives (see fig. 1).

Burke's Dramatic Pentad
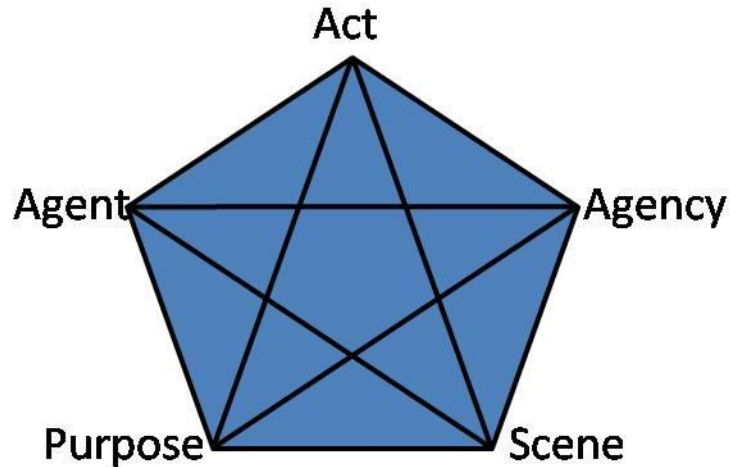
Fig. 1: A representation of Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Pentad created by Shaun

Treat. ("Mario Cuomo's 1984 DNC Keynote." *Dr. T's Virtual Rhetoric Lyceum*.

04 March 2009. Web. 26 February 2016).

The Pentad reflects the interconnectedness between the five elements. For example,

there are times in which one element of the Pentad is more important than the

others, so that element will play a larger role in the discourse and/or narrative. The

importance of each element is dependent, in many situations, upon context,

audience, and motivation. It is in this way that we can clearly see a relationship

between Bakhtin's discussion of the impact of the addressee (and, by extension,

context) on the utterances the speaker chooses and Burke's Dramatistic Pentad

(which will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter). The importance of

highlighting the connection between Bakhtin's and Burke's ideas is that they are

both homing in on social and rhetorical action, though they are both doing so

implicitly. Their implicit discussions of social and rhetorical action contribute to the list of reasons why Bakhtin and Burke are, arguably, foundational to the development of rhetorical genre studies beginning in the 1980s.

Though this claim may be argued, Bakhtin turned the focus of rhetorical genres to the nuanced technical facets of communication and to the impact that speech genres had on the writer/speaker, the audience, and others who encountered the speech/text, as well as the impact of the writer/speaker, the audience, and others who encountered the speech/text on the way the speech/text was composed, delivered, received, and reacted to. While utterances are imperative to the creation of speech genres, utterances are to some extent at the mercy of audience, motivation, and context. According to Bakhtin, "the fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 68). Even in situations where a speaker and listener are not in the same physical space, the listener is responsive "from the very beginning—sometimes literally from the speaker's first word" (Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres" 68). Bakhtin goes on to explain that "any understanding of a live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely" ("The Problem of Speech

Genres" 68). If the content of the speech is controversial, taboo, or potentially

volatile, the speaker is taking a risk in stringing together utterances.

The responsiveness of a listener can arguably be extended to readers of text-

based discourses, as well as audio and video recordings. Though the

listener/reader/viewer may not have the ability to respond with the same

immediacy and face-to-face, the listener/reader/viewer still has the potential to

respond to the speaker/writer. Take, for instance, YouTube videos. A YouTube user

records a video coming out about their undocumented status. The YouTube user

uploads the video and publishes it as public. The intended audience may or may not

see the video right away, but since the video is published publically, the audience is

far larger than the one the speaker may have had in mind. Eventually viewers begin

to leave comments on the video. The viewers are generally responding to the

information that the YouTube user who recorded the video disclosed. Some viewers

offer support, others offer encouragement, some compliment bravery, others

criticize, and some troll. Even if the YouTube user has disabled comments on the

video, viewers have the YouTube user's username. In some instances, viewers may

contact the person who uploaded the video directly.

Regardless of the medium used by a speaker/writer, the consumer is

responsive and, given the present-day levels of connectedness, the consumer can

oftentimes easily reach out and make contact with a speaker/writer. The

speech/text/video is not simply a monologue, but becomes dialogic because, as

Bakhtin notes, "the listener becomes the speaker" ("The Problem of Speech Genres"

68). Extending this idea to the discussion of coming out narratives, what the speaker

says and how they say it impacts, to an extent[10], the response of the listener.

Returning to the previous example of the YouTube user publishing a public video

coming out about their undocumented status, the listener/viewer can choose to

become the speaker by way of leaving a comment or otherwise contacting the

YouTube user who published the video. The listener/viewer can also respond by

talking to other people about the content of the video or by sharing the video via

social media platforms, which illustrates another facet of the social action

component. Bakhtin astutely observes that "sooner or later what is heard and

actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behavior of

the listener" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 69). This idea is one that seems to

underlie Miller's discussions of genre.

Discussion of the complexity of the relationships between a speaker/writer

and listener/reader/viewer are also seen in Burke's works, of particular interest in

this research is the Burkean Dramatisic Pentad. Why focus on the Dramatistic

Pentad? Though there are other discussions of genre and the interconnectedness

between the elements of texts, speeches, conversations, and the like, Burke's

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[10] It ought to be noted that in some instances, no matter what the speaker says or how they say it
they will be met with a particular reaction. This is particularly relevant when discussing coming out
narratives because coming out involves claiming a marginalized and/or oppressed identity publically
and taking risks while doing so, thus it would be naïve to believe that the person coming out has
absolute control over the responses of all listeners. Social action is, however, still created (though it
might not be positive).

Dramatistic Pentad is most appropriate because each of the rhetorical elements are evoked and as this particular study is exploring coming out narratives and making a rhetorical genre claim for these narratives, it is a natural fit. Coming out involves what Burke calls an act, a scene, an agent, agency, and a purpose (*Grammar* xv). Though there are instances in which one of the elements is more relevant to a coming out narrative or is more prominent in a coming out narrative, each of the elements can be found in each narrative.

Furthermore, one aim of the Dramatistic Pentad is to discern "what people are doing and why they are doing it" (Burke, *Grammar* xv). Though this research does not aim to establish motive, why someone says, writes, or does something can impact how it is received and the social action that results. Additionally, Burke notes that there are "certain formal interrelationships [that] prevail among these terms, by reason of their role as attributes of a common ground or substance. Their participation in a common ground makes for transformability" (*Grammar* xix). This notion of "transformability" (Burke, *Grammar* xix) is relevant to rhetorical genres, particularly as discussed by Bakhtin, Miller, Bazerman, and Bawarshi (to name only a few scholars that will be or have been cited).

In this instance, it seems best to lead with an example of Burke's Dramatistic Pentad at work (referencing the structure he outlines in the introduction (xx) of *A Grammar of Motives)* using a coming out narrative. Jessica Hyejin Lee (actor) along with Tania Chairez (co-agent) and several other undocumented students (co-

agents) come out as undocumented via videos posted to YouTube and social media,

specifically Facebook (agency), after being arrested for protesting in front of the

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Offices in Pennsylvania (act) in order

to increase the visibility of the undocumented community (purpose). As Burke notes

in *A Grammar of Motives*, there are multiple perspectives from which we can work to

determine the motivation for Lee coming out. The relationship between the

rhetorical elements in the context of coming out narratives can be useful in helping

to identify the ways that coming out narratives function in society, as well as to

potentially highlight recurrent situations and scenes. As coming out narratives are

rhetorical (this research seeks to demonstrate not only that they are rhetorical, but

how they are rhetorical and *why* it matters), it is necessary to understand the

contexts in which these narratives originate, the motivations of those telling the

stories, and the social and rhetorical action that is generated by the rhetorical genre.

Carolyn Miller, in "Genre as Social Action," draws upon Burke,[11] and other

genre theorists, approaching rhetorical genres as being informed by and as being a

means of understanding social, cultural, political, and ideological underpinnings of

communications, thus turning the focus away (in part) from formal and structural

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[11] I would argue that elements of Bakhtin's discussions of speech genres and utterances are also present in Miller's discussion of genres as social action, though I cannot say whether Miller had or had not accessed or had access to Bakhtin's works when she was researching and writing the article. It is very plausible that Miller had not read Bakhtin's works due to their just being translated and more widely published around the same time that Miller would have been researching and composing her article. Miller does cite Bakhtin in her later article "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre."

facets of communications, like those elements that were the focus of Bakhtin's studies and interrogations of rhetorical genre. This turn does not diminish the value of considering speech genres, utterances, and speech acts, but provides an additional perspective through which to view communications. Miller theorizes rhetorical genres as resulting in action in society. Communications are responses to specific circumstances, and the discourses that result from these circumstances shape future responses and circumstances. (Miller, "Genre" 152). The circumstances are informed by a speaker's/writer's or audience's schema, epistemology, gender identity, race, class, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and a plethora of other factors. Miller posits that "if genre represents action, it must involve situation and motive, because human action, whether symbolic or otherwise, is interpretable only against context of situation and through the attributing of motives" (Miller, "Genre" 152). This idea is rooted in the Burkean Dramatistic Pentad.

While motivation is central to Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, situation and context also play a role in establishing motive or a set of motives. The situation and context that are involved in potentially helping to establish motive are not, however, inherently rhetorical in nature. Lloyd Bitzer posits that "it is the situation that calls the discourse into existence" (2). In other words, a speech or text is the result of a particular set of circumstances. According to Bitzer, "to say rhetoric is situational means" (5) that a discourse is elicited by a particular situation (5), that "a speech is

given *rhetorical* significance by the situation" (his emphasis, 5), that "a rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse" (6), that there are many instances in which rhetorical situations do not elicit speech or discourse (6), that "a situation is rhetorical insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it" (6), and that "a situation controls the rhetorical response" (6). Bitzer goes on to define a rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (Bitzer 6). In short, if a situation elicits speech and the situation can be resolved by that speech or can result in action taken in the direction of resolving the situation, then it is a rhetorical situation (Bitzer 6). This definition of rhetorical situation is integral to Carolyn Miller's discussion of genres as social actions.

Miller also draws upon Bitzer's definition of exigence. Bitzer defines exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (6), but cautions that "an exigence that cannot be modified is not rhetorical" (6). In the case of coming out narratives, there is a particular rhetorical situation that exhibits social exigence and needs to be resolved. Referring back to the example of Jessica Hyejin Lee coming out as an undocumented immigrant through a video posted on YouTube, the exigence is

the mass deportations of undocumented immigrants and the need for immigration

reform in the United States. By coming out as undocumented, Lee helped to raise

awareness about and the visibility of the undocumented community in her city.

Though Lee was arrested and potentially faced deportation, she was not deported

because the community rallied around her. Lee's act created change, albeit minimal

change given how large-scale the issue is, but positive change in that it was in the

direction of a resolution of the exigence.

Though Carolyn Miller notes gaps in Bitzer's research, she builds upon

Burke's and Bitzer's[12] ideas and makes the claim "that a rhetorically sound

definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse

but on the action it is used to accomplish" ("Genre" 151). Miller theorizes that

rhetorical genres are ever-changing and that genres gain meaning from the social

situation and context in which they exist. The social situations and contexts in which

genres arise are recurrent and reproduced. Rhetorical genres are important in

society because "genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools

for exploring the achievements of speakers and writers" (Miller, "Genre" 165) and

because they can "serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions

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[12] Miller cites many other genre theorists throughout "Genre as Social Action," to include Walter
Fisher, James Kinneavy, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. It is not within the
scope (nor is it the aim) of this dissertation to provide a complete history of rhetorical genre theory
or rhetorical genre studies. There are a number of texts that provide thorough introductions to and
discussions of rhetorical genre theory and rhetorical genre studies, such as Aviva Freedman and
Peter Medway's *Genre and the New Rhetoric* and Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff's *Genre: An
Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy.* Discussions of the aforementioned (and
other) theorists and their theories will be couched in discussions of Carolyn Miller's exploration of
genre as social action and in the criteria for a rhetorical claims test that she sets forth.

of a community" (Miller, "Genre" 165). It is in part for these reasons that this dissertation draws upon Miller's work. Also contributing to the selection of Miller's work in rhetorical genre studies is the fact that Miller provides a practical tool for testing rhetorical genre claims.

According to Miller, there are particular criteria that are required for "a collection of discourses…to constitute a genre" (Miller, "Genre" 163). Miller theorizes that in order for a discourse to qualify as a genre, it "acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose" ("Genre" 163), it "is interpretable by means of rules" ("Genre" 163), it "is a fusion of lower-level forms and characteristic substance" ("Genre" 163), it "serves as the substance of forms at higher levels" ("Genre" 163), and it "is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence" ("Genre" 163). In "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre," Miller elaborates and clarifies several points from "Genre as Social Action," and proposes "that we see genre as a specific, and important, *constituent* of society, a major aspect of its communicative structure, one of the structures of power that institutions wield" (71). Given Miller's efforts to clarify and elaborate on the criteria initially set forth in "Genre as Social Action," these additional criteria will be included in the rhetorical claim made in this dissertation. According to Miller, the roles of the speaker and "addressee" must be reproducible ("Rhetorical Community" 71), the social exigences must be recurrent ("Rhetorical Community" 71), the genre must have "topical structures (or 'moves'

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and 'steps')" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71), and there are "ways of indexing

an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints or resources" (Miller,

"Rhetorical Community" 71).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

The narratives that are analyzed in this research have been found on
YouTube, blogs, websites, Twitter, and in other public forums. The reason for this
approach is multifold. First, in order to best ascertain whether or not coming out
narratives comprise a rhetorical genre, it seems necessary to consider narratives
that have been made public for any number of reasons. Had the coming out
narratives been composed by volunteer participants, the narratives might be
different because they are being composed for a specific audience (the researcher)
for a specific purpose. Second, rhetorical genres both inform and are informed by
society, context, and the telling of the stories within the particular genre. Thus, it
was imperative to select narratives that were public and were potentially exerting
social action. Third, if coming out narratives do in fact comprise a rhetorical genre,
then logically, they best function when they are more widely accessible. Narratives
composed by people for the purpose of a study are unlikely to ever be readily
accessible to others (unless the participant themselves made the narrative public).
Fourth, if coming out narratives comprise a rhetorical genre, then they will be
reproduced in form and structure and applied to other situations and
circumstances, fulfilling Miller's notion that "it is in action that we create the

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knowledge and capability necessary to reproduce structure" ("Rhetorical

Community" 72), which draws upon Burke's idea that "in acting together, [people]

have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them

consubstantial" (*Rhetoric* 21). Though people may be coming out about very

different things, in many cases, they are experiencing similar feelings of shame, fear,

anxiety, urgency, anticipation, excitement, relief, liberation, and freedom.

The narratives that are being analyzed were selected based upon a number

of criteria. The narratives had to be accessible using coming out in the Internet

search query. In some instances, narratives were found via Google using the query

"coming out" + narrative or "coming out" + story. In other instances, narratives were

found using the aforementioned queries in the YouTube search engine and the

Texas Woman's University Library "Universal Search" and "Catalog Search" engines.

The "Universal Search" engine can be used to look for books, journals, and other

such materials. The "Catalog Search" engine can be used to locate a broader range of

material, as well as to search electronic databases and library holdings. Other

narratives were emailed to me by family, friends, and colleagues. Before using these

particular narratives, however, I performed searches to ensure that the narratives

could be readily accessed using "coming out" in the search query.

The narratives sought were those in which a diverse group of

speakers/writers came out about any number of things to a diverse group of people.

Selected coming out narratives include those in which the speaker/writer comes out

about being LGBTQIA, having a mental illness, suffering from an invisible disease, being HIV+, being an undocumented immigrant, and being an atheist, to several of the categories included in this analysis. The risks associated with the various coming outs differ from narrative to narrative. In some instances, such as coming out in support of a political party/perspective, the risks are often low (though this depends upon circumstances), while in others, such as coming out as being an undocumented immigrant, the risks can be quite high, potentially resulting in deportation and separation from one's family and friends.

Interconnected with the rhetorical genre claim test is the identification of basic genre features of coming out narratives. One function of identifying basic genre features is that these "descriptions can be used as part of a rhetorical theory that describes rhetorical practices according to genre" (Benoit 77). A second function is that "rhetorical critics can apply what [they] have learned about a genre to help understand and evaluate other, as yet unexamined, instances of that genre" (Benoit 78). This research seeks to fulfill both of these functions in identifying what William Benoit calls "generic descriptions" (Benoit 78), or as referenced in this study, basic features or basic genre features. As Benoit notes, "the texts studied in a generic rhetorical criticism are a sample of a larger population of texts and that the texts studied in a generic rhetorical criticism can be generalized to other similar discourses" (78). coming out narratives, though they come in many forms and engage many topics, tend to rely upon the same basic features discussed below. This

reliance upon these basic features is in line with Miller's criteria that in order for a discourse to be a rhetorical genre, they must have similar "topical structures (or 'moves' and 'steps')" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71).

The identification of these basic features can be an arduous task given the need for familiarity with the genre and the various ways in which the genre the genre appears. In order to establish the basic features of coming out narratives, I read and viewed a great many coming out narratives of many different types. The types of narratives included sexual coming outs, mental illness coming outs, religious coming outs, document status coming outs, political coming outs, social coming outs (for example, coming out as vegan, coming out as feminist), and economic coming outs (coming out about socioeconomic status). I first read and viewed these coming out narratives attending to the stories being told. I then (re)read and (re)viewed these coming out narratives, making annotations about structure, diction, organization, and content. After (re)reading/(re)viewing and annotating the narratives, I sifted through the annotations and identified several basic features of the narratives.

The basic features of coming out narratives include the following: revelation of once private information, self-reflection, an acknowledgement of risks, and a call to action. In coming out narratives, the speaker/writer makes once private information public. Sometimes speakers/writers are doing this for the first time, other times speakers/writers are revealing this information to a new audience, in

response to a situation that has arisen and elicited coming out, and/or in order to help make it easier for others to come out. In coming out narratives the speaker/writer reflects upon their experiences from before they decided to come out and sometimes includes reflection upon experiences after coming out. It is within these reflections that speakers/writers typically convey emotions associated with their experiences prior to and after coming out. In coming out narratives the speaker/writer acknowledges the risks of coming out. The types of risks and degrees of risks may vary from narrative-to-narrative, but the risks tend to be significant, including the risk of being disowned by one's family, the risk of losing one's employment, the risk of losing one's housing, the risk of losing one's friends (and thus support system), and the risk of being deported, which is interconnected with each of the aforementioned risks. In coming out narratives the speaker/writer issues a call to action. The call to action is sometimes a call to society at-large, a call to a community at large, and/or a call to a particular group of people that the speaker/writer has in mind, but that call can be extended to society and the community.

Though coming out narratives created by members of majority and/or dominant groups may exhibit most of the basic features, such narratives do not include acknowledgements of real risks. For example, as protest against the highlighting of queer lives in queer coming out narratives, some people, including *Wheel of Fortune* host, Pat Sajak, have "come out" as straight. In Pat Sajak's "coming

out" tweet, he specifically evokes the risk of his employment, tweeting "Damn the career consequences! I'm hereby proclaiming my heterosexuality!" The risk he cites is a completely unrealistic risk as a heterosexual, cisgender, wealthy, white man who is more-or-less present in households across the United States. Pat Sajak or a representative of Pat Sajak removed the controversial tweet from Twitter after LGBTQIA members of the Twitterverse responded with anger. The tweet, however, was recorded in a number of news articles reporting on the story. One such article can be found here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/21/pat-sajak-comes-out_n_5186950.html. Sajak's tweet is only one very brief example of a larger trend. Simply searching for "coming out as straight" in Google (or one's preferred search engine) will populate many articles, blogs, and videos. Coming out stories created by members of majority and/or dominant groups are likely classified more accurately as satire than as coming out narratives due to the absence of realistic risks and a lack of social exigence. Furthermore, in many instances the information being "revealed" is not information that had been secret prior to the coming out.

A total of nine narratives were selected. Eight of the narratives selected were videos posted to YouTube because of the accessibility to the medium and the tendency for mass consumption of coming out narratives via this medium (Alexander and Losh). The coming out narratives found on YouTube include Jessica Hyejin Lee's "Coming Out for the Undocumented Community," Tania Chairez's "Coming Out for the Undocumented Community," Mark Antony's "Coming Out of the

Bipolar Closet," David Wright's "Coming Out as Bipolar," Natasha Tracy's "Mental

Illness Stigma: Coming Out with Bipolar Disorder," Jean Ann Van Krevelen's "Coming

Out as Chronically Ill," Louis "Kengi" Carr's "Coming Out HIV+," and Dirk Ellis' "My

Story 1-Coming Out as an Atheist." In addition, Kathleen Scott's narrative, "Coming

Out to My Children about My Alcoholism," which had been published on the *HuffPost*

Parents blog and had been shared elsewhere, potentially creating a broad

readership, was included in the analysis.

The method of analysis began with reading, watching, and listening to

coming out narratives. Though only nine narratives are individually analyzed in

depth for the purpose of this research, hundreds (I recorded 302 narratives before

losing track) of narratives were read,[13] viewed (at least 91 videos were viewed

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[13] Some of the websites and blogs I used were: HRC's "Explore: Coming Out" (http://www.hrc.org/explore/topic/coming-out), RUComingout.com (http://www.rucomingout.com/), "When I Came Out" (http://whenicameout.com/), the University of California at Irvine's LGBT Resource Center's "Coming Out Stories" (http://www.lgbtrc.uci.edu/resource-library/ComingOutStories.php), and "Empty Closets" (http://emptyclosets.com/home/pages/resources/coming-out-stories.php), to name a few. Some of the anthologies read were: Joan Larking's *A Woman Like That: Lesbian and Bisexual Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories*, Lisa Moore's *does your mama know?: an Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories*, Julia Penelope and Susan Wolfe's *The Original Coming Out Stories* (expanded edition), Juanita Ramos' *Companeras: Latina Lesbians: an Anthology,* Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan Wolfe's *The Coming Out Stories* (earliest edition), Kevin Jennings' *One Teacher in Ten: LGBT Educators Share Their Stories,* and Kevin Jennings' *Telling Takes Out of School: Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals Revisit Their School Days*. In addition to reading anthologies, I read novels and memoirs that have been lauded as coming out stories, some of these novels and memoirs are as follows: Jeannette Winterson's *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?,* Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Z Egloff's *Leap*, John Stuart Wynne's *The Red Shoes*, and others. In addition to anthologies, novels, and memoirs that focused primarily on acts of "coming out," I also read popular fiction texts in which characters "come out." Two such authors whose texts I read through this lens were Patricia Cornwell (the character Lucy Farinelli in the Scarpetta Series "comes out" a number of times and the reader, on some of these occasions learns about her experiences coming out via free indirect discourse, which provides an interesting look at coming out through the eyes of supportive others), and Ellen Hart

when logged into one of my YouTube accounts),[14] and heard in order to get a sense

of what the basic features of coming out narratives are and whether coming out

narratives could even possibly constitute a rhetorical genre. The scope of this

project initially was only looking at queer coming out narratives as a rhetorical

genre, but after encountering other types of coming out narratives, I recognized that

they too functioned in similar ways and when considered alongside queer coming

out narratives, pass Carolyn Miller's rhetorical genre claim test. In fact, since other

types of coming out narratives functioned in a similar way as queer coming out

narratives, it strengthens the argument that coming out narratives ought to be

(re)visioned as a rhetorical genre. (Re)visoning coming out narratives as "a

collection of discourses…[that] constitute a genre" (Miller, "Genre" 163) can reveal

facets of coming out narratives that are not otherwise evident and on a larger scale,

acknowledges the power that coming out narratives potentially wield in society (see

fig. 2).

(Jane Lawless "comes out" a number of times throughout the series and each instance varies a bit because of circumstances and exigencies).

[14] I have viewed more coming out videos than I can track. At the onset of this project I had been working to keep a record, but the further I delved into the videos, the more mediums I used to view the videos, to include a tablet device, my cellular phone, and my computer, and the more varied the spaces were in which I watched (and sometimes listened to) the videos, to include watching coming out videos while in waiting rooms, in lines, during breakfast and lunch breaks, sometimes listening to narratives while working out, in a vehicles on road trips, and, on a few occasions, when camping, the harder it was to keep track of how many and which coming out videos I had watched. Sifting through the histories of the various YouTube accounts that I have, I was able to definitively identify at least 91 coming out videos viewed when logged into my YouTube accounts.

Fig. 2. I created this figure in order to illustrate the interconnectedness between coming out narratives (stories), individuals, communities, cultures, and societies, as well as the recursive nature of coming out and the action that it creates. When someone comes out they create social action in the world around them, thus potentially shaping future instances in which they come out as well as shaping future coming outs by others. The use of coming out by marginalized and/or oppressed communities beyond the queer community exemplifies the way future coming outs are shaped by the effectiveness of previous coming outs.

Coming out is moving toward resolving recurring rhetorical situations, be it working

toward eliminating transphobia, homophobia, and/or racism; creating immigration

reform; or breaking the shame and taboo associated with mental illnesses and medical conditions.

Coming out is a means through which the private sphere and the public sphere meet and it is within such liminal spaces that change is possible. (Re)visioning coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre, a genre whose function goes far beyond that of classification, highlights the interconnectedness between marginalized groups, movements, and oppressions. Coming out narratives help to increase visibility and presence those who are oft-silenced, thus helping to overcome shame and break taboos. It is important to note that while increasing visibility and presencing those who are often erased or rendered invisible, it is vital that coming out narratives not be used for assimilative purposes. Coming out narratives are and should be subversive. Viewing coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre helps to highlight the subversive and transgressive nature of the stories that are told. According to Janet Wright, "coming out…becomes part of the struggle against dominant/subordinate thinking" (193).

As such, I use Carolyn Miller's criteria for a rhetorical claim test set forth in "Genre as Social Action," as well as the four criteria she suggested considering in her follow-up a decade later, "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Community." In "Genre as Social Action," Miller posits five features that are necessary for "a collection of discourses" (152) to constitute a rhetorical genre:

1) the genre "acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose" (Miller, "Genre" 163)

2) the "genre is interpretable by a means of rules" (Miller, "Genre" 163)

3) the "genre is distinct from form" (Miller, "Genre" 163)

4) the "genre serves as the substance of forms at higher levels" (Miller, "Genre" 163)

5) the "genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence" (Miller, "Genre" 163).

In a later article, in which Miller revisits her 1984 "Genre as Social Action," Miller elaborates on specific facets of the five features, specifically on what she means by "cultural artefact" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 69), which is connected to the fourth genre feature set forth in "Genre as Social Action," and seeks to clarify the relationship between social action and social structure, particularly as they relate to genre and community (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 67). Miller's clarifications and elaborations, in a way, expanded the features of a rhetorical genre beyond the five that were posited in "Genre as Social Action." These additional features are:

1) "reproducible speaker and addressee roles" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71)

2) "social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigences" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71)

3) "topical structures (or 'moves' and 'steps')" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71)

4) "ways of indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints or resources" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71).

Thus, the rhetorical claims test used in this research includes nine features of a rhetorical genre. Rather than focusing only on the original five features Miller presented in "Genre as Social Action," I found it important to include the additional features that Miller highlighted in "Rhetorical Community" because these additional features potentially provide insights into the social action facets of rhetorical genre, which was what Miller emphasizes is social action and rhetorical genres as a "cultural artefact" (Miller, "Genre" 163).

It is also important to note that in "Genre as Social Action," Miller outlines three ways discourses may "fail to constitute a genre" (Miller, "Genre" 163). The three ways that a discourse does not meet the criteria of a genre, according to Miller, are: a lack of "significant substantive or formal similarities" ("Genre" 163), a lack of adequate evaluation of rhetorical situations, and/or the lack of a "pragmatic component" ("Genre" 163) or a lack of a way to understand "the genre as social action" ("Genre" 163).

Though some may argue that there are other tools that could be used to test a rhetorical genre claim, Carolyn Miller's research in the area is well-respected and oft-cited in the field. After much research and inquiry, I was unable to find a tool that

could "provide guidance in the evaluation of genre claims" (Miller, "Genre" 163) in the way that Miller's does. In order to strengthen the claims test, I have included Miller's additional criteria that she set forth a decade after having written "Genre as Social Action" in the analyses and discussion. One might question the decision not to use Kenneth Burke's or Mikhail Bakhtin's theories as the foundations of such an inquiry. While some points that could be made might be valid, Miller's theory brings together very strong elements of their theories and the theories of other rhetorical genre theorists. Miller also fills gaps that had been present in some of those very same theories.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Though no two coming out stories are the same, not even in organization,

there are basic features of coming out narratives that are common across most

narratives; there are "topical structure (or 'moves' and 'steps')" (Miller, "Rhetorical

Community" 71) that are present in the narratives. The basic features of coming out

narratives include the following: revelation of once private information, self-

reflection, an acknowledgement of risks, and a call to action. Coming out narratives

involve a disclosure of private information. In some instances the person who is

coming out might already be out to some people, but not to others. Coming out

narratives also involve elements of self-reflection. It is typically in the reflection of

one's experiences before and after coming out that individuals highlight issues of

secrecy, lying by omission, and deception in order to continue "passing."[15] The

reflection also typically involves feelings, experiences, and events. Some common

feelings that are explored are fear, shame, anxiety, loss, guilt, being different,

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[15] "Passing" in this context refers to the ability to be viewed as a member of another identity group, oftentimes a majority and/or dominant identity. The term "passing" is frequently used in discussions of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. One well-known discussion of "passing" can be found in Nella Larsen's *Passing.* A second well-known discussion of "passing" can be found in Langston Hughes' "Passing," which was printed in the collection *The Ways of White Folks*. The idea is slowly becoming a part of public consciousness and can at times be seen in situations in which "passing" is not laden with nuance. For example, one might say that they could pass as a fan of baseball, acknowledging that they know enough to appear to be a fan, but are in fact not.

isolation, and anger. Oftentimes speakers in coming out narratives express feelings

of relief, liberation, freedom, the lifting of a weight, and the like after they have come

out. Coming out narratives also involve an acknowledgement of risks associated

with coming out. Depending upon what someone is coming out about, these risks

vary, but can include the potential loss of employment, housing, family, support

systems, and, in some instances, people risk their lives.[16] Lastly, coming out

narratives involve a call to action. In some coming out narratives the speaker asks

for tolerance and/or acceptance, while in other coming out narratives the speaker

calls others to action. Calls to action can be implicit, or explicit. Calls to action can be

calls to oneself, calls to one's family, calls to one's community, calls to one's

government, or calls to one's society.

What follows are discussions and analyses of coming out narratives. These

narratives will be discussed and analyzed using the basic features that have been

highlighted here and using Miller's rhetorical claims criteria.

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[16] Over the course of 2015, more than 20 transgender women of color were brutally murdered
(Michaels). According to the *Wikipedia* "List of Unlawfully Killed Transgender People," there were at
least 30 murders of transgender people in 2015 (see Appendix B for the 2015 entries in the Wiki).
This count only includes women whose murders were reported by the media. This count does not
include the many transgender folks who were misgendered, deadnamed, or whose murders were not
associated with "hate." Countless more transgender folks committed suicide, many of whom were
youths and people of color. Being out can be life-threatening. In some instances being "out" makes
people targets for fatal violence. In other instances being out makes people targets of bullying,
harassment, and assault, which in some cases pushes some people to feel that suicide is the only way
out.

JESSICA HYEJIN LEE'S "COMING OUT FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY"

Jessica Hyejin Lee, in her YouTube video "Coming Out for the Undocumented Community," leads with the statement that "if you're watching this, I've been arrested" (Lee). Lee goes on to explain that she attends Bryn Mawr College and "risked arrest and deportation" (Lee) because she came out as an undocumented person at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in Pennsylvania. She came out in order to "empower" (Lee) other undocumented people and in solidarity with "another undocumented American who has been kept in detention for over seven months" (Lee). Lee goes on to discuss how growing up undocumented impacted her life. She cites the isolation and shame experienced when she "could never explain why [she] couldn't drive" and "couldn't explain why [she] didn't get into colleges that people thought [she] would get in for sure" (Lee).

Lee's coming out narrative meets one of Miller's rhetorical genre features in that it "acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which the situation arose" (Miller, "Genre" 163). Undocumented communities in the United States are in a precarious position because while they may be able to work, pay taxes, and go to attend school EC-12, they are deprived access to many institutions and protections. By coming out as an undocumented immigrant, Lee is addressing the need for immigration reform in the United States, and thus her coming out story is also "a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence"

(Miller, "Genre" 163) and addresses "recurrent social needs and exigences" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71).

Giving consideration to the features of Lee's coming out narrative, each of the basic features typically found in coming out stories are incorporated. Lee first engages her audience by revealing that she has been arrested for and "risked...deportation" (Lee) in order to increase the visibility of and solidarity with undocumented immigrants. She then goes on to reflect upon her experiences as an undocumented person, recounting feelings of isolation, feelings of shame, and feelings of fear. Within the recounting of several experiences, Lee touches upon her inability to reveal her status to her peers, thus leaving her feeling isolated. The issue of isolation comes up several times in her story. Lee says that "in the Asian American community people tend to keep silent about undocumented status" (Lee) and that she "went through high school thinking that [she] was the only undocumented person" (Lee). She later notes that one of her classmates at Bryn Mawr "had not said the word 'undocumented' until she came out" (Lee) to Lee. In the conclusion of her story, Lee emphasizes that her coming out is not just for her own personal liberation, but it is an act of solidarity with other undocumented folks and implicitly calls for others to do the same.

Lee's coming out is motivated by the need to increase the visibility of the undocumented community and the struggles they face, as well as to ultimately drive immigration reform. These motivations are demonstrated in the calls to action that

can be found in both the introduction and conclusion of Lee's story, as well as in her call to "fight for civil rights and human rights" (Lee). Further evidence of Lee's motivation can be found in the visual imagery of her narrative. Lee is filmed standing against a white wall and she is wearing a black t-shirt that reads "Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic." The video itself was posted by an account with the username "DreamActivist Pennsylvania." The username references the Dream Act, an act that would help undocumented youths gain access to higher education. Below Lee's video, there is a brief blurb about the action that Jessica Hyejin Lee and Tania Chairez took. This blurb explicitly states that both Lee and Chairez "acted to confront the unjust immigration system, reclaim their human rights, and call attention to the deportations that are tearing apart their communities" ("Lee"). The fact that this coming out story was told via a YouTube video and was very intentionally staged, scripted, and edited also speaks to Lee's motivation. She clearly understood the risk she was taking when she walked into the Immigration and Customs Enforcement office and came out as undocumented.

TANIA CHAIREZ'S "COMING OUT FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY"

Like Jessica Hyejin Lee, Tania Chairez "came out" as undocumented in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in Pennsylvania (Chairez). Also like Lee, Chairez was arrested and her coming out story was posted to YouTube by the "DreamActivist Pennsylvania" account. Chairez's story, though it opens with the statement that "if you're watching this, I have been arrested" (Chairez), differs from

Lee's in terms of organization. Chairez leads with a reflection on her life, noting that

her "parents decided that [she] would have better opportunities in the United

States" (Chairez). For much of her life, she "thought [she] was American. [She]

thought [she] was the same as anybody else" (Chairez). As she got older she noted

the racial discrimination that her family experienced. She thought that she "couldn't

go to college" (Chairez) because of her undocumented status and became frustrated

and confused as to why her family had moved to the United States. Chairez goes on

to explain that she is coming out as undocumented because she wants

"undocumented youth" (Chairez) to "feel empowered" (Chairez) and hopes that

"youth in Philadelphia will see that it's better to be publically undocumented where

you have the support group, where people can stand up for each other, and…not sit

at home being scared of everything" (Chairez). Her motivations are made very clear

in her coming out narrative; she is calling for undocumented people to come out

about their status and to act in solidarity and support one another. As was the case

in Lee's coming out narrative, Chairez's story is told via a YouTube video posted by

the "DreamActivist Pennsylvania" account. Chairez is standing against a backdrop

that reads "Dream Activist" and is wearing a black t-shirt that reads "I AM

UN•DOC•U•MENT•ED" with a white long-sleeved shirt under it. The video was very

intentionally staged, scripted, and edited.

The comments found on both Jessica Hyejin Lee's and Tania Chairez's coming

out stories are very telling of the circumstances in which Lee and Chairez live. One

commenter with the username "robin ked" writes in the comments below Chairez's video,

> HaHaHa....check out the comments when this article tried to "garner"
> sympathy for ILLEGALS....again, heeheehahaha...keep talkin chickie cuz
> EVERY time an ILLEGAL begins to whine, complain & kick their feet just like
> a 2yr old BRAT, More American's Resolve to NEVER, EVER, EVER let the
> SCREAM Act or ANY Amnesty pass, cuz the way we look at it...Why should
> We Reward a LAWBREAKER for ILLEGAL activities....So Please keep it up,
> YOU ILLEGALS Please keep "workin it".... !!!!!!!!!

Though there are commenters who speak out in solidary with Chairez and Lee, there are many more who throw around words like "illegal," used as a slur, and draw upon the tried-and-true comments like, "what about American youths who *belong* here?" and "people here illegally are taking opportunities away from people who were born here."

Coming out as undocumented has become a powerful tool in the pursuit of immigration reform. At the onset of this research, a search in Google with the query "coming out" + "undocumented" would yield some results, but over the course of the past year (2015), the number of articles about coming out as undocumented and the number of blog posts and videos of individuals coming out as undocumented has increased a great deal. One reason for this increase is that coming out as undocumented has come to the forefront of public consciousness. Though folks like

Angy Rivera came out as undocumented a half a decade ago (Rivera), within the last two years activists, advocacy groups, and celebrities alike have foregrounded such coming out narratives.

MARK ANTHONY'S "COMING OUT OF THE BIPOLAR CLOSET"

Like those narratives in which speakers/writers come out as undocumented, there has been an increased presence of individuals coming out with mental illnesses. One such example is a narrative by Mark Anthony. Anthony established an online community called "Break the Grip of Shame" that seeks to do just that ("Break the Grip of Shame") by fighting "against the stigma of mental illness" ("Break the Grip of Shame"). YouTube user "Break the Grip of Shame" shared a video in which Mark comes out as bipolar. Mark opens with the comment that "this [coming out as bipolar] is probably the most difficult thing I have done in my life." He recounts an incident in which an acquaintance posted on Facebook that Mark was bipolar. Mark says that the comments that followed this revelation of information made him "feel like [he] was a monster, which caused even more shame and guilt." He goes on to explain that he has spent much of his life "trying to hide [his] illness" because "people don't understand." When he tries to explain, people tell him "'just think positive,' 'it's gonna be alright,' 'it's all in your head.'" Mark makes a series of suggestions for people whose friends or family members live with bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses, appealing to them to "be there" and to "reach out to check on us."

Before closing his story, Mark explains that he is coming out as bipolar "in the hope that" others will not feel alone and so that others know that "together we can overcome this thing." Mark closes the video with a reading of a poem that he wrote on a day when he was struggling a great deal, titled "You Left Me to Die." The poem is filled with anguish, guilt, shame, anger, and references to self-medication, self-harm, and a trip to a psychiatric unit. The poem ends with a thankfulness for making it through that time and the desire "to reach out to others, and to let you know that we're not alone." Though presented as something somewhat separate from the coming out story that Mark is telling, the poem itself is also a coming out, as the basic features of a coming out narrative are present. In both his video and his poem, Mark makes it known that he is bipolar and goes on to explain what being bipolar has meant in his life. Though the viewer is uncertain when Mark was diagnosed, it is evident that Mark has struggled a great deal with the disorder and has fought to keep it a secret.

Mark's presentation of his story seems indicative of someone who had put some thought into how to go about coming out, but was more concerned with the coming out narrative and less concerned with the surroundings in which the coming out narrative was recorded. This apparent lack of concern is evident in the lack of staging of the video. Mark is sitting on what appears to be a grey couch. Based upon the reflection in his glasses, he appears to be reading while recording using the computer's webcam (at points in the video, the viewer can see that the reflection of

the computer screen in his glasses has the silhouette of a person, presumably Mark).

The presence of an odd shadow in the background, likely one cast by a tall lamp,

further contributes to the notion that this video was filmed without a great deal of

attention to the setting. The coming out narrative itself, unlike the setting in which it

was told, seemed to be scripted. Despite being "one of the most difficult things [he

has] done in [his] life," Mark's telling of the story is not hurried or riddled with

emotion. Though it is evident that Mark is experiencing emotional reactions while

telling his story, these reactions are primarily conveyed via emphases on words, for

example, when he says "the pain of living with this illness *itself* is the most

excruciating pain" (written emphasis mine). Another instance where Mark's

emotional reaction is evident is in his recounting that people tell him to "just think

positive" and "it's gonna be alright" and "it's all in your head." There's a touch of

disdain and frustration in his voice when he reflects upon being told these things.

His repetition of the words "a couple of people" when he notes that there were "a

couple of people" who were "a great support to [him]" is also illustrative of his

frustration and anger with the lack of understanding and empathy of those around

him. Though Mark's coming out narrative is rushed and filled with emotion, it is at

times disorganized. The points at which it seems most disorganized are those at

which emotion seems to run most high.

     In the video "Coming Out of the Bipolar Closet," Mark is revealing his private

struggle with bipolar disorder to the public in order to help break the stigma

associated with mental illness. Thus, with regard to the genre claim test, the exigence in this situation is the stigma associated with mental illness. Mark not only seeks to free himself of his secret and invisible struggle with bipolar disorder, but he "hope[s] that someone else out there [will] know that we are not alone." He aims to build a community and support network for people living with mental illness, which is further evidenced by the creation of the Facebook Community "Breaking the Grip of Shame," which has almost 1000 followers as of August of 2015. Unfortunately, these social circumstances in which individuals who live with mental illness are stigmatized are "recurrent" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71). The open-ended rules by which we may (or may not) act or react to situations in which we claim or are perceived to hold a stigmatized identity are "interpretable" (Miller, "Genre" 163), and the roles of the "speaker and addressee" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) are "reproducible" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71).

Likewise supporting the genre claim, Mark, in his coming out narrative, calls upon a series of "topical structures" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) in the telling of his story. At the onset of his coming out narrative, Mark reflects upon the fact that coming out is "one of the most difficult things [he has] done in [his] life." He goes on to reveal that he has been "living with mental illness" and notes that prior to this coming out, he was outed as being bipolar by an acquaintance on Facebook. This revelation highlights the fact that individuals come out, even about the same things, repeatedly over the course of their lives and though the act of outing can

produce irreparable results, individuals still must come out time and time again.

Mark explains that he has lived with "the pain of the guilt and the shame" of being

bipolar, which is a frequent characteristic of coming out narratives and emphasizes

the difficulty of living with a stigmatized identity or multiple stigmatized identities.

He also expresses feelings of anger and of being out of control, isolated, abandoned,

and unheard. Again, these feelings frequently appear in coming out narratives.

Though he left his church and felt alone, Mark notes that he has come to understand

that "bipolar is not who [he is]" and is empowered by this understanding. He then

implicitly calls others to action—presumably by coming out with mental illness and

being visible—and notes that "together we can overcome this thing." Mark's coming

out narrative also has an underlying call for acceptance and patience from those

around him and for those who know others who live with mental illness. This call

for acceptance and patience is most evident when Mark addresses "family

member[s]" or "friend[s] of someone who suffers from mental illness" and provides

several suggestions for being supportive. Though more subtle, this call for

acceptance and patience is also present in Mark's recounting of his experiences with

being outed on Facebook, with people dismissing his illness, and with his leaving the

church because of the parishioners "turn[ing] their backs on [him]."

DAVID WRIGHT'S "COMING OUT AS BIPOLAR"

Similarly, David Wright, a YouTuber and blogger, published his video

"Coming Out as Bipolar" on YouTube, as well as on his blog, *Poetry the Art and Soul*

of Therapy. The video begins with Wright, wearing a black and white baseball tee with text (that is not completely visible) and steampunk goggles on his forehead, sitting in front of a camera explaining that the video is being published for his blog and that the focus of the video is mental illness. He is sitting in what appears to be a bedroom that has a number of posters, including a *Doctor Who* poster, a stocking and a clock hanging on the wall, and storage organizers with clothes piled on top. Though Wright seems to have planned the coming out narrative, the background does not appear staged. Wright is likely in his bedroom recording the video. This setting leads one to ask *why* he has chosen to come out at this particular moment.

At the onset of the video, Wright notes the social stigma associated with mental illnesses. Wright stammers, "I'm, I am, I'm, I, I'm…" and gets choked up and begins crying. A purple dialogue box pops up on the left side of the screen that says "I have bipolar disorder," and at this point in the video Wright says, "I'm that" and points to the general area where the dialogue box has appeared, indicating that he had planned to edit the text box into the video. There are several instances at this point in the video where it is evident that the video had been edited. Wright explains that he doesn't "know why that is so much harder to admit than everything else [he] has been through, everything else that [he] is." He speculates that perhaps it is "because it's something [he] can't really control, that [he] didn't choose in any way" (Wright, "Coming Out"). Wright elaborates that when someone is mentally ill they need support from those around them, but that support is not always there. It is at

this point that Wright begins crying more and pulls a pair of steampunk goggles

over his eyes so he can "hide behind [them] so you [the viewer] can't see [him] cry."

Wright goes on to explain that asking for help or telling others about being bipolar is

risky because he and others who are also bipolar "don't want people to love [them]

less, abandon [them], or just make [them] feel worse about [themselves] than [they]

already do." At about 5:35 into the video, Wright notes that he is going to "keep

talking about these issues because they need to be talked about, if [he is] not going

to say something, who will?" The video cuts at this point and then begins again, this

time with Wright wearing a black t-shirt with a black and white long sleeve shirt

under it. Wright draws attention to the fact that this portion of the video is being

recorded on a different day. This is the point at which Wright issues a call to action.

He notes that coming out is risky and urges viewers to come out when they are

ready, not to feel pushed. Wright also implicitly calls for more support from society

for people with mental illnesses. Wright is aware that by coming out he is

potentially increasing the visibility of mental illness, in this case, bipolar disorder,

and that he is potentially creating positive action in the community around him,

whether it be by being a voice of support and encouragement, or by convincing

someone to be supportive of a person with mental illness.

Wright's coming out narrative very clearly includes all of the basic features,

or "moves" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71), that appear in coming out

narratives. In his narrative, Wright addresses the recurrent social situations that

have elicited his coming out and acknowledges the potential for his coming out to help resolve or to help move toward a resolution of the exigency. The roles of "speaker and addressee" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) are reproducible. The reproducibility of the roles is emphasized by the discussions that appear both in Mark Anthony's and David Wright's coming out narratives. These roles are reproducible within and across coming out narratives.

NATASHA TRACY'S "MENTAL ILLNESS STIGMA: COMING OUT WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER"

As a part of a campaign by Healthy Place, Natasha Tracy, in her video "Mental Illness Stigma: Coming Out with Bipolar Disorder" highlights some of the detriments and benefits of coming out with bipolar disorder. Tracy notes that when one comes out with bipolar disorder online

> hundreds, or thousands, or even millions of people suddenly know you that have bipolar disorder and that means that they can judge you for it, that means that the stigma that everyone of us suffer with a mental illness can be amplified because of all of the people who now know that you have bipolar disorder.

Though she leads with this caveat, Tracy points out that

> there are some great positives where you can really positively affect other people's lives. You can affect someone else's life as to how they feel about themselves. You can affect as to whether they get treatment. You can affect as

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to how they feel about their disease. You can help eradicate the stigma that

people with a mental illness face. Those are huge and powerful gifts and

should not be understated.

The potential positive impacts that Tracy outlines are evidence of the social action

created by coming out narratives. Tracy explains that though there are many

amazing potential positive impacts that can result from coming out, there are also

major risks (she labels these "negatives"). She points out that coming out with a

mental illness can result in negative situations in one's "work life" (Tracy), in one's

"personal life" (Tracy) and in one's "online life" (Tracy). Tracy goes on to warn that

the negatives of coming out with a mental illness can sometimes outweigh the

positives, especially if the negatives are impacting one's own mental health. Though

Tracy is not just coming out in this particular video, she exhibits an inherent

awareness of the basic features of coming out narratives.

JEAN ANN VAN KREVELEN'S "COMING OUT AS CHRONICALLY ILL"

The potential positive and negative outcomes of coming out that Tracy

highlights are broadly applicable to coming out narratives. The benefits and

detriments she notes are also present for individual's coming out with an invisible

illness. YouTube user, HealthAdjacent, or Jean Ann Van Krevelen,[17] in her video

"Coming Out as Chronically Ill," comes out as having Fibromyalgia. Van Krevelen is

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[17] Internet research revealed that Health Adjacent's name is Jean Ann Van Krevelen. This was
confirmed via her website, http://edgyentrepreneur.typepad.com/about.html.

sitting on a bed,[18] propped up against a pillow that is grey with white and black borders. Though the visual imagery does not seem to indicate staging, Van Krevelen's attire, hair, and make-up potentially suggest otherwise. She is wearing a red collared shirt over a white shirt. Her make-up is well-applied, emphasizing her eyes (by way of eyeliner, mascara, eyeshadow, and likely brow pencil) and lips. Given the nature of her coming out, it is highly-likely that Van Krevelen's coming out was planned. Her appearance and the content of her coming out narrative and the call for action that she issues all speak to her coming out being very intentional.

At the beginning of her coming out narrative published on YouTube, Van Krevelen says that coming out as being chronically ill has been a struggle and that she has "for the most part, kept it [her chronic illness] to [herself]." She says that this is the case because she

> has a fear that people will judge [her] as less competent, less capable because [she] has a chronic illness. And [she doesn't] think that fear is unfounded. [She doesn't] think that fear is unfounded at all and [she] spent six years finding work-arounds so [she] could live in an able-bodied world without them knowing that [she], you know, couldn't get her body to work half of the time (Van Krevelen).

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[18] HealthAdjacent confirms that she is sitting on a bed advocating for herself around 7:11 in the video.

Van Krevelen goes on to explain that when she was first diagnosed with Fibromyalgia and she told people about her illness, "people judged her" (Van Krevelen) and "a lot of people thought that [she] was faking it" (Van Krevelen). Van Krevelen notes that "as [she] has gotten it older it has been, better, better received" (Van Krevelen). She goes on to explain that being chronically ill led to her having to change her lifestyle and career, and resulted in the loss of a significant relationship. She was once "running a, uh, good-sized non-profit" (Van Krevelen) and had a "type-A personality, like crazy driven" (Van Krevelen). Van Krevelen says emphatically, "That came to a halt. And I had no intention of changing my life in that way. None. And I mourned for years for the loss of that career and, and the loss of other things too, including a relationship." She discusses the fear of judgement and loss that she has and still experiences, and acknowledges the risks she takes by coming out as being chronically ill and having fibromyalgia.

Van Krevelen goes on to issue a series of calls to action. She first calls people to "talk about it" (Van Krevelen) even though it is "hard to talk about because you don't want people to see you as less than" (Van Krevelen). She notes the fact that there are so many other things that are talked about, and asks, "why should this be any different?" (Van Krevelen). Van Krevelen then points out that fibromyalgia "primarily affect[s] women" (Van Krevelen) and suggests that this fact might contribute to the lack of acceptance of the illness, even within the medical community (Van Krevelen). She then calls people to "be more vocal in advocating for

[themselves] and what [they] need" (Van Krevelen). She expands this call to all

"people who have illness and disabilities of all kinds" (Van Krevelen). Van Krevelen

further calls people to find someone to tell because

> first of all, we all need to be able to talk to somebody. Second of all, we can all
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> influence someone in our little circle of people, you know the people that
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> we're in contact with, whether it's on a small scale or a large scale, we can
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> have some impact. And I think by doing that, we can put ourselves in, uh, a
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> position of advocacy, a position of empowerment. And that is a whole lot
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> better than being in a position of victim (Van Krevelen).

She goes on to say that she thinks "we should have a national coming out week for

people with chronic illness" (Van Krevelen) because everyone knows someone with

a chronic illness and odds are fair that they are completely unaware that many of

those people have chronic illnesses. Van Krevelen's call for a "national coming out

week" is a direct allusion to National Coming Out Day. Robert Eichberg and Jean

O'Leary founded National Coming Out Day in 1988 ("National Coming Out Day";

"Robert Eichberg, 50, Gay Rights Leader"). It falls on October 11th each year in honor

of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights which took place

on that day in 1987 ("National Coming Out Day"). The goal of National Coming Out

Day is to presence queer voices because, as Eichberg said, "most people think they

don't know anyone gay or lesbian, and in fact everybody does. It is imperative that

we come out and let people know who we are and disabuse them of their fears and

stereotypes" ("National Coming Out Day"; "Robert Eichberg, 50, Gay Rights Leader").

Van Krevelen's call for a national coming out week for people with chronic illnesses

echo's Eichberg's sentiment and expands it in, noting that everyone knows someone

who has a chronic illness or invisible illness. This "move" (Miller, "Rhetorical

Community" 71) demonstrates the reproducibility of coming out narratives (Miller,

"Rhetorical Community" 71). It also demonstrates that coming out narratives

"[acquire] meaning from situation and from the social context in which that

situation arose" (Miller, "Genre" 163). Furthermore, this move illustrates the fact

that coming out is a way of resolving social exigence and/or "mediating private

intentions and social exigence" (Miller, "Genre" 163; Miller, "Rhetorical Community"

71). Lastly, this "move" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) serves as a "[way] of

indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into…resources" (Miller,

"Rhetorical Community" 71).

Van Krevelen's coming out narrative includes all of the basic features of

coming out narratives. Van Krevelen reveals that she has a chronic illness,

specifically, fibromyalgia, and reflects upon her experiences before and after coming

out about her chronic illness. She does say that, at the time of her diagnosis she was

more open about her chronic illness, but after telling a few people, their reactions

led to her keeping her illness quiet. Van Krevelen's listeners'/addressees'[19]

reactions to her coming out resulted in Van Krevelen changing her behavior, or, in

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[19] To use Bakhtin's terms from "The Problem of Speech Genres."

Bakhtin's terms, "the relation to the listener and [the listener's] influence on the utterance" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 61) influenced Van Krevelen's future utterances. Over time, the situation was such that Van Krevelen felt the need to come out about her chronic illness and eventually was compelled to do so in a much more public way via social media, specifically YouTube, Facebook (see fig. 3), Twitter (see fig. 4), and her blog.[20]
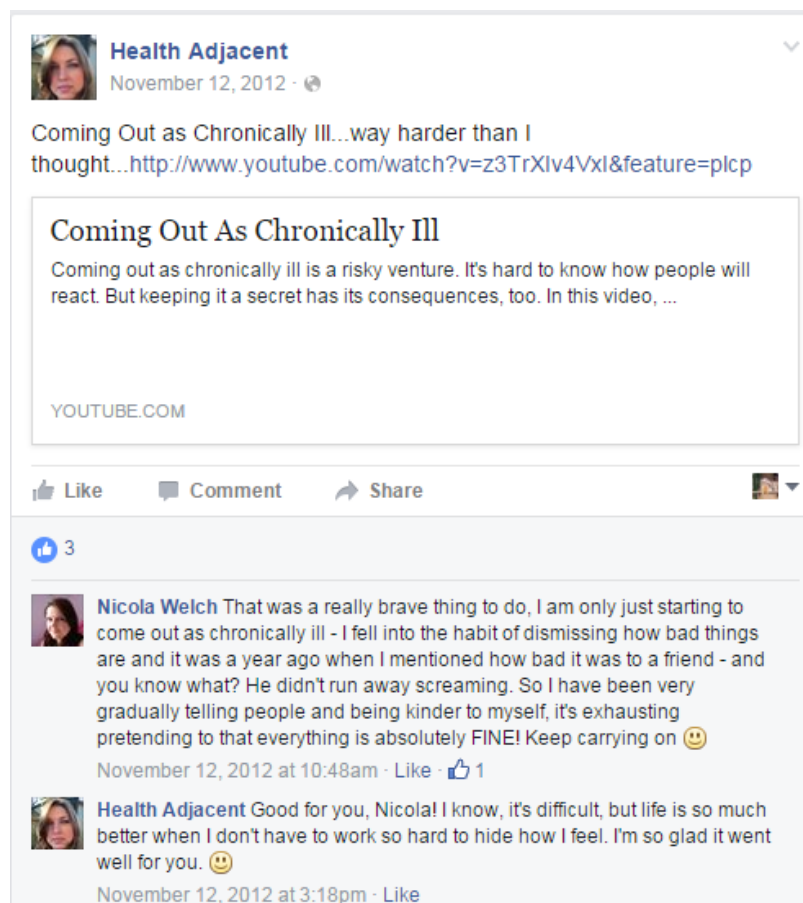
Fig. 3. A screenshot of Van Krevelen's Facebook post in which comes out and shares

a link to her coming out video on YouTube.

In Fig. 3, note that Van Krevelen's post with a link to her coming out narrative very

quickly garnered a response from someone, Nicola Welch, who found Van

Krevelen's Facebook page. Welch notes similar experiences to those expressed by

Van Krevelen, which further demonstrates the reproducibility of the roles of the

"speaker and addressee" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71), and illustrates the

influence of the listener on a speaker's utterances (Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech

Genres" 61). Additionally, the responses[21] to Van Krevelen's coming out narrative on

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are evidence of the social action that is created

when people come out.

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[21] There is one response to Van Krevelen's coming out on Facebook, there is one response to Van Krevelen's coming out on Twitter, and there are fourteen responses to Van Krevelen's coming out on YouTube. Due to the nature of technology and the digital universe, and the amount of time that has passed since Van Krevelen initially posted the coming out narrative (approximately four years), it is difficult to discern whether these are the only responses to the "coming outs" or if there had been others who responded but have since deactivated or deleted their accounts.
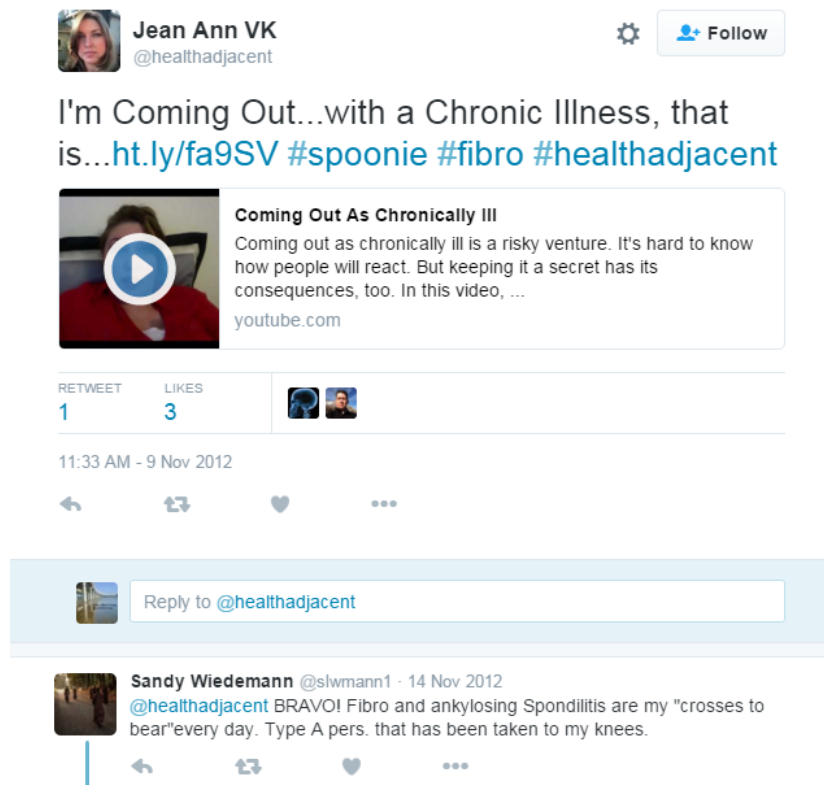
Fig. 4. A screenshot of Van Krevelen's tweet about coming out featuring a link to her
coming out video.

Like Van Krevelen's Facebook page, the @HealthAdjacent tweet coming out received

response, though the response was posted several days after the coming out tweet.

Van Krevelen's tweets about chronic illness and fibromyalgia resulted in dialogue

with fellow tweeters, but the dialogue stopped when Van Krevelen's Twitter account

was no longer actively in use (June 28, 2013 was the date of her last post via this

account). Van Krevelen's coming out raised awareness and elicited conversations

amongst her Twitter followers, Facebook friends, and YouTube subscribers and

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viewers, demonstrating social action via coming out. Van Krevelen has not posted

any new posts on the HealthAdjacent Facebook profile[22] since May 1st, 2013, but

people who find themselves in similar situations continue sharing their stories on

her page via visitor posts.

LOUIS "KENGI" CARR'S "COMING OUT HIV+"

YouTube user KengiKat, Louis "Kengi" Carr,[23] posted his "Coming Out HIV+"

video as a "part of a dialogue on PosIAm"[24] (Carr). In the video, Carr can be seen

reclining on his side on what appears to be a tan couch. He appears to be very

relaxed. At times, it looks as though Carr is referencing notes on a screen, but the

narrative generally seems unscripted. Periodically there are sounds akin to road

noise.

Carr reveals that he has been "living with HIV" (Carr) since April 3, 2008 (at

the time of the recording, it was "a little over a year" (Carr) after his diagnosis) and

that he is not on HIV medications because his immune system is still functioning. He

goes on to speak to the importance of trusting one's medical team, noting that

shortly after his diagnosis, he "had questions about [his] medical team. [He] didn't

trust his doctor. Um, [he] didn't like the clinic he was at. So how [he] could possibly,

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[22] Van Krevelen's Facebook page can be found at: https://www.facebook.com/HealthAdjacent/.
[23] Louis "Kengi" Carr's identity was confirmed via Internet research. Carr has founded "Project KengiKat" which seeks to provide outreach for homeless and HIV+ communities via "Do Something Saturday" and "Unplugging HIV." More information on Carr and Project KengiKat can be found at: www.dosomethingsaturday.org.
[24] PosIAm, according to Carr in his coming out video, was a blog on which individuals who are HIV+ post blogs. Carr notes that a fellow "feature [blogger] thought it would be cool to have, like a, either monthly or, um, even a weekly or biweekly, um, blog/vlog topic" (Carr).

um, uh, trust that they would give [him] the best HIV care?" (Carr). He explains that

he "has a doctor, a case manager, a team of health care professionals who will help

[him] get through this" (Carr). Carr follows this commentary introducing the idea of

coming out as HIV+. He takes a long pause, then emphatically says "if you are having

sex and you're are HIV+ or you have AIDS, you need to be telling everybody you are

having sex with, period. End of discussion" (Carr). Carr dismisses the idea that there

are reasons or excuses for someone who is HIV+ or who has AIDS to not tell their

sexual partners that they are positive or have AIDS.

Carr goes on to talk about coming out to family and friends. He reflects on his

first phone call, noting that he called his great Aunt and "didn't even hesitate to call

her" (Carr) because he knew that "she was, was going to be loving. [He] knew she

was just going to be like 'no big deal' and that's exactly what happened" (Carr). Carr

notes that his friends have been very supportive as well, but there have been people

who have not been supportive in "ignorant ways" (Carr). One example that he

recounts is when a co-worker said "she had to tell her clients that [he] was HIV+"

(Carr), a situation that he quickly remedied by telling her "I'm not screwing your

clients, your clients don't need to know this!" (Carr). His advice to others who are

considering coming out as HIV+ is that

> You're gonna get so many different reactions, and I think, I just say trust
>
> yourself. Trust your, trust, trust your gut instinct as to who you tell and who
>
> you don't tell. But when you do tell somebody, you have to be prepared to

answer questions. You have to be prepared for rejection. But you also have to

be prepared for love (Carr).

Carr's call to action in this video is not so much that everyone who is HIV+ come out

without caution, but that those who are comfortable and able to coming out about

their status do come out and talk about being HIV+ or having AIDS because it would

"encourage others to do the same" (Carr). Carr wholeheartedly believes that talking

about HIV and AIDS is an important route to decreasing the stigmatization of HIV

and AIDS and the backlash that people with HIV and AIDS face. Carr says that he

would love to, like one day, live to see that people with HIV or AIDS are

comfortable enough to say "I'm HIV+" or "I have AIDS" and there not be any

like backlash for it. And that's why for me, it is important for me to talk about

my status, to open and honest about my status in the hopes that it will make

it easier for people that will come after me. Um, that will educate people not

just with HIV or AIDS, but people who don't have it and need the education

(Carr).

For Carr, coming out was not only something that helped him early in his diagnosis,

but it is a way to increase visibility and awareness and to educate people about HIV

and AIDS.

Carr's coming out narrative "acquires meaning from situation and from the

social context in which [the] situation arose" (Miller, "Genre" 163) in that he is HIV+

and is coming out despite the many risks of doing so because new cases of HIV and

AIDS are being diagnosed every day. Protections for people who are HIV+ or who

have AIDS are limited, thus placing people who come out about their status in

positions where they can lose their employment and their housing. Furthermore,

people who are HIV+ or who have AIDS risk losing their family, friends, and support

networks when they come out due to the stigmatization of HIV and AIDS and the

lack of education about both. In his coming out narrative, Carr notes the statistic

that "1 in 3" people have HIV, thus emphasizing the exigence in the situation (Miller,

"Genre" 163). Carr's coming out is a way to bring awareness to HIV and AIDS, as well

as to help others who are HIV+ or have AIDS, and to educate people about HIV and

AIDS, thus helping to move toward a method of resolving the exigence (Miller,

"Genre" 163).

Carr's coming out narrative includes all of the basic features or "moves"

(Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71), thus demonstrating the recurrent nature of the

rhetorical situation (Miller, "Genre" 163) and the "reproducible speaker and

addressee roles" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71). Carr seeks to create change in

the world and he does so by way of coming out about his HIV status.

DIRK ELLIS' "MY STORY 1: COMING OUT AS AN ATHEIST"

Coming out as an undocumented immigrant, as being bipolar, as having a

chronic illness, or as being HIV+ are all coming outs with obviously great risks

associated with them. Coming out as atheist comes with a somewhat different set of

risks than the aforementioned coming outs. Dirk Ellis (YouTube user,

EllisEvolvedProductions), in his YouTube video "My Story 1: Coming Out as an Atheist," explains that he "grew up in Texas" (Ellis). He acknowledges that since his "parents weren't very hard Christians" (Ellis) so he "had that advantage" (Ellis). He reflects upon going through the motions and "doing what [he] was told" (Ellis) when he was a child and recalls that at one point he "did truly believe [in G/god] and [he] truly prayed" (Ellis), but "none of [his] prayers were ever really being answered" (Ellis). After he moved away from Texas, he "was able to start doubting what [he] was told and [he] was able to start questioning everything" (Ellis). Ellis was twenty-two when he began doubting and questioning. Five years after beginning to doubt and question, Ellis traveled to Hong Kong and lived abroad, learning about other religions and cultures, and found that he was becoming a disbeliever. He recalls the moment that he became an atheist, saying that it happened when he watched a YouTube video, "Bill O'Reilly versus Richard Dawkins." O'Reilly, according to Ellis, says to Dawkins, "I just don't see how we can have this world be so perfect. Have the tides go in, the tides go out, some go up, some go down, I don't think it could've happened" (Ellis). Richard Dawkins, according to Ellis, replied, "We have a perfectly good understanding of why the tides go in and why the tides go out" (Ellis). It was this moment that he realized that there were "intelligent, rational people out there" and Dawkins was "the first one [he] really ever came across of his caliber" (Ellis).

Ellis goes on to give advice to others who are considering coming out as atheist. He says that he only knows two people in Texas who are "semi-atheist"

(Ellis) and that he credits "the fact that there are atheists that are coming out, [himself] included, to the Internet. Absolutely 100%. The Internet has given us a way to communicate with each other around the world to find out that we're not alone" (Ellis) and goes on to draw a connection between the rise in atheists coming out to the "gay movement" (Ellis). He notes a rise in the number of "gay" (Ellis) people coming out is in part due to the Internet and how easy it is to come out, as well as to the increase in the acceptance of homosexuality. Ellis explains that there is no one right way to come out and people should use "whatever works best for [them]" (Ellis). He notes that he has heard "horrible stories…about children being kicked out of their homes" (Ellis) after coming out. Ellis says that he did not come out all at once, but he did so gradually. He also warns that he "did not have fundamentalist parents" (Ellis). He thinks back to when he was "eighteen, nineteen, twenty" (Ellis) and says he "would never have admitted that I don't, that I doubted god exists. I was way too scared. I wasn't old enough to defend myself intelligently. There was no way, I'd be ripped apart" (Ellis). Ellis' experiences have led to him standing up when anyone "is pointing fingers saying you should believe what I believe" (Ellis). He emphasizes that coming out is not a one-size-fits-all process and that people have to find ways that work for them.

Though Ellis personally did not seem to face the risks others who come out as atheist might face, Ellis acknowledges that the risks exist and that he was privileged not to face them. Though he did not face some of the more extreme risks,

Ellis does reflect upon his experiences as youth having to attend church and being made to feel uncomfortable when asking questions about the teachings within the church. Ellis also implicitly speaks to the potential isolation that results from being out as an atheist. This isolation is particular invoked when he reflects on only knowing two people who are "semi-atheist" (Ellis) in Texas and on his musings about the Internet providing opportunities for atheists to connect with one another.

Ellis' coming out narrative "acquires meaning from [the] situation and from the social context in which that situation arose" (Miller, "Genre" 163). Ellis seeks to bring awareness to atheism and to help decrease the taboo associated with being atheist, thus his coming out is a way of resolving the exigence (Miller, "Genre" 163; Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71). He acknowledges that he is using coming out as a tool to create change because of the progress that coming out has created for the "gay movement" (Ellis), thus demonstrating that the speaker and addressee roles are reproducible (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71), and that there are "recurrent social needs or exigencies" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71). The coming out narrative that Ellis presents uses each of the basic features of coming out narratives, though his call to action is more implicit than the calls to action that were seen in other coming out narratives analyzed in this research. Ellis speaks to the interconnectedness of the atheist community being the result of the Internet and of coming out. He also connects atheists coming out with members of the LGBTQIA community coming out and the progress that has been made in the "gay movement"

(Ellis), thus implying that as more atheists come out, more progress will be made for atheists.

KATHLEEN SCOTT'S "COMING OUT TO MY CHILDREN ABOUT MY ALCOHOLISM"

Though some may argue that coming out as an alcoholic would not constitute a coming out narrative, I would argue that such a coming out should be considered a coming out narrative. The "I am" statement aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous (and Narcotics Anonymous and similar groups) is central to recovery, in part because it involves claiming an identity that is quite stigmatized. Writing "Coming Out to My Children about My Alcoholism" under a pseudonym, Kathleen Scott comes out as a closeted alcoholic. Scott's coming out is complicated though because while she is coming out publically in a *Huffington Post* article, she is doing so under a pseudonym and is not out to many, including her children. Some might immediately jump to the conclusion that because she is not out to everyone (is this even possible?) and is writing under a pseudonym that Scott is not, in fact, coming out. I would argue, however, that Scott's coming out story demonstrates the complexity of coming out and also strengthens the rhetorical genre claim for coming out narratives.

Scott opens her coming out story acknowledging that she is "not all the way there yet" because she struggles to introduce herself by saying "Hi, my name is ____, and I'm an alcoholic." She goes on to recount her experiences with family members who were alcoholics, highlighting the frustration that came with "the specter of all those slurry words and empty, glassy stares" (Scott). It was because of

her interactions with those in her family who were alcoholics that Scott "avoided alcohol" for many years, and also why she did not acknowledge her struggle for many years. She "was too angry at her [mother] to allow any such comparison" (Scott).

The moment that led to Scott's decision to come out about her alcoholism was one that she does not remember. She writes, "three days ago, sociability slipped into problematic which slipped into unconsciousness, and I was careless enough to let that happen in front of my entire extended family. I'd like to say my observant eldest child did not notice, but I have no idea. I don't remember. That's a blank too" (Scott). It is evident that she is ashamed of the incident and is fearful of what will come when she comes out to her son, but it is also evident that doing so serves as a relief and a call to action. Scott says that she is "proud enough" (Scott) to not allow the label of alcoholic to "obliterate everything else [she has] worked so hard to become" (Scott) and that "the only way [she] get[s] to keep those other identities is to admit the word 'alcoholic' to [her] list" (Scott). Though she concludes with a personal call to action—come out to her children—Scott also implicitly calls others who struggle with alcoholism to come out about their alcoholism in order to serve as models for those they love and for those who may also struggle.

At the onset of her story, Scott reveals her private struggle, in this particular instance, to the readers of *Huffington Post*. She reflects upon her experiences with alcoholics and alcoholism, indicating feelings of anger, and implied feelings of shame

and isolation. Coming out about her alcoholism has empowered her and she implicitly calls for others to model her coming out. The aforementioned "moves" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) comprise the "topical structures" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) of Scott's coming out narrative. The exigence in this situation is the stigma associated with alcoholism. Scott seeks to free herself, and implicitly others, of this stigma and to also protect what she has "worked so hard to become." The social context in which alcoholism is stigmatized is "recurrent" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71), and the roles of the "speaker and addressee" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71) are "reproducible" (Miller, "Rhetorical Community" 71). Further supporting the rhetorical genre claim is the fact that Scott's coming out narrative, though written under a pseudonym, which adheres to Alcoholics Anonymous' code of anonymity, at an early stage of her coming out process, still encompasses the basic features of other coming out narratives and exerts rhetorical and social action.

Each of the coming out narratives analyzed in this chapter make use of the basic features of coming out narratives. The coming out narratives, when assessed independently, and when considered as an aggregate, meet the criteria that Miller established in "Genre as Social Action" and "Rhetorical Community," as evidenced in the analyses of the texts earlier in this chapter, as well as in the diversity of the structures of the narratives (Miller, "Genre" 163), the word choices and uses within the narratives (Miller ,"Genre" 163), and the narratives themselves lead to action

beyond the structure of the narratives (Miller, "Genre" 163). Though there is a lot of linguistic and structural diversity within and between the narratives, there are formal similarities (for example, the uses of the basic features) that support the rhetorical genre claim being made. Bawarshi and Reiff point out that "for genres to perform actions, they must be connected to cognition, since how we know and how we act are related to one another" (79) and coming out narratives, when viewed in aggregate as a rhetorical genre are not only "connected to cognition" (Bawarshi and Reiff 79), but are also connected to emotion, which also plays a role in human action (or inaction).

The discussions of the narratives in this chapter demonstrate that coming out narratives constitute a rhetorical genre according to the criteria set forth by Carolyn Miller. If we were to (re)vision coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre, perhaps coming out narratives would garner more attention from scholars, providing more opportunities to study how coming out narratives function in society and how they contribute to social change. Coming out narratives are potentially powerful tools for marginalized and/or oppressed groups and social movements because they increase visibility and awareness of oppressed peoples and communities.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As a rhetorical genre, coming out narratives tell as much about the

writer/speaker as they do about the world in which the writer/speaker exists.

Coming out narratives exist in part because of societal expectations, assumptions,

and presumptions. Adrienne Rich addressed the presumptions of heterosexuality in

"Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" and Esther Saxey addresses

the issue in *Homoplot* (2). Coming out narratives exist because as a society we have

rendered queer identities erased/invisible, in part due to the presumptions of

heterosexuality. Coming out narratives continue to exist, evolve, and be reproduced

because as a society we have rendered many identities erased/invisible, thus

mandating that those who claim these identities must come out in order to be seen

and increase visibility. As a rhetorical genre, coming out narratives highlight the

nuances of erasure in society. Coming out narratives are subversive and

transgressive, challenging the heteropatriarchal and heterocolonial norms that are

engrained in society and institutions in the United States (and other places in the

world as well). These narratives not only can serve as personal liberators, but can

also contribute to a more widespread liberation from societal assumptions,

presumptions, and expectations.

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Why are coming out narratives so important? According to the National

Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), "approximately 1 in 5 adults in the U.S.—4.8

million, or 18.5%--experiences mental illness in a given year" ("Mental Health"). Of

those adults who experience mental illness, 4.2% ("Mental Health") experience

mental illness so severe that it "substantially interferes with or limits one or more

major life activities" ("Mental Health"). Like adults, youths also experience severe

mental illnesses at high rates. According to NAMI, "approximately 1 in 5 youth aged

13-18 (21.4%) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point in their life"

("Mental Health"). Approximately 13% of children between the ages of 8-15

experience severe mental illness ("Mental Health"). The continuing stigmatization of

mental health conditions contributes to the silencing of individuals who have mental

health conditions. Coming out about mental health conditions can help decrease the

stigma associated with them and presence the issue. Increased visibility of mental

health conditions can potentially lead to changes in policies concerning mental

health.

Further exemplifying the importance of coming out narratives in our society

is the enormous number of "an estimated 11 million" ("Why Don't They")

undocumented immigrants struggling to remain in the United States and become

legal immigrants. In 2015, the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE) deported "96,045 non-criminal immigration violators" ("FY 2015 ICE"). The

process for becoming a documented immigrant in the United States is very complex

and often very expensive. There are a number of routes by which an individual can seek to become a legal immigrant. The American Immigration Council identifies four: "employment, certain family ties, refugee or asylee processing, and the diversity lottery" ("Why Don't They"). There are, however, limits on how many immigrants can become legal immigrants via these routes each year. According to the "Permanent Legal Immigration to the United States: Policy Overview" published in 2014 based upon data from 2013, only 675,000 legal permanent residents were allowed into the United States in 2013 (Kandel 2), of which approximately 480,000 were "immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and family-sponsored preference immigrants" (Kandel 2), 140,000 were "employment-based preference immigrants" (Kandel 2), and 55,000 were "diversity immigrants" (Kandel 2). In addition to the limits in the number of each category of legal immigrants allowed per route of immigration, there are ceilings for immigrants from certain countries (Kandel 2). Further complicating the process of becoming a legal immigrant is the issue facing undocumented immigrants already living in the United States: there are very few routes by which undocumented immigrants, including children of undocumented immigrants who had no choice in the matter, are able to become documented. Though Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) became law in 2012 ("Consideration of Deferred"), the visa provided is short-term and subject to renewal. The process by which undocumented immigrants are able to become documented is an extensive and expensive process. Coming out as undocumented

can potentially lead to increased visibility, thus potentially leading to less stigmatization and more effective and more efficient immigration reform.

While the level of risks associated with the coming out varies, everyone comes out about something, whether it be coming out as queer, coming out with a chronic illness, or coming out as vegan, or coming out as something not covered in this research. It is an inevitability in life. Thus it should not be surprising that students, researchers, and academics sometimes use coming out in their work, research, and teaching. Therefore, I would like to extend this research into the realm of pedagogy, specifically within the composition classroom, establishing coming out as a genre that is taught in First-Year Writing classrooms. The implementation of the coming out genre that I am proposing would be akin to the presentation of genres of writing in Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper's *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* (10th edition). The ways in which the genre is used in various contexts and environments would be discussed, the basic features would be highlighted and explained, and models of the genre would be provided. Since coming out is a frequent occurrence, it would be of great benefit to teach best practices for using the genre.

While (re)visioning coming out narratives is important to understanding coming out narratives more fully and helping coming out narratives to reach their full potential as subversive, transgressive tools to create change, (re)visioning coming out narratives is just the beginning. As tools for creating social action and change, it is a given that some individual coming out narratives will be more

successful, or persuasive, than others. I would like to explore what makes some

coming out narratives more persuasive than others. There are at least three possible

methods that could be used to conduct this analysis, and ideally, all three methods

would be used in conjunction in order to most clearly and most accurately

determine the moves that help make coming out narratives persuasive. The first

possible method of interrogating the persuasiveness of coming out narratives would

be to analyze the coming out narratives in terms of the basic features and the uses of

the basic features, as well as in terms of the rhetorical moves that are made.

The second method of interrogating the persuasiveness of coming out

narratives would be investigating the reach of the narratives. This is a potentially

complicated approach due to the fact that there are many limitations to accessing

this information. For example, it is difficult to discern how many hits a blog post or

an article has had unless the individual or publisher has made the statistics for the

blog post or article visible to the public. Additionally, it is difficult to discern how

many times an anthology of coming out narratives has been checked-out from a

library or purchased. If the coming out narratives analyzed, however, were

published on YouTube, one could consider the number of views as well as the

number of comments (supposing the YouTube user has allowed comments) on the

coming out video.

The third method of interrogating the persuasiveness of coming out

narratives would be more involved and elaborate, drawing upon social science

research and the measurement of attitude changes. The third method would be a study in which participants are first given a beliefs survey, then are shown a video or texts of a coming out narrative, and after viewing and reading the coming out narrative, the participants are asked to complete the beliefs survey again. If a coming out narrative is persuasive, one would expect that a participant whose beliefs did not previously align with the content of the coming out narrative would show a shift in their beliefs after viewing/reading the coming out narrative. This approach is, of course, not without confounds, but could be a potentially viable approach to assessing the persuasiveness of coming out narratives. Learning more about what makes some coming out narratives more persuasive than others is important because more persuasive, or more effective, coming out narratives have the potential to create a bigger impact. One point that should not be lost, however, is the idea that even if one coming out narrative might be viewed as more important or might be viewed more or commented on more on YouTube, coming out videos "may have more affective and political power in aggregate" (Alexander and Losh 32). This potentially applies to coming out narratives more broadly, to include written narratives. Because of the aggregate power noted by Alexander and Losh (32), in addition to exploring the persuasiveness of the narratives, it is important to also consider whether people who face similar situations are encouraged to come out, or are made to feel less isolated, or are comforted in some way by the narratives.

Building upon this discussion of coming out narratives, I would like to explore the ways in which coming out advice pamphlets, texts, and videos impact the coming out narratives that extend beyond queer coming out narratives. Furthermore, I would like to follow-up on Deborah Chirrey's work in order to optimize such advice texts. Chirrey, in her article "Reading the Script: an Analysis of Script Formulation in Coming Out Advice Texts," analyzes advice about coming out using script formulation theory. Chirrey posits that coming out advice pamphlets and "texts function at the socio-cultural level as a way of conventionalising them, of codifying them and of communicating them to the reader, while also encouraging the reader to repeat and recreate these scripts of coming out in their own lives" (55). She goes on to warn that "the scripts [the advice pamphlets and texts] work towards establishing a common understanding of the structure and meaning of coming out. Although these texts [the advice pamphlets and texts] challenge heteronormativity, they can also be accused of marginalizing the experience of some queer individuals" (55). Given the reproduction of coming out narratives and the use of coming out narratives by other marginalized and oppressed communities and movements, it would be beneficial in the future to view coming out narratives of all types through the lens of script formulation theory in order to ensure the minimization the conventionalization and marginalization of the individuals telling their stories. Coming out narratives are subversive and transgressive narratives and advice pamphlets and texts need to reflect the subversive and transgressive nature

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of these narratives, not stifle them. Thus, in addition to viewing coming out

narratives by other marginalized and oppressed communities and movements,

additional research on coming out advice pamphlets and texts that seek to mitigate

the conventionalization and marginalization of coming out narratives.

Another potentially fruitful expansion of this research would interrogate the

ways in which people of various demographic backgrounds come out.[25] This

research could be achieved by way of a questionnaire in which the fact that

everybody "comes out" about something is highlighted, then respondents are asked

to complete a brief questionnaire then share a story about a time that they have had

to come out about something. Such a questionnaire could potentially provide a

wealth of information that could be analyzed in more nuanced (and potentially

quantitative) ways that are not possible by other means of data collection. Ideally a

large enough sample to be considered representative of the population would be

achieved (and the appropriate confidence level selected based upon the sample

size) with the goal of achieving a 95% to 99% confidence level with a significance of

.05 (though .01 would be preferable).Thus, in non-statistical terms, the discussion of

the results that would ensue would be safely more generalizable than the results of

a study with a smaller sample size that is not representative. This of course is an

exceptionally lofty goal, but provided that the population is selected carefully, it is a

potentially attainable goal.

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[25] Many thanks to Dr. Gray Scott for suggesting this.

In addition to continuing to work with coming out narratives, I would like to

expand my research into other arenas that were inspired by this research. As I

delved into my dissertation research, I began to take note of other types of

narratives that tend to be taken up by social and cultural movements. These

narratives seem to come in and out of public consciousness throughout history,

typically at points in which there is immense social and cultural tension. For

example, since the killing of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, awareness of police

brutality, particularly against unarmed black men, has been heightened ("Ferguson

Unrest"). Brown's death was followed by the deaths of many other unarmed black

people (Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and many others)

("Freddie Gray Death") at the hands of law enforcement officers or while in law

enforcement custody. This heightened awareness and the rise of the

#BlackLivesMatter movement seems to be accompanied by an uptick in African

Americans, Latinos, Native American and Indigenous people, and other people of

color and marginalized groups recounting their experiences at the hands of law

enforcement. These narratives seem to serve a very specific rhetorical and cultural

purpose. As such, I would like to explore the idea that all of these narratives are a

part of a larger, more intricate rhetorical genre. At the moment, it seems these

narratives ebb and flow in terms of public consciousness based upon social and

cultural circumstances, becoming presenced and more visible when a particular

threshold has been met. Thus, I am tentatively positing that these narratives are a

part of a larger rhetorical genre, a threshold genre. In addition to exploring the idea of threshold genres, I am interested in the ways in which the narratives that potentially comprise this threshold genre facilitate and create social and rhetorical action.

Though coming out narratives have received limited attention from scholars, the use of coming out narratives by individuals, communities, activists, members of marginalized and/or oppressed groups, and others has continued to increase. coming out narratives are powerful tools with the potential to increase the visibility of marginalized and oppressed peoples and groups. (Re)visioning coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre highlights the social and rhetorical action they create in society. coming out narratives are subversive and transgressive narratives that challenge the status quo stories that are told and re-told in society. (Re)visioning coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre can potentially help us to harness the narrative's subversive and transgressive powers so that they can be used to create change. (Re)visioning coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre might also create new ways to view coming out narratives, thus inspiring further research and a re-introduction of coming out narratives in the academic spheres. (Re)visioning coming out narratives as a rhetorical genre, a genre whose function goes far beyond that of classification highlights the interconnectedness between marginalized groups, movements, and oppressions. coming out narratives help to

increase visibility and presence those who are oft-silenced, serving as powerful,

subversive, and transgressive tools for creating change.

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APPENDIX A

Transcripts of the Coming Out Narratives

JESSICA HYEJIN LEE'S "COMING OUT FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

My name is Jessica Hyejin Lee. And if you're watching this, I've been arrested. I live in Pennsylvania and I'm a student at Bryn Mawr College. I'm a junior. I risked arrest and deportation because I felt that my community needs to be empowered and also for another undocumented American who has been kept in detention for over seven months. We see that a lot of high school students are not certain about their future because they're undocumented and we see a lot of fear even among, especially among young adults, um, who don't feel safe in their community to share stories of their life or their immigration status.

I moved from South Korea when I was twelve with my family. My family is Asian American. And I think in the Asian American community people tend to keep silent about undocumented status. And people don't think much about what it's like to be undocumented or even what undocumented means. Growing up, I didn't know any other undocumented person other than my family. I went through high school thinking that I was the only undocumented person. Could never explain why I couldn't drive and I had to get other friends to drive. And couldn't explain why I didn't get into colleges that people thought I would get in for sure. I applied to 24 colleges. And I was hoping I would somehow get into college. I still remember walking down the aisle with a, you know, handful of international baccalaureate who all got into schools like Cornell, Duke, Occidental, Berkeley. But I had nowhere,

nowhere to go. And my friends all wondered why I wasn't going anywhere. And they didn't understand it was not a thing, not my thing. For undocumented youth, I think it is important for them to feel like they are part of the community and to not feel stigmatized by their status. Because we are who we are. We're the same as anyone else in America. One of the Bryn Mawr students had not said the word "undocumented" until she came out to me privately. And it is just so important for me to show the undocumented community that it is okay to come out and be the leader of our fight for civil rights and human rights in this country.

My name is Jessica Hyejin Lee and I am undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic.

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJg5LfmDcnU

TANIA CHAIREZ'S "COMING OUT FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY"

Transcribed by: Jamie M. Jones

My name is Tania Chairez. If you're watching this, I have been arrested. I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. When I was five years old my parents decided that I would have better opportunities in the United States. And everything was fine. I thought I was American. I thought I was the same as anybody else. Um, until I was around middle school when things started getting a little shaky. I saw what it did to my parents. For them, it was about racism. A lot more about how they lived their lives day-to-day. So, I got to see a lot of attacks on my family just because of the color of our skin, not because anyone knew of my status because obviously we weren't advertising that. I thought I couldn't' go to college. I thought what am I doing here? Why did my parents bring me here? Thanks to all of the people in my high school I realized that I could go to college. SO I applied um, and got accepted to the University of Pennsylvania where I am now a sophomore. I am very, very lucky to be there. At the end of the day, I hope after, um, this action, that a lot of undocumented youth will feel empowered. A lot of them will stop feeling so scared, uh, because it is something we grow up with. It is something that is very much instilled in our minds where we have to be afraid, we have to be scared that a knock will come to our door deporting our parents or separating us. And I hope that after all of this undocumented youth in Philadelphia will see that it's better to be publically undocumented where you have the support group, where people can stand up for

each other and, you know, not to sit at home being scared of everything because in the end we're humans too. To my Pine community, I want to say that, uh, I want you to keep an open mind and I want you to really understand that I am very lucky to have come across the opportunities that I have in my life and being in Penn is a great privilege, but there are other youth across the country, other youth in Pennsylvania that don't have those same opportunities and it is for them that I am really doing this. To the undocumented youth, I really want you to drop that fear and stop being afraid. And realize that I'm out here getting arrested so you can feel empowered, so you can stand up for your rights, because you have rights. And in the end, this, this is all about you. This is all about all the youth out there that don't know what to do. Don't be scared of what people tell you. Don't be scared of the system. Just embrace it and say "I will fight for my rights and the rights of my community." My name is Tania Chairez and I am undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic.

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prqQMROMzFU

MARK ANTHONY'S "COMING OUT OF THE BIPOLAR CLOSET"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

Hello, my name's Mark and this is probably one of the most difficult things I have done in my life. I have been living with mental illness. It is something that I don't like to talk about. Only a hand few of people that I do talk about it with. Um, there was an incident in my life where someone, as you would say, put me on blast. In other words, they put this, my information that I was bipolar on Facebook. And to see the responses of the people, it made me out to feel like I was a monster, which even caused more shame and guilt. The pain of living with this illness itself is the most excruciating pain that I could imagine. But the pain of the shame and the guilt is just as great. So, I been trying to hide my illness. I tried to talk about it with a few people close to me. And those people don't understand. You get that answer like "just think positive," "it's gonna be alright," um, "it's all in your head." Not understanding that it's a brain disorder. It's not like I choose to be depressed or hypomania. As a matter of fact, I can't even control it. I just have to learn to live with it.

There has been a couple of people, and when I say that word, a couple of people, there has been like one that has been a great support to me. I appreciate them. Your support and your friendship probably helped save my life. If anyone out there that's a family member or a friend of someone who suffers from mental illness, we're not asking you to try to figure it out. We just want you to be there. To shoulder

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the crown. Sometimes we might just need a hug. Sometimes we might just need to talk. Sometimes we might isolate ourselves. And when you reach out to us to check on us to see if we alright, of course we always say that we alright, but just the idea that you're concerned, it's important.

The struggle has been so hard that I wouldn't wish this illness on my worst enemy, but I know that I must learn to live with it. That's why I chose to talk about it today. See I was ashamed when they told me I had bipolar. I went through the stages of grief. Denial, anger, all of those issues. I was angry at God I, uh, people at my church turned on me. I reached out to some other people; they turned their backs on me. Um, nobody wanted to be associated with someone who quote unquote was crazy. So I left the ministry.

Look, today I understand one thing. Bipolar is not who I am. I am Mark. Bipolar is something that I have. And despite this illness, I still can be a productive and responsible member of society. The reason I tell my story in hope that someone else out there know that we are not alone. As NAMI says, that motto, you've seen it posted on the page, it says that "we're not alone" and together we can overcome this thing. We can recover. We can live successful. Yeah there may be times we struggle, but together.

I want to read this poem that I wrote that describes a day in my life that happened last year, 2013. It's called "You Left Me to Die"

You left me to die

Even though I cried

To you please help me now

I have lost control and

My disease is trying to kill me

As I called your name you turned away

In anger and said "I can't help you:"

Your words still ring in my brain

I grabbed a bottle of pills

And a bottle of whiskey to wash it down

To drown my misery and the pain in my life

So much pain in my heart

I don't want to go

Living on

And the voices in my head tell me

There's nothing to live for anymore

So I grab the knife and I begin to cut myself

I never did this before

What's going on?

I'm losing my mind

Then I black out

Darkness is all around

Is this death? Am I dead?

Silent and darkness

Is this the end?

No! I really want to live

But it's too late

Forgive me Lord for my sins

I didn't even get to say goodbye to my friends and loved ones

I awoke that morning

My house destroyed

Things all around broken and shattered just like my life

Blood and vomit is everywhere

I don't remember it

To the psych ward I drove myself

Thank you god for not allowing me to die

And because of that, now I choose to be a fighter

To reach out to others, and to let you know that we're not alone

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CNl5jitf0Y

DAVID WRIGHT'S "COMING OUT AS BIPOLAR"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

This video is for my blog, *Poetry the Art and Soul of Therapy*. Yeah, so, this issue, topic of the week, um, as you have read, yesterday and will continue to read tomorrow, is on mental illness and the social stigma around that. I'm, I am, I'm, I'm that [points to purple dialogue box that says "I have bipolar disorder"], yeah. Sorry. I don't know why that's so much harder to admit than everything else I've been through, everything else that I am. But maybe it is because it's something I can't really control. I didn't choose in any way. Yeah. I, uh, it's just something that will be there. Um, messing with my life. It's broken, broken me down. Um, society makes it so much worse. It makes any type of mental illness so much worse because that's when you need people the most and that's when you're too afraid... [cries]. I'm just going to hide behind these [puts on tinted goggles] so you can't see me cry. That's when you're too afraid to go to them for help because we know how broken we are but we don't want other people to see that. We don't want people to love us less, abandon us, or make us feel worse about ourselves than we already do.

I wrote so many poems on this issue. This poem "Apathetic Artist" you probably wouldn't have even known, but I shared with you that it is about mental illness, being bipolar. Um, so, bipolar. Um, the best as I can explain it. For me, it's not being in control of my emotions. You're angry for no reason. You're happy for no reason. It's not just angry. It's not just happy. It's fury, it's depression, it's not caring

about anything at all. It's apathy. You're not happy because something good happened. You're not sad because something sad happened. You just are. But they're so strong and they just control you and prevent you from living. It prevents you from being you because you don't know who you are when your emotions don't reflect how you actually feel and what you are. And it's just so confusing.

So many years of not knowing what it's like to be normal. And I'm not normal in so many other ways. I feel like this, beyond everything else, makes me feel less human. I can't have that life of normalcy. It's something that I have to hide. It's something that's my fault almost. That society would look down upon and pity and think less of and I know I'm broken. Everyone knows they're broken in one way or another. It held that connotation, that stereotype of the extreme end that's violent, that prevents you from any social, normal social interaction with anyone. And on the other extreme you have, I won't say simple, but anxiety, social anxiety, depression, eating disorders, um, there's all these things that aren't really our fault, but we think it is and we blame ourselves for it and it just compounds the problem.
When you're told you have a mental illness or you figure out you have a mental illness you associate that on some level to the violent, the extreme. The things that you see in movies and television that people laugh about, that people are afraid of, that, that isn't what it really is. And that's just so messed up. Thanks for watching. Sorry about, no, I'm not sorry. I'm not sorry that I have emotions. I'm not sorry I'm upset. I won't apologize for that or myself and neither should you. And I'll keep

talking about these issues cause they need to be talked about. If I'm not going to say

something, who will?

[Video cuts]

Hey. Okay. So yeah, that happened. Um, as you can see, different shirt,

different day. Time to compose myself. Um, so yeah. It rally sucks that I have to

come out as bipolar. Or I don't' have to, but that that's a thing. That these

stigmas...coming out as anything. You weren't born in a closet; you were shoved into

a closet by society. And coming out is you opening a door and setting yourself free.

Um, it can be dangerous. You will be judged by people. Um, it's something very

courageous and brave, um, that has, that you have to be in a position, a healthy

position mentally and emotionally to, in order to do that, um, safely.

Poetry was how I was able to say these things without saying them before I

was ready. So I'm showing you poetry at the beginning of, before you can speak, that

way you can still write and get the words out. And then, I mean, it's been years,

almost a decade. In some, for some cases for me, that I've been able to talk about

things like this. So it is an experience and everyone is on their timeline, so everyone

has their own timing and you have to know what that is for yourself and you can't

compare yourself to other people's timelines. We're all different. We're all unique.

And that makes us special. So, thanks. #DavidIsWright

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2LLePd7FG4

NATASHA TRACY'S "MENTAL ILLNESS STIGMA: COMING OUT WITH BIPOLAR

DISORDER"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

Hi! I'm Natasha Tracy and I'm the author of *Breaking Bipolar* here at *HealthyPlace.com.* I want to talk for a minute about coming out with bipolar disorder. So when I originally started writing about bipolar disorder, I did so anonymously. And this was really important to me because I needed my thoughts about depression, hypomania, my thoughts that just didn't make sense—I needed those to remain private. I needed to feel confident that people in my real life wouldn't stumble across these thoughts of mine. They were very personal to me. But at some point, and it took years for me, I decided it was important to come out with bipolar disorder. I only did this once I managed to gain some confidence about my story, who I was, and my ability to tell that particular story. It was only then that I thought it was appropriate to become public. Now, in my real life this wasn't a big deal for me because the people in my real life knew that I had bipolar disorder. Nevertheless, it is still an event to come out with bipolar disorder online because suddenly hundreds, or thousands, or even millions of people suddenly know that you have bipolar disorder. That means they can judge you for it. That means the stigma that every one of us suffers with a mental illness can be amplified because of all of the people who now know that you have bipolar disorder.

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Now, there are real positives and negatives to coming out with bipolar disorder. There are some great positives where you can really positively affect other people's lives. You can affect someone else's life as to how they feel about themselves. You can affect as to whether they get treatment. You can affect as to how they feel about their disease. You can help eradicate the stigma that people with a mental illness face. Those are huge and powerful gifts that should not be understated.

However, there are also major negatives to coming out with a mental illness. There are all kinds of negatives associated with work life. There are all kinds of negatives associated with your personal life depending on who you've told and who you haven't told. And then there are all kinds of things associated with your online life. And one of the things to remember is that some people online will disagree with you. For example, I am attacked because I have bipolar disorder. Because I talk about bipolar disorder. Because of my thoughts on treatment. Because of my thoughts on psychiatry. Certainly some people attack me professionally and personally for what I think about these things. And I would suggest to anyone who is considering coming out with bipolar disorder online that these things are likely to happen to them as well. It is simply a matter of time before people who vehemently disagree with you find you and start attacking you. So it is really important to prepare yourself for that inevitability. And the thing about that type of negative

attack is that it can push you. And it can push you in a really bad direction. It can negatively harm your health. And that is something that no one wants.

And the important thing to remember is that it is your health that matters. If you're sick you can't help anyone else. It's really great to inspire people. It is really great to hold their hand. It's really great to support people. But if all it does is harm your own mental illness, then it really isn't worth it. So it is really careful, really important to carefully consider both the positives and the negatives before coming out with bipolar disorder.

I am Natasha Tracy for *HealthyPlace.com*.

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQBYEMPVsE8

JEAN ANN VAN KREVELEN'S "COMING OUT AS CHRONICALLY ILL"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

 Hi, guys. I want to talk to you today about coming out with a chronic illness, I mean. Yeah, the gay, lesbian thing, that coming out happened for me a long time ago. That's no big issue. It was the decision to come out as chronically ill that really, that I mean, I struggled with it. I still struggle with it. I have had time fibromyalgia, diagnosed six years and longer than that really and for the most part I've kept it to myself. I didn't talk about it. Obviously, I talked about it with my family and maybe some of my very close friends, but for the most part and I kept it to myself. And I'll tell you why. I have a fear the people will judge me as less competent, less capable, because I have a chronic illness. And I don't think the fear is unfounded. I don't think that fear is unfounded it all and I spent six years finding work arounds so that I could live in an able-bodied world without them knowing that I, you know, couldn't get my body to work half the time. And it wasn't until really recently that I decided you know what I just can't live like this anymore. I mean I still wanna be able to do those things that allow me to function in the able-bodied world with everybody else, but they don't have to hide who I am anymore. And the bottom line is that I am living with fibromyalgia and that's just the way that it is. I didn't want it. I didn't ask for it. And, to my knowledge, I don't think I did anything to get, but I have it. And let me tell you something, it does not make me weak. It does not make me any different than anybody else. I mean this is my thing that I have to deal with, but we all have

things. We all have things, you know? Our crosses to bear as my grandmother would

say. And I think that's part of what we're doing here on this planet is learning to

deal with the different aspects of our life, good, bad, and indifferent, you know?

I wish I could say that my experience in sharing this information has been,

um, well-received and as I get older it has been better, better received but when I

first came out, um, when I very first was sick and I was more open about it, people

judged me. First of all, a lot of people thought that I was faking it. Why anybody in

their right mind with fake this kind of illness, I mean, I'm sure it happens, but I don't

wanna be on all of these medications. I don't wanna be at home in bed most of the

time. I wanna be out there living life with everybody else. And at the time that I was

diagnosed, I was, uh, running a good sized nonprofit, Type A personality, like crazy

driven, and that stopped. That came to a halt. And I had no intention of changing my

life in that way. None. And I mourned for years about the loss of that career and the

loss other things too, including a relationship.

Being chronically ill is stressful and it is, it's hard to talk about because you

don't want people to see you as less than. But I think it's completely necessary to

talk about it. I mean, do you know the amount of drama that I listen to from my

friends about anything and everything in their lives? Why should this be any

different? I mean, why should this be any different? I think we have to get to the

point where we, the people, stop judging other people based on their physical

capability. Yes. I realize that's pie in the sky talk. I realize that, but I have hope. I

mean I think it has changed a lot and I think it's continuing to change. And I think if

fibromyalgia hadn't primarily affected women that there would have been a wider

spread acceptance of this illness earlier on. But because it's an intangible,

uh, illness, meaning that it's hard to identify it, doesn't mean it isn't there, means we

don't have accurate tests for it, and because it primarily affects women, I think the

medical community was quick to sort of poo-poo it and say, "you know, you're just

depressed sweetheart." That's a terrible thing to experience. I think the only way

that we're going to get past that is to be open about who we are, about what we

experience, and not to go on about it ad nauseam. Who cares? I don't need to hear

myself complain 24/7 and nobody else wants to either. But I do think that we have

to be more vocal in advocating for ourselves for what we need. I don't think that,

um, hiding it necessarily makes us any better, it really doesn't make our health

condition any better. And what it does is it prevents us from getting the

accommodations that we need to be successful. And I'm not just talking about, you

know, myself for people with my illness, but people who have illness and disabilities

of all kinds. It's taking a risk there's no two ways about it taking a risk. Talking about

it with your friends and your family and colleagues, especially, is taking a risk.

I decided it was worth it. I decided to take the risk. You may have decided

differently, but I would encourage you to think about who you can tell because, first

of all, we all need to be able to talk to somebody. Second of all, we can all

influence someone in our little circle of people, you know, the people that we are in

contact with. Whether it's on a small scale or a large-scale, we can have some impact. And I think by doing that we can put ourselves in uh, a position at advocacy, a position of empowerment, and that is a whole lot better than being in a position of victim.

I mean really, with today's technology you don't have to leave your bed, as you, well, you may not realize this, but I am actually in bed right now, you don't have to leave your bed to advocate for yourself. So what are you waiting for? Come on! Let's go! Let's get it on! I think we can do it. I really do. I think that coming out, we should have a National Coming Out week for people with chronic illness. You'd be surprised at the people you know who live with an illness who deal with it every day who haven't told you anything about it. And you may have all kinds of judgments about people that you know, like "they're lazy," or they're slow," or "they're this," or "they're that," and really, what they have is an illness. So for those of you who don't have illnesses and who are able-bodied, I encourage you to be kinder and gentler to your neighbors. You never know when one of them is struggling just to make it through the next day. So, come on, join us. We can do this. We can do this together. I hope it's helpful. I hope you consider coming out with your illness. If you do, leave me a comment or tell me what it was like, I would love to know. You can comment here or go to my blog and leave me a comment on one of the posts there at HealthAdjacent.com.

Talk to you soon!

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3TrXIv4VxI

LOUIS "KENGI" CARR'S "COMING OUT HIV+"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

Hey guys, what's up? So, um, this video is about coming out HIV+ and, um, it's part of a dialogue on PosIAm. I'm a featured blogger on PosIAm and one of the other feature bloggers thought it would be cool to have like a, either a monthly, or, um, uh, even a weekly or biweekly, um, blog/vlog topic. And, um, for me, since I have people who simply just read my blog and other people who just watch my YouTube channel, I'm going to do both. I'm going to do a blog and a vlog. Um, and I'm just going to share my own experience, um, with being HIV+. Um, if you guys are watching my YouTube channel or reading my blog, then you know that I am HIV+. I was diagnosed HIV+ on April 3, 2008, so I've been living with HIV a little over a year now and, excuse me, and, um, currently, I'm not on any HIV meds. My immune system is still very, very strong and it's doing what it's supposed to do. It's defending my, it's defending itself. My body is defending itself against HIV. However, if the time comes for me to start HIV meds, and I'm just praying that time won't come, um, but if it does, I will start HIV meds and it's so weird to say that right now because, um, before when I thought about it, I had question about my medical team. I didn't trust my doctor. Um, I didn't like the clinic I was at, so how could I possibly, um, trust that they would give me the best HIV care. Um, that's totally different now. I now have an awesome doctor and an awesome clinic with an awesome support staff, so if, if when I go get my blood drawn next month and it comes back and I need

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to go on meds, I now know I have a doctor, a case manager, a team of healthcare professionals that will help me get through this.

As far as coming out to people, um, if you're having sex and you are HIV+ or you have AIDS, you need to be telling everybody that you're having sex with. Period. End of discussion. I don't have any respect for people who are having sex and not telling the other person that they are HIV+ or that they have AIDS. I just don't have any respect for you. And there, there's absolutely no reason or excuse or anything that anybody can give to why they will not tell somebody that they are HIV+ or that they have AIDS. I, I, there's just no excuse. Period. Um, as far as telling friends and stuff and family, um, the first person I called was my great aunt and I didn't even hesitate to call her because I, I knew that she, she was going to be loving. I knew she was, she was just going to be like "no big deal." And that's exactly what happened. Um, I mean she was worried about me, but it wasn't like "oh my god, you've got that gay disease." It wasn't like that at all. She was totally supportive and everything. And for the most part, my friends have been very, very supportive. Um, Tina and Andy, Patrick and Crystal, um, they've all been very, very supportive. There are some people, um, who haven't been. Um, not in bad ways, but just in like ignorant ways. Um, Like I had somebody um, say that she had to tell her clients that I was HIV+. I'm like "whoa, whoa, whoa, I'm not screwing your clients. Your clients don't need to know this!" I've had some like "Christian" friends, um, kind of stop talking to me.

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Um, and I think that's all because they read that book and they somehow have interpreted that God is punishing me. Whatever. Um, good riddance, kick rocks.

Um. You're gonna get so many different reactions and I think, I just say trust yourself. Trust, trust, trust your gut instinct as to who you tell and who you don't tell. Um, but when you do tell somebody, you have to be prepared to answer questions. You have to be prepared for rejection. Um, But you also gotta to be prepared for love. Um, because, I mean, if it's, if it's uh, like okay relationship, you coming out saying, "hey, I'm HIV+" might make it a great relationship because that could actually turn it around. I know people who say they had horrible relationships with their siblings or with their, with their, um friends, or even with their parents and now that they're HIV+ the relationships have gotten so much stronger. Um, and then there's people who say it's gotten a lot worse. So, I think whenever you choose to come out, be true to who you are, um. I would love if one day that, I mean cause when you think about it, 1 in 3 people, but I would love to like one day live to see that people with HIV or AIDS are, are comfortable enough to say "I'm HIV+" or that "I have AIDS" and there not be like any backlash for it. And that's why for me it is very important for me to talk about my status. To be open and honest about my status. In the hopes that it'll make it easier for people, um, that will come after me. Um, that will educate people, not just with HIV or AIDS, but people who don't have it and need the education. I really, really hope that, um, people like Dab Garner and, and, Bob Bowers, Robert from PosIAm, Justin B. Smith, and all the PosIAm bloggers,

um, um, I just think if we talk more and, and if we become, if we just talk about it in a, in a natural and cool environment, and, it would encourage other people to do the same.

Um, but like I said, coming out, there's just so much. And, I mean, you've gotta be prepared for anything. You've gotta be prepared for rejection. And you've gotta be prepared for love. Um, and let me just say this. If people stop talking to you or if people don't wanna be around you because you're HIV+, then do you really want those kinds of people in your life? Do you really want somebody in your life whose love has conditions on it? Do you really want a friend whose friendship has conditions on it? "I'm your friend or I love you as long as you're not HIV+" or "as long as you don't have AIDS" or "as long as you're not gay or lesbian." Screw those people! Get rid of them. Tell them to kick rocks.

Um, I mean that's, my being HIV+ is just, for me, no big deal. And sharing it with people is, is really no big deal for me. And I would love to see a day when, when all of us can say that. When all of us can say "you know what, I'm HIV+ and it's really not a big deal." Um, peace and blessings everybody. We'll talk to you soon. Bye, bye. Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pD89v0k47to

DIRK ELLIS' "MY STORY 1: COMING OUT AS AN ATHEIST"

Transcribed by Jamie M. Jones

Hi guys, this is my video submission for the *Atheist Jesus* Facebook page talking about how I came out as an atheist. I grew up in Texas, but my parents weren't very, they weren't very hard Christians, so I had that to my advantage. My mom did take me to church every once in a while and I remember going to church and just feeling very awkward. I was always wondering why the preacher was you know, yelling so much. I didn't understand a word he was saying and I was asking my mom, "Why are we doing this? Why are we doing that" and everything. I was just pretty much told, "Just do it," you know? I didn't really quite get why I was even there in the first place. But I went along with it because you're a little kid, you're told to do what, you know, you're made to do what you're told.

I, uh, I remember questioning the whole, um, whale, you know, the whale story, living in the whale for three days and stuff, and I remember raising my hand and being like "so, the guy actually lived inside of a whale for three days?" and they said "yes." and I was like "wow!"

And I, there was a time when I did believe. I did truly believe and I truly prayed. I remember thinking, I prayed so much, I remember thinking that none of my prayers were ever really being answered, not only that but I wasn't hearing anything back. I wasn't getting anything back. About the age of 22, I, um, was able to move. I moved out to pursue a career in, uh, acting and entertainment. I moved to

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Florida. And once I got out of Texas, that's when I was really able to get away from

that, you know, hold on me. I was able to start doubting what I was told and

everything. I was able to start questioning it and everything. I remember moving

from Texas. I remember the last question I asked my mom was, "okay, there's a term

'God Bless America' but I don't understand why it's just God just bless America. Why

is it not, why is the term not 'God bless the world'? Because if God created the world

in seven days, then how come it's not 'God bless the world'? And if that, that's the

case, there's only one true God, then why are there other countries that worship

other gods?" And my mom didn't know what to say. She replied, she said "oh, well,

they have their own God they worship." and I go, "yeah, but there's only one God, so

why wouldn't' they all worship it?" I was very confused and she didn't even know

what to tell me. About five years later, I got to, uh, fly overseas to Hong Kong and

travel. And I went to Hong Kong and Singapore and that's when I really started

disbelieving. Not just doubting, but disbelieving in the existence of any God at all. I

had been living overseas for two years. I was definitely becoming a disbeliever. I

was definitely on my way there. I was right on the fence. I, I was a little bit too

scared to admit I was an atheist, but what did it for me was a, I was on YouTube, and

I clicked on a video entitled "Bill O'Reilly versus Richard Dawkins. And I didn't know

who Richard Dawkins was. And I clicked on it. And he told Richard Dawkins, he said

"You know, I just don't see how we can have this world be so perfect, have the tides

go in, the tides go out, the sun come up, the sun go down, I don't think it could have

happened" and Richard Dawkins looked at him and just gave this little smile. Just

like a little, the smile was indicating "dude, that's not going to work on me, I'm sorry,

it's not" and when he said "we have a perfectly good understanding of why the tides

go in and why the tides go out." When he said that, I almost stood up and applauded.

That was the changing moment in my life when I became an atheist. Absolutely

100% was when Richard Dawkins said those words. I realized there are intelligent,

rational people out there. Because that was the first one I ever really came across of

his caliber. So I owe that to him definitely.

My advice to anyone who is doubting, cause I, I only have a couple of people I

know back in Texas, only two that I know that I can tell are semi-atheist, atheistic on

the inside, one of them would ironically be [airplane noise and speech bubble

appears to block his lips], who I've talked to. She, uh, she still, you know, claims she's

a Christian, but she's also told me in secrecy that she does have atheistic thoughts in

her mind. And she loves hearing me talk about it. Me and her have a great

relationship. Uh, another one is actually one of my ex-girlfriends back in high school.

You know, I'm 31. I graduated in 2001. She, uh, she sent me some Facebook

messages saying that she supports what I believe, or don't believe actually. That's

the only two people I know in Texas that I really can point at the top of my head.

I owe the fact that there are atheists coming out, myself included, to the

internet. Absolutely 100%. The internet has given us a way to communicate with

each other around the world to find out that we're not alone. It's okay. It's just like

the gay movement. The gay movement has been the exact same way. People, I think, have always been gay, but they're just now recently coming out because more and more people are coming out. And it's easier to come out now. It's more socially acceptable. The internet is doing the same thing for, with the atheists. Um, my advice to anyone who wants to come out as an atheist to their parents who may be super hard-core Christian, unfortunately, in my opinion, there is no direct way to do it. There are several ways and it is whatever way works best for you. There is a rip the Band-Aid off method, you can just come out and say "I'm an atheist. Sorry guys, I'm an atheist." Um, do expect to not get, you know, good feedback from that. I have heard some horrible stories on the *Atheist Jesus*, uh, Facebook page about children being kicked out of their homes and everything, which I find horribly disgusting.

There is no real, I don't think there is a real way to do it. You just have to do whatever is, you feel comfortable with. Me, I did not just come out and say it. Mine was a slow progression. I think my family, after I moved out especially, could slowly see me progressing in that non-believing side because I kept on coming back up to them and the questions that I had asked them before my years of growing up in my teens, I was now able to answer because I had traveled the world. I had the advantage of traveling the world. Again, I did not have fundamentalist parents. My parents are cool with my, my non-beliefs. I say to anyone who wants to come out, It's gotta be up to you when you want to come out. You've gotta feel comfortable. I think that comfortability comes from your strength within. Back when I was 18, 19,

20, I would have never admitted that I don't, that I doubt God exists. I was way too scared. I wasn't old enough to defend myself intelligently. There's no way. I would be ripped apart. Now if I see anyone pointing fingers at gay people, or non-believers, or any religion for that matter, if I see anyone pointing fingers saying that "you should believe what I believe and if not you're going to hell," that's when I stand up, stand up to them and put them in their place. I don't get attacked anymore because I know how to defend myself. It has to be whenever you're ready. Now, if you feel strong enough and you feel like "I can't live in hiding" then you have to do what you have to do and you have to come out. But it's' up to you. But just expect that it may not come off well. But I fully support someone coming out and just ripping the Band-Aid off and saying "I'm an atheist and you're going to have to get over it." If someone comes out as an atheist and their parents reject them, kick them out of the house, that's not a family I would want to live with in the first place. The more I learn about religion, the less I like it. I have come to this conclusion that the more religious you are, the more you don't like people who aren't religious and you don't like them just because they don't share that belief. So, I don't want to be associated with people like that. I want to be associated with people who accept me for who I am. There's no real straight answer to coming out. It's all about how comfortable are you and how quickly or slowly do you want to come out as an atheist to your family. So, this, uh, concludes my video. And, uh, guys, I'm Dirk, and I'm proud to be an atheist. See ya.

Link to the video as of spring 2016:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AVm_MwEdpI&feature=youtu.be

KATHLEEN SCOTT'S "COMING OUT TO MY CHILDREN ABOUT MY ALCOHOLISM"

What follows is the text from Scott's article published on *HuffPost Parents* on 24 August 2013. As of Spring 2016, the full-text of the article could be accessed at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathleen-scott/coming-out-to-your-children-about-alcoholism_b_3480217.html. The text that follows is from the *HuffPost Parents* article penned by Scott:

When I introduce myself from here on out, I am supposed to say, "Hi, my name is _____, and I'm an alcoholic." That's the first step, according to the brochure some nice woman handed me as I entered my first AA meeting day before yesterday.

As I have left that space in my introduction blank, and am using a pen name for this column, it's fairly obvious I'm not all the way there yet. That step, and all the subsequent ones I'm going to have to tread, are not entirely clear to me yet.

It's not that I have any doubt that I'm an alcoholic. I know what alcoholics look like, and they look a heck of a lot like me. And my mom, and my aunt, and my grandfather, and my cousin, and my great-grandmother. I am well-acquainted with alcoholics, and the specter of all those slurry words and empty, glassy stares looms large in my childhood memories.

I hated it. Hated them sometimes, and I swore that no matter what, I'd never end up like them. I'd never allow my children and grandchildren and nieces and great-grandchildren to equate me with "alcoholic."

For a long time, I simply avoided alcohol, figuring that would be the best way to circumnavigate my inheritance. In high school and college, I was everyone's designated driver, the responsible one who, as a bonus, could lord all that moral superiority over my drunken classmates, mother, and grandfather, knowing I was above all that. I would never be like them.

When I had my own children who are now 14 and 9, and it came time to deliver an ultimatum to my mother — she'd have to choose, alcohol or her grandchildren — I had already begun to slide down the same slope she'd traveled. I knew I was slipping, and I knew where that slope led, but to reveal that reality to anyone else would be to admit I might just be like my mother, and I was too angry at her to allow any such comparison.

During their early childhood years, avoiding that comparison was easy. My children were too little and too oblivious to comprehend how many glasses of wine I'd had. I figured I'd get the drinking back under control by the time they were old enough to be observant. Because, of course, I could stop any time I wanted to.

I just didn't want to.

This year, we started to talk to our oldest, very observant child about alcohol. We were matter-of-fact and blunt. Alcohol has had a tight and devastating hold on both sides of his family for generations. We told him that it's going to be very important for him to pay attention to his drinking. To know the difference between social drinking and problem drinking.

Yes, very important, I repeated, as I sociably sipped my wine.

Three days ago, sociability slipped into problematic which slipped into unconsciousness, and I was careless enough to let that happen in front of my entire extended family. I'd like to say my observant eldest child did not notice, but I have no idea. I don't remember. That's a blank, too.

The next morning, my father informed me that I'd have to choose — alcohol or them — and I chose them. I cried, threw up, showered, and drove to my first AA meeting. My husband offered to go with me, but I knew these were steps I'd have to take alone.

When I walked into that church basement, packed with one hundred other alcoholics, I wasn't fooling anyone. No introduction was needed; I was simply one of them.

This weekend, over a dinner without that problematic glass of wine, I will have to look my son in the eye and say the words that fit into that blank up there at the top of this page for the very first time. While I am scared to death, it will be a relief. It will be the end of ten years of sliding and the beginning of my journey back uphill.

My son introduces me to his friends as many things — mother, wife, writer — and I'm incredibly proud of those labels. Proud enough that I refuse to allow this newest label to obliterate everything else I've worked so hard to become. I've finally

done the math and figured out that the only way I get to keep those other identities is to admit the word "alcoholic" to my list.

Because when my son is my age, I want him to be proud of me, particularly if our mutual inheritance grabs hold and threatens to drag him down. As his mother — particularly his alcoholic mother — the most important gift I can give him is the power of my example to guide him if he ever stumbles upon the treacherous terrain of our family's well-worn slippery slope.

The writer has chosen to remain anonymous.

APPENDIX B

List of Names of People who are Transgender who were Murdered in 2015

According to the *List of Unlawfully Killed Transgender People* that is

maintained on *Wikipedia,* there were over twenty people who were transgender

who are known to have been "unlawfully killed" in the United States in 2015.

Biographical information can be found on the wiki:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_unlawfully_killed_transgender_people#2015

Below are the names of those whose lives were taken:
- Papi Edwards
- Lamia Beard
- Ty Underwood
- Yazmin Vash Payne
- Taja DeJesus
- Penny Proud
- Bri Golec
- Kristina Gomez Reinwald
- Keyshia Blige
- Vanessa Santillan
- London Chanel
- Mercedes Williamson
- Amber Monroe
- Kandis Capri
- Elisha Walker
- Tamara Dominguez
- Fernanda 'Coty' Olmos
- Kiesha Jenkins
- Marcela Estefania Chocobar
- Amancay Diana Sacayán
- Zella Ziona
- Yoshi Tsuchida