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## The Creation of Coherence in Coming-Out Stories

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I've realized now that I can tell all my friends about the kind of guys I like to date. . . . I can write to some 30,000 Cal students a week on the importance of (and secrets to) drag makeup. And, honey, I don't care if the whole world knows that I can't take it as a bottom. But I can't show these clippings of my newspaper columns to my dad. I can't tell my grandma that the "ugliest" baby she has ever seen took first runner-up in a beauty pageant and has serious hopes of becoming a future Miss Gay Universe. I can't tell my mom about my love life (or lack of it). I haven't come out. At least not where it counts: to my family.

Eddie Jen, "It's Snowing in Berkeley," *Daily Californian* (October 9, 1996)

The 1996 reelection of Bill Clinton, the first gay-friendly U.S. president to engage in public discussion of homosexuality, marked a begrudging public recognition, if not acceptance, of homosexual ways of being. As columnist Deb Price of the *Detroit News* put it, "Anyone doubting [the significance of Clinton's reelection] should take a moment to ponder how a Clinton defeat would have been interpreted: Every newspaper in America would have at least partially blamed his gay-rights advocacy" (November 8, 1996). Historically momentous for gay visibility and equality, Clinton's reelection overlays a plethora of less dramatic though no less consequential instantiations of the changing status of lesbians and gays in the United States today. Each week, one hears of one or two more municipalities adding sexual orientation to its antidiscrimination clause; of another corporation expanding its employee benefits package to include domestic partners; of a city instituting a domestic partners registry. In mainstream popular culture, lesbian and gay characters are no longer exclusively and simplistically portrayed as criminals or deviants. They now appear in recurring roles on TV shows like *Roseanne* and *Melrose Place*, and their relationships are common themes in films and theater. Since the late 1960s, the number of books on the subject of homosexuality has proliferated from 500 or so to roughly 9,000 in the late 1980s, an increase of nearly two orders of magnitude (Gough and Greenblatt, 1990: xxi, cited in Plummer 1992:

xiv). But the mainstay of this cultural transformation is the sheer number of individuals who accept and define themselves, at least in part, by their homosexuality, and this increasing number is itself reinforced by the admittance of the topic of homosexuality into public discourse. Homosexuality in the United States has come out of the closet.

Even so, homosexuality as a personal characteristic is still highly negatively valued, and there is vehement resistance to granting it legitimacy within the fabric of U.S. society and politics. National polls continue to indicate that a majority of Americans disapprove of homosexuality, and over a third would not vote for a political candidate because of his or her sexual orientation. As of late 1996, in only nine states of the Union and in the District of Columbia was discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment, and public accommodations illegal. And in no state are homosexual relationships legally protected.<sup>1</sup> Violence against lesbians and gays is a major component of hate crimes, and it is rising in frequency (28 percent in five major cities between 1994 and 1996) with the increase in gay visibility. In custody battles, a homosexual parent is typically denied custody or visitation rights of his or her own children, even when the competence and sanity of the other parent is in doubt. Teachers still get fired for being gay or lesbian; lesbian and gay youths are subject to antigay harassment. And children who are active in their community promoting lesbian and gay rights still do not talk to their parents about their personal lives.

Thus, cultural norms are in a state of flux as far as social approbation of homosexuality is concerned. It is therefore interesting to study the ways in which individuals incorporate their gayness into their personal narratives. Any decision to define one's self as lesbian or gay is necessarily one which requires explanation. Indeed, it is the explanation, or to use Mills's words, "the ultimates of discourse" (1940 [1984]: 19), through which an individual's narrative can be understood by and thus shared with others. So common and necessary is this personal and social process of making sense of a lesbian or gay identity via the personal narrative that it has been termed the "coming-out story." Before going into the details of the forms and functions of the coming-out story, I want to consider those properties of identity which are established and expressed through language.

### *Language and Self*

The central role of language in the constitution of self is alluded to by Linde's definitive statement of the personal narrative: "Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity" (1993: 98). The presentation and construction of the self is a social process conducted through the telling of a personal narrative. In order for one individual to express herself to another, not only must she be able to tell a life story which is intelligible, but both she and the audience must reach more or less the same understanding of the point of the story.

Linde (1993: 100) identifies three characteristics of the self which are maintained and expressed through language:

- continuity of the self
- the self's separateness from and relatedness to others
- the reflexivity of the self

*Continuity of the self* refers to the sense that one's previous experiences are related to one's later experiences and that the past bears on who one is at the moment. In western cultures, continuity of the self is constructed linguistically through the *narrative presupposition* (Labov 1972), whereby the events in a narrative are assumed to occur in a temporal sequence analogous to that in which they are reported. Further implicit in the narrative presupposition is the relationship of causality. Events which are temporally ordered permit the inference that those events are causally related to each other. Since, according to Linde, "The ability to perceive or create a sense of historical continuity is an achievement of a normal personality" (1993: 101), the narrative presupposition itself is fundamental to the creation of a coherent self-presentation.

The second property of the self that may be established and maintained linguistically is the *self's relationship to others*. The ability to reconcile the self's separation from and relatedness to others is the basis for what R. D. Laing (1969) terms *ontological security*, the feeling of being in possession of a whole, integrated person, whether coping with the stresses of social interaction or those of isolation. According to Linde, all languages appear to have a way of distinguishing the speaker (first person) of an utterance, the addressee (second person) to whom the speaker is directing the utterance, and the nonparticipants (third person) of the speech event in which the utterance is being made; hence, all languages recognize the existence of distinct persons. Linde further points out that the "reuseability" of pronouns by any speaker to refer to the self, her addressee, and others who are neither the speaker nor the hearer establishes the self as related to others:

*I* is not a name, like Susie or Jack, that refers to the same person, no matter who uses it. Rather, *I* changes its reference depending on who uses it. To understand this is not merely to understand an arbitrary fact about language use—like the fact that we do not say *childs*, but instead say *children*. To understand the shifter nature of *I* is to come to comprehend that others exist in one's world who have the same nature and who must be seen as separate but fellow beings. (Linde 1993: 112)

At a more abstract level of linguistic structure, the personal narrative (and other self-presentational genres) functions, on the one hand, to present the speaker's self as distinct from her addressee while, on the other hand, engaging in a social process in which the interpersonal relationship between speaker and addressee is evoked. For instance, the telling of the narrative may serve to demonstrate how the addressee herself should behave in similar circumstances. An individual may evidence her group membership by modeling the structure of her narratives after that of the group (cf. Silberstein 1982, cited in Linde 1993: 113); she may make reference to interests she shares with her interlocutors.

Finally, Linde (1993: 121) refers to the *reflexivity of the self* as the third property of the self that is displayed and maintained linguistically. All questions of

"How am I doing?" whether in relation to one's own standards or in relation to the standards of others if such a distinction can even be made, require the ability to make evaluations, and the evaluations cannot be done by the immediate liver of the life; the task requires a watcher and narrator who is related but not identical. It is through this feature that the self can change. The individual can look back on her life, even if it was just a moment ago, and put it into narrative form, to be revised and edited in accordance with the norms and values shared by herself and her audience. She can thereby present a self which is socially (and morally) agreeable. Tannen demonstrates the complexity of this relationship between the self and other through the concept of involvement. She invokes Chafe's tripartite schema (Chafe 1985, cited in Tannen 1992), whereby conversation consists of the speaker's self-involvement, the involvement between the speaker and her audience, and the speaker's involvement with what she is talking about. Tannen illustrates how the speaker's attempt to retrieve from memory extraneous details, on the surface, constitutes self-, and not other-involvement, since the details do not clarify or provide relevant information for the listener. Yet the interpersonal relationship between self and other is implicated in that such details enhance the imagery and make the narrative seem authentic, thereby drawing the listener into the speaker's narrative.

### *Language and Lesbian/Gay Identity*

When an individual encounters in herself a characteristic, such as gayness, that is subject to cultural disapprobation, then, theoretically, within that culture, that aspect of self cannot be incorporated into a tellable narrative. From the perspective of cultural norms, a gay self is not recognized as valid (or as existing at all) and hence not worth justifying. Thus, some individuals undertake aversion therapy or commit suicide as a way of doing away with what is culturally disapproved and hence ego-alien. Yet, the existence of the coming-out story is evidence that individuals do manage to incorporate gayness into their identities.

This chapter examines the structure of the coming-out story in order to ascertain the coherence principles by which the individual makes sense of his or her gayness. Of particular interest are those aspects of the narrative that have to do with how the speaker deals with recognition of a gay self. The group whose stories are under examination consists of Asian American and European American male college students, aged 18-27. Coherence principles of the coming-out stories of the two groups are delineated. The stories were told in rounds and, with the permission of participants, tape-recorded during a ninety-minute Coming-Out Stories rap session held in celebration of Coming-Out Week on a university campus. The chapter is arranged as follows. First, the coming-out story is defined in terms of its content and form. Next follows a comparison of one component of the coming-out stories of Asian Americans and of European Americans: the self-recognition of gayness. Finally, the coherence principles by which self-recognition is achieved are extracted.

*Defining the Coming-Out Story*

Because homosexuality is a contested concept (Barrett, this volume)—that is, one for which no prototypical meaning exists—whether or not an individual is homosexual is a matter of personal decision rather than convention. While, as Sweetser (1987) notes, meanings of words generally depend on “simplified or prototypical schema of personal experience,” the invisibility of homosexuals does not lend itself to personal experience out of which a prototype notion of a homosexual can emerge. As a result, definition as homosexual begins with the individual and the self’s internal and highly idiosyncratic experiences and with the verbalizing of those emotions, instead of with any external criteria based on a simplified schema of a range of complex experiences.

The term for the act of naming and accepting one’s same-sex emotions is *coming out*, the shortened form of *coming out of the closet*. It is a metaphor for both the recognition to oneself and the act of disclosing to another one’s homosexuality. As implied by the question “How out are you?,” coming out is a matter of degree rather than of a binary opposition. Just as there is no prototypical meaning of homosexuality,<sup>2</sup> so too is there no central definition of coming out. I will attempt to demonstrate that coming out, and whether or not it has taken place, is also something that varies according to individual opinion. Nonetheless, in any instance of coming out, there appears to be at least one of three recognizable properties: self-definition as lesbian or gay to the self; self-presentation as lesbian and gay to others; membership in a series of ongoing acts of self-definition, and/or self-presentation as lesbian or gay.

Depending on one’s perspective, coming out to self can be seen as necessarily instigated by external homosexual behavior or, more probably, as constituting a gradual process of self-acceptance as homosexual. On the one hand, the nonpsychological viewpoint might hold, for instance, that the first experience of having sex with a person of the same sex constitutes coming out (Barrett 1989: 48). But categorical denial or rejection of the label *homosexual* for such behavior may continue even during long-term same-sex relationships (e.g., Barrett 1989). On the other hand, the extent to which gayness can rely not on behavior but on self-recognition as such is exemplified by the following personal advertisement.

I don’t consider myself gay. I’m a regular guy who likes men who like only men. I’m tired of nonsense & insincerity. I’m 40, tall, bearded, good looking, healthy, caring, straight forward & very discreet. I like to work outdoors & walk. I like good music & art. If you feel as I do, are about my age, handsome & interested in a relationship [*sic*]. Write Dept. 3819 Gannett Newspapers, 14614. (Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle/Times-Union*, 28 December 1994)

As the ad demonstrates, self-naming works both ways in the absence of well-established social naming conventions for identities whose cultural status is in flux. An individual may retain the labels reflecting normative (i.e., culturally accepted) identities despite nonnormative (i.e., culturally disapproved) preferences

and behaviors; or he<sup>3</sup> may readily adopt labels (e.g., drag queen) consonant with his nonconventional behaviors and preferences. Among some members of the lesbian and gay community, however, criteria for identifying lesbians and gays are sufficiently stable such that there are even terms for those who are, according to these criteria, lesbian or gay but who refuse or have yet to define themselves as such. Thus, individuals such as the above advertiser would be deemed *closet case* or *fag-to-be*, or in more generic psychoanalytic terms, in denial (about his sexuality). Nonetheless, variable and contested though its definition may be, for the purposes of this chapter, coming out to self is the ability to utter phrases synonymous with "I am gay."

The definition of self-disclosure to another is equally protean. It can be brought about with or without the individual's express intention but also depends on the addressee's understanding. The intention to come out can be signaled with nonverbal cues, such as wearing an earring only on the right earlobe or suppressing the urge to conceal gay newspapers, paraphernalia, and photographs when guests visit.<sup>4</sup> Verbal disclosures span a range of explicitness, from "I am gay" to an ambiguous statement about being "together" with a same-sex lover. Yet, in all instances, if the addressee does not recognize the intention, that is, if he does not apprehend the significance of the earring on the right earlobe, then it is questionable as to whether coming out has taken place. Similarly, if the addressee chooses not to recognize the intention, then the discloser's status as a gay individual, with respect to the addressee, is still unclear. If through the gay individual's own unintentional behavior the addressee discovers the secret, coming out may or may not be said to have taken place, depending on how the individual assesses his own behavior, that is, if he "really wanted" to come out or if it was accidental. In the latter case, the term *outing oneself* may be appropriate. If he announces his gayness for one day only and never does so again, allowing, for the rest of his life, the heterosexual presumption to stand, he may or may not be said to have come out. In spite of the difficulty of determining a set of conditions for whether or not self-disclosure to another has taken place, for the purposes of this chapter, coming out to other will be viewed straightforwardly as the successful and intentional communication by one individual of his gayness to another to whom such information has not previously been conveyed by the gay individual himself.

Coming out to self and to other can overlap. The experience of articulating one's gayness to another can simultaneously induce an internal acknowledgment (much as insight in the psychotherapeutic setting can be gained merely with the linguistic formulation of feelings never before verbalized). What is clear is that the act of coming out is fraught with ambivalence on the part of both the discloser and the recipient, rendering precise definition difficult, as explained earlier.

Finally, coming out is processual. The fundamental nature of reproduction and its implications for what constitutes a legitimate relationship in this culture, and the consequent pervasiveness of heterosexuality and the vigor with which it is sold, give rise to the default assumption of heterosexuality as the natural condition of all members of the culture. Consequently, gays have to continually recreate themselves through self-naming to ensure that they are heard and understood as individuals who define themselves as and therefore are gay. At the same time, they

are faced with the burden of having to decide with every interaction whether or not to self-disclose. It is by virtue of being compelled to make this decision with every interaction that coming out is processual. Not everyone can know, and therefore not everyone does, and the default assumption of heterosexuality remains in place. Still, with every disclosure, that assumption becomes further dislodged.

Coming out is therefore a speech act that not only describes a state of affairs, namely the speaker's gayness, but also brings those affairs, a new gay self, into being. By presenting a gay self, an individual alters social reality by creating a community of listeners and thereby establishing the beginnings of a new gay-aware culture. Coming out is, in this respect, a performative utterance (Austin 1962) that can be seen as revolutionary.

### *The form and function of the coming-out story*

In this section the structure of the personal narrative, as proposed by Labov (1972), is reviewed. Next, the coming-out story is defined in terms of a particular type of personal narrative, the life story. Finally, one story is examined to exhibit the characteristic structure of a coming-out story.

#### The personal narrative

Labov (1972b: 359) described the narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred." The clauses in question are termed narrative clauses, whose change in sequence alters the meaning of the event sequence. The structure of the narrative can include the following: *abstract* (an encapsulation of the story and why it is being told), *orientation* (an identification of the situation, consisting often of past progressive verbs that describe what was happening before the first narrated event), *coda* (the signal that the narrative has ended and that returns the participants to the present), and *evaluation* (how the speaker makes his points with regard to telling the narrative). A minimal narrative consists of two ordered narrative clauses, which Labov termed the "complicating action."

The pertinence of Labov's conceptualization of the personal narrative to the present analysis rests on the fact that, like the narratives upon which his analysis is based, the coming-out stories examined herein were elicited. This is reflected in the discrete, fully developed, structure of the narratives. In actual conversation, however, narratives are considerably less distinguishable from the surrounding conversational context. Moreover, a speaker who produces a spontaneous narrative is under a social obligation to establish the reportability of the narrative, its relevance to the conversation up to that point, how it impinges on the relationships among the participants of the conversation, its connection to the activities in which they are engaged, and so on. A teller of an elicited narrative is not burdened to the same extent since some degree of relevance has been preestablished by the addressee who has elicited the narrative. While the reportability of an event can be established just by virtue of its being unusual, such as spotting a naked man walk-

ing down a busy street, it can also be indicated by an explicit evaluation, as in the following (to use Polanyi's 1976: 60 example),

and here's the funny part

The evaluation directs listeners as to how they should interpret what is to follow. In the first person narrative, evaluatives also position the speaker as one who shares the norms of the listener. They may also have suggestive force in demonstrating to the listener what he should or would do under similar circumstances.

In any case, since the telling of a story is socially situated, it must contain some linguistic or paralinguistic devices to guide the listener toward an interpretation of the story which matches more or less that intended by the speaker. These devices are the evaluations, which, at minimum, justify to the listener why the story is worth listening to. The life story is a particular type of first-person narrative inasmuch as it is a story that "makes a point about the speaker, not the way the world is" and "is tellable over the course of a long period of time" (Linde 1987: 344). Because coming out can be considered an event about the speaker which has extended reportability, a story about coming out is classifiable as a subtype of the life story.

#### One person's coming-out story

The coming-out story can be defined as one that describes the speaker's internal experience of recognizing and acknowledging his gayness and the external experience of revealing that information to others. It may consist of accounts of one or both forms of coming out. That coming-out stories exist at all and are recognized by members indicates their centrality in defining a gay identity as well as a gay culture. For the gay individual, telling a coming-out story presupposes self-acceptance and self-definition as homosexual.<sup>5</sup> This presupposition is one of the central evaluative components of the coming-out story. A coming-out story is not only an account of the reportable event of coming out but a source of social validation for the narrator. It is told to a receptive audience (e.g., other gays) who can affirm the gay identity of the narrator and reinforces bonds of mutual support among participants.

Another major evaluative aspect of the coming-out story involves the ways in which the narrator (and his interlocutors) cope with the recognition or disclosure of his sexuality. Fear of exposure has prompted gays to engage in deception and other forms of concealment, but they have also felt hypocritical for doing so. Consequently, in telling their coming-out stories, speakers often distance themselves from the protagonist's actions, indicating to the audience that they now know better than to engage in the deceptive behavior of their former selves.

The following story, broken down into parts (a), (b1), (b2), and (c), reflects the three characteristics of coming out: the internal coming out (a), the external coming out (b), and its processual nature (c).<sup>6</sup> In excerpt (a), although Mark reports no trouble coming out to himself and therefore does not offer a narrative account, he does supply an explanation for how he circumvented inner conflicts concerning his gayness.



Uh I'll go next. /?/ Um I's pretty lucky 'cause um, I didn't have to deal with what a lot of people said, that coming out to yourself is very hard. Um I knew I was attracted to men before I knew that was wrong, and I think that was very strange, 'cause I I was attracted to um, uh other guys when I was pretty young, still. Um so I guess the circumstances around me coming out was just uh, coming out to other people an' an' that has been hard um, uh, two years ago, not anymore. Mark [a], Asian American male, aged 20)

The rationale Mark employs is that his attraction for men preceded his awareness of cultural values concerning homosexuality. I discuss this further in the section on coherence principles. However, at this point it is reasonable to ask why the speaker feels the need to preface his narrative with an explanation of his coming out to himself rather than simply going on to tell his stories (b). First of all, as mentioned, self-definition as gay involves two dimensions, coming out to self and coming out to other. As a member of the gay culture, the speaker understands this and thus addresses both aspects. But more crucially, in the context of a culture where heterosexuality is the unmarked case, gayness is ego-alien, and hence its acceptance by the individual of gayness in himself bears explanation, either by way of narrative or the discourse unit of the explanation, as defined by Linde (1993), who points out that speakers use explanations to "establish the truth of propositions about which the speakers themselves are uncomfortable, or to defend propositions whose validity they feel their addressee has in some way challenged" (92). Particularly in the case of coming-out stories, speakers anticipate that the implausibility of a proposition, acceptance of one's own gayness, will raise doubts in the addressee's mind. Consequently, the speaker addresses the issue of coming out to self despite the fact that, in this case, the speaker's narrative principally involves coming out to other.

After settling this issue, Mark goes on to tell a few stories of coming out to other people. The following account (b1) in Table 16-1 exemplifies how a segment of a coming-out story may consist of all of the components enumerated in Labov's analysis. The external evaluation given at the beginning of the narrative ("Um, it was kinda funny") explicitly states the reasons for telling the story. An abstract then sums up the story as involving lying and deceitful behavior. Next are three orientation clauses that situate the narrative events, followed by a series of narrative clauses that describe the protagonist's thoughts and actions. The (failed) outcome of the coming-out attempt signals the end of the narrative.

In (b1) the protagonist does not actually come out, so the speaker goes on in excerpt (b2) (Table 16-2) to relate more instances of "lying and deceit" before ending with a story in which there was no question of his success in self-disclosing. Again, the structure of the accounts conform to Labov's analysis of the personal narrative. Although there are many more evaluative clauses in part (b2) of the speaker's story, all of the components that make up the personal narrative, with the exception of the abstract, are present. Since this stretch of speech falls within the scope of the abstract mentioned in (b1), there is no need for an abstract for (b2). Furthermore, (b2) consists of two stories, one about lying to a priest and the other about hedging with an acquaintance in spite of mutual suspicions of the other's gayness. Although the first story ends not with a clear-cut coda but with an evaluation ("I lied to a priest"), it directs the audience's interpretations of the events

Table 16-1. Mark (b1)

<i>Clause</i>	<i>Structural Type</i>
Um, ih- it was kinda funny	Evaluation
'cause there w- it involved a lot of lying and deceit?	Abstract
Um, 'cause when I first came out, I went to this Neuman, um the Neuman center?	Orientation clause
The Catholic church had a, a panel discussion on gays.	Orientation clause
And I was sittin' in the audience,	Orientation clause
And I'm all, well now, I'm here w- um, they'll probably think I'm gay by association.	Narrative clause
So I'm all, well how do I mitigate this?	Narrative clause
So I raised my hand	Narrative clause
and I said um, I said, isn't being gay, um, a psychological thing sδ that you can change it?	Narrative clause
So everybody looked at me	Narrative clause
and they started going, boo:!	Narrative clause
So I go, shit!	Narrative clause
So um, so then you know, I I left the meeting	Narrative clause
um not coming out to anybody really,	Coda
maybe I did but um.	Evaluation

just reported and alludes to the abstract mentioned earlier, namely, the lying involved in the protagonist's attempts to come out. The fact that the stretch of talk that follows is unrelated to the priest incident confirms (to both analyst and audience) that it was intended to finish another narrative without ending the current story.

Following this segment is part (c), which pertains to the processual nature of coming out, signaled, in particular, by the "it," which refers to the person-by-person disclosure that makes up the coming-out process. This processual aspect is also underscored by the use of the past progressive in "it has been going well."<sup>7</sup>

And um it's been going well since then, I'm out to all four of my siblings, um I'll probably wait till uh till I get outta school before I tell my parents though. 'S been pretty good. (Mark [c])

This coming-out story, containing an explanation of coming out to self, three narratives of "lying and deceit," and a record of who has been and who has yet to be told, is structured in accordance with the definition given earlier. I now compare the structures of the stories of Asian American and European American males.

### *Asian American and European American Coming-Out Stories Compared*

As mentioned, the stories under examination take place in a rap session. In a rap session, individuals assemble to discuss issues or problems unique to those sharing

Table 16-2. Mark (b2)

<i>Clause</i>	<i>Structural Type</i>
So like the following year, I went back uh, to another meeting and this time it was explicitly just gay people, a gay group meeting over there, and I came late on purpose	Narrative clause Evaluation
'cause uh, you don't wanna be the first one there. And you know, I came late on purpose,  and I didn't realize, you know, being late wasn't like being gay late 'cause gay late's very late. So I get there, and there's nobody there. And I'm all, Shit!	Narrative clause/ evaluation Evaluation Narrative clause/ evaluation Evaluation Evaluation Narrative clause Evaluation Narrative clause
So then one of the father, one of the priests at the /?/ came up to me, he goes, are you here for the: meeting? 'Cause he didn't wanna say <u>gay</u> meeting, 'cause it was still very low key back then and I'm I'm all, uh: no I'm not. So I lied to a priest. [laughter]	Narrative clause Narrative clause Narrative clause Evaluation Evaluation Narrative clause Evaluation
So I went next door, and I was giftwrapping presents for the homeless, and I'm all, Okay I'll time this now, I'll go back over there when they break for ah refreshments, you know. So I'm over there wrapping for a while, and I go back, and I bump into a friend of mine who works at the bank with me, and I think, well, we sort of suspected each other, he's been trying to tell me that he's gay, 'cause we're we're uh working, he'll be telling me, oh I went to church in the Castro last Saturday, and I'd just say, oh okay, you know. He's all, you know, all kinds of hints, and I'm just ignoring it.	Narrative clause Orientation clause Narrative clause  Orientation clause Narrative clause Narrative clause Evaluation Evaluation
But now I'm, he goes he goes, we're standing there at the meeting, and we're pouring drinks, and he's all, oh what are you doing here? I'm all, oh I don't know, what are you doing here? And so then we just came out to each other.	Narrative clause Narrative clause Orientation clause Orientation clause Narrative clause Narrative clause Coda

membership in the same oppressed or stigmatized group and for which there is no institution within which those issues can be managed. Discussion usually takes the form of the exchange of stories, which serve to give definition to participants' experiences and to provide different ways of handling them, particularly in the face of discrimination and silencing by the politically dominant. Participation in the rap session is thus governed primarily by common experiences resulting from group membership rather than by acquaintanceship among participants. Above all, participants assume that it is therapeutic both for the speaker to verbalize his difficult experiences to a receptive and supportive audience and for audience members who have had similar experiences to feel validated by hearing the experiences of others.

In the coming-out stories under examination, speakers evidence awareness of the rap session frame (cf. Tannen 1993) in the telling of their stories. Remarks such as "My name's Kevin," which preface stories, allude to the fact that the gathering is among individuals who have not previously met. Others, like "Okay, I'll go next," signal the nature of turn-taking in the rap session. Individuals have the option of volunteering a story or yielding their turn to the next person. When speakers are done, they indicate this with remarks such as "That's it." Less linguistically salient, though still manifest, is the awareness that turn length should be such that everyone is permitted the opportunity to decide whether or not he wants to speak. Speakers tell their stories without diverging from the subject under discussion or occupying the floor for too long, in order to leave enough time for as many potential speakers as want to volunteer a story. Given that there is the sense among participants of an "acceptable" turn length for discussion of an "acceptable" topic, speakers choose to emphasize different components of their stories in ways that correlate by ethnicity.

The general pattern that emerges from these data is that Asian Americans, in contrast to European Americans, focus on experiences of coming out to others much more than on those of coming out to self. This difference is reflected in the proportion of the turn allotted to speakers' feelings about their gayness and to the outcome of coming out to others. Asian Americans spend almost all of their turns telling about the experience of coming out to other and virtually no time on the experience of coming out to self. Unlike European Americans, Asian Americans do not present a self that is racked with inner conflicts. It is interesting to examine the selves that members of each group do present and how each accounts for acceptance or incorporation of his gay identity in his narrative.

#### *Coming out to self*

Whereas the coming-out-to-other component presupposes the speaker's acceptance of his gayness, it is concerned only with external social events and does not address the psychological issue of how the speaker worked out any possible threats to his identity posed by gayness. In a sense, the coming-out-to-self component is the most important part of the coming-out story, since it enables the individual to understand his life as both a moral person — that is, one who shares cultural norms with his listeners — and a gay person. A gay individual must necessarily construct

a coming-out-to-self story prior to telling coming-out-to-other stories, since the reverse, telling a coming-out story prior to coming out to self, would be interpreted as schizoid behavior, or, at the very least, require an explanation.

The coming-out-to-self component in the stories of Asian Americans tend, in these data, not to occur in narrative form. Instead, speakers explain how they managed to avoid inner conflict and often omit any reference to their own feelings about their gayness at all. The coming-out-to-self component, part (a) of Mark's narrative, reproduced here, is structured as an explanation as defined by Linde (1993: 90–94).

Uh I'll go next. /:/ Um I's pretty lucky 'cause um, I didn't have to deal with what a lot of people said, that coming out to yourself is very hard. Um I knew I was attracted to men before I knew that was wrong, and I think that was very strange, 'cause I I was attracted to um, uh other guys when I was pretty young, still. Um so I guess the circumstances around me coming out was just uh, coming out to other people an' an' that has been hard um, uh, two years ago, not anymore. (Mark [a])

As a discourse unit, the explanation consists of the position to be proved and the supporting arguments. In (a), the statement of the proposition to be proven is "I's pretty lucky 'cause um, I didn't have to deal with what a lot of people said, that coming out to yourself is very hard." Mark then shows why this statement should be believed. Because he learned of his attraction to men before he became aware of societal disapprobation, he was able to accept his homosexual feelings easily.

Speakers may even decide not to mention coming out to themselves and instead simply proceed to tell a story about coming out to someone else. Still, the justification takes the form of an explanation, X so Y.

Well I'm Thomas and um, I'm I'm out to selected people but um, you know I find myself—I mean I find my coming-out story boring so I'm not gonna tell the whole thing. (Thomas [a])

Given that this statement is made just at the beginning of his turn, "the whole thing" can be said to include the coming-out-to-self component of the speaker's story and therefore one part of the coming-out story he declines to tell. According to the speaker, its omission is warranted because it is "boring." Thus, the speaker appears to be more concerned with the impression made upon his audience in the telling of his story than with the purpose of the telling in the rap session, adding to the repertoire of alternatives of how speakers came to be aware and accepting of their homosexuality.

European Americans portray protagonists whose self-acceptance is preceded by a sometimes lengthy internal struggle with their gay feelings. This struggle, or inner conflict, is transformed into words using metaphor, inner speech, expressive phonology, repetition, and detailed imagery, to name a few of the devices that appear in the data. Rather than adding to the propositional content of what is being expressed, these devices add to the emotional effect of the story. The following is

an excerpt from a longer narrative that describes the journey toward self-acceptance. Several of the devices mentioned are employed by the speaker to describe the protagonist's attempt at, and the consequences of, denial of his homosexual feelings.

When I was fifteen, I started thinking to myself, you know, this probably isn't a phase, I'm gonna have to deal with this someday soon. But I said, I'll deal with this later. When I was sixteen, I had my first massive massive crush on this guy in my high school, and I'm like, I do not how- know how to deal with this. So I sort of just let it sit, and it sit, and it got bigger, and it got bigger, and it got bigger, and then w- finally when I was seventeen, I could not deal anymore, and so I went and told my mother. (Gil, European American male, aged 22)

In this excerpt, the distance with which the speaker refers to his feelings—as evidenced, for example, by the use of impersonal pronouns (“it,” “this”)—reenacts the denial he describes. Metaphor describes his feelings (“it got bigger”), inner speech reports his growing realization of their reality (“I started thinking to myself, you know this probably isn't a phase . . .”; “But I said, I'll deal with this later”; “I'm like, I do not know how to deal with this”), and repetition conveys the intensity of his feelings as well as his own inability to control them (“I . . . just let it sit, and it sit, and it got bigger, and it got bigger, and it got bigger”).

Another speaker, John, makes extensive use of repetition to describe how badly he wanted to be straight. (The transcription has been arranged to emphasize the repetitions, which are underlined.)

My focus shifted to now, the one thing, the one goal I had was to be cool.

It- I just wanted to fit in.

I wanted to fit in.

All my friends you know, were like, hetero- er heterosexual,  
or at least they thought of themselves as heterosexual.

They had girlfriends and all that kind of stuff.

I wanted to fit in.

I wanted to be cool.

I wanted to have a girlfriend.

I wanted to um,

well I I w- wanted to fit in.

That was my my goal, my life's goal now. (John, European American male, aged 22)

In describing the protagonist's plight, the speaker employs “I wanted to . . .,” the paradigmatic structure upon which the excerpt is built. The speaker becomes so involved with the repetition (and presumably the intensity of emotion that it exhibits) that he repeats the paradigm once again before realizing that he has run out of new information with which to fill it (“I wanted to um, well I I w- wanted to fit in”). Indeed, a few lines following this excerpt, the speaker confirms his involvement with the text by reporting “I was really confused, just like I am talking about it right now.” The evaluative effect of the list is that it communicates the strength

of the protagonist's sentiments about being gay and the associated desire to belong. The last line in the excerpt ("That was my goal, my life's goal now") enhances the rhythm of the sentence, by contrast, and hence the intensity of the feelings conveyed by the repetition.

Now that we have seen some typical examples of excerpts from the coming-out-to-self components of the stories of Asian and European Americans, we may consider one Asian American exception found in the data. As mentioned, most Asian Americans tended to discount coming-out-to-self experiences as uneventful by giving explanations. In contrast, Mike related a narrative of his coming out to self. The following is the coming-out-to-self component:

Okay, my name is Mike? Let's see, I've been out for one year, exactly one year last April, and the rea- one reason why I came out was um, um, I've always known since I's like seven or eight years old, I guess. I don't know the first time you think about these, things, but the reason why I came out 'cause I was I I know a lot of people, I have a lot of friends but /?/ so lonely like, during the month of February, March, basically isolated myself from everybody, would um, never return calls, didn't call anybody noone, /people call me back/, and was doing really poorly in school, and um, and suddenly you know I was, it was really bad, you know, I was really feeling depressed. So then I deci- and then one time there was this movie showing on TV, channel two, and I forgot the name of it but it's from- about a family, a dysfunctional family, one was gay, one was alcoholic, and the and the girl uh, the- and the woman was- had a bad marriage. And one, during the movie, um the best line that I heard I still remember you know, was when well, when the son came out to his father and uh, and 'cause he had tried to commit suicide and uh, he tried smashing himself into a pole, and then what happened was, the father or the mother said, look you think we would rather visit you in the graveyard than you know, accept you who you are. And then just thinking about /?/, I said myself, /?/ my parents, would I want to see my parents visit me in the graveyard? They would just, it was it was unfair for me and it was unfair for them. So then I decided to go out there and just look for things. (Mike [a], Asian American male, aged 20)

Distinguishable in passage (a) is the overall narrative of how the speaker came to accept his homosexuality and the narrative embedded within it describing the TV program that prompted his acceptance. That his concern is simply to give a summary report of his emotions before proceeding with the other components of the story rather than focusing on the coming out to self is illustrated by several points. First, the apparent abruptness of the onset of his depression and its equally sudden departure is quite different from the stories of European Americans, who spend years fighting off their gay feelings. The impression is that the disturbance to the protagonist's self-image is not as extreme or persistent as it is for European Americans. Second, unlike the previous European American speakers, Mike summarizes rather than dramatizes his emotions. This is evident from the absence of any of the devices used by the white speakers. Instead, the speaker does no more than state in gross terms that he was "really depressed" and that "it was really bad." His perspective is oriented externally, that is, upon his self-imposed isolation from social intercourse and the suffering of his schoolwork, both of which were caused by

his depression. Third, and crucially, his original intention regarding his account was that it serve only as a subnarrative or introduction to the longer, more detailed accounts of his coming out to other, as evidenced by the "So then I deci-," which presumably would have ended the coming-out-to-self component if he had not self-interrupted at that point and proceeded with the description of the film. The fact that his coming-out-to-self account does indeed end with "So then I decided to go out there and just look for things" supports this argument. Had he continued with his sentence, that is, not self-interrupted, the passage up to that point would have served as an orientation for the coming-out-to-other narrative rather than as a narrative in its own right, as does the coming-out-to-self constituent in the other Asian American speakers' stories. Finally, in comparison with the rest of his rather lengthy turn, the intended coming-out-to-self story and the actual one are both quite short. This forms quite a contrast to the urgency and duration of inner conflict that characterizes the coming-out-to-self component of European Americans. Thus, while from a structural point of view this speaker's coming-out-to-self component constitutes an exception to the other stories told by Asian Americans, particularly because of the problems he had in self-acceptance, nevertheless, the tendency to focus away from internal experiences and the comparatively easier time had by Asian Americans in accepting their gay selves is evident in the structure of this speaker's story as well.

By examining the structure and the linguistic devices employed in the telling of the coming-out-to-self constituents of coming-out stories, we have seen that Asian American speakers are less concerned with the emotions associated with their coming out to self than European Americans are. The former do not address the issue at all, explain it away, or summarize without delineating the events through the use of external evaluations, while the latter spend most of their turns dwelling on what went on in their minds before they came out to themselves.

#### *Beyond cultural coherence systems*

According to Linde (1993: 12), in order for a text to be recognized as coherent, two relations must hold:

One is that its parts—whether on the word level, the phrase level, the sentence level, or the level of larger discourse units—can be seen as being in proper relation to one another and to the text as a whole. The other is that the text as a whole must be seen as being a recognizable and well-formed text of its type. Thus, a cowboy movie is understood both because its internal structure is understandable—that is, the shootout follows rather than precedes the explication of the problem over the ownership of the ranch—and because it stands in a tradition of prior texts recognizable as cowboy movies.

Implicit in this definition is the idea that textual coherence is a product of the interaction between speaker and hearer. The speaker is expected to create a text whose coherence is evident to or can be constructed by the listener, while the listener attempts to understand the speaker's text as coherent and to indicate that this is so. *Adequate causality*, one of the coherence principles in life stories recog-



nized by Linde (1987, 1993), is an expectation that all members of the culture have for a coherent story, and speaker and listener negotiate as to whether or not it has been achieved. On the one hand, the fulfillment of adequate causality depends on social norms of what constitutes a reasonable sequence of events, a decent person, a proper life, and so on. On the other, it also depends on the speaker's own creativity in constructing an account whose causality will be acceptable to the listener. For instance, we saw that Mark's explanation of how he managed to accept his gayness arose from the general unlikelihood that a member of a homophobic culture would simply accept this aspect of himself. If he had not explained his assertion that he avoided the problems of self-acceptance, it would have lacked adequate causality. Thus, it was necessary to spell out the reasons for self-acceptance. In the case of the rap session, where talk tends toward monologue and stories are told in rounds, however, whether or not a speaker's stories have adhered to coherence principles is less overtly subject to negotiation.

As mentioned, part of what constitutes adequate causality is determined by what is culturally defined as proper. What is an expected or recognized cause or explanation forms part of what Linde calls *coherence systems*. Linde (1993: 164) defines a coherence system as a set of assumptions that provides "a means for understanding, evaluating, and constructing accounts of experience." Some of the coherence systems used by Americans employ concepts from expert systems that have undergone simplification once they have reached the general public. Among the ones she discusses are Freudian, astrological, feminist, and Catholic confessional systems of thought. When speakers construct life stories, they rely on these systems to provide a means for structuring events so that the criteria for coherence are fulfilled. Linde contrasts the following constructed exchanges to show how one but not the other meets the criteria for coherence:

- 3a. How did you come to be an accountant?
- 3b. Well, I guess I have a precise mind, and I enjoy getting all the little details right.
- 4a. How did you come to be an accountant?
- 4b. Well, my mother started toilet-training me when I was six months old.  
(Linde 1993: 18)

The response in example 3 invokes the white middle-class American commonsense coherence system, which holds that individual character traits and preferences supply adequate justification for one's professional choice. As for the response in example 4, unless the listener shares the Freudian coherence system whereby current personal circumstances can be ascribed to events in one's childhood, the justification supplied does not provide a satisfactory account for why the speaker became an accountant.

In previous work (Liang 1995), I have shown that in telling coming-out stories, European American males portray a protagonist who attempts to reject or deny his gayness and who does so until some facet of his survival is at risk.

Since a stigmatized self is by definition not justifiable, the only way it can be dealt with is to carry cultural assumptions of normality to their logical conclusion. At this point, individuals arrive at the dilemma of having to decide between continuing to deny their gayness at the cost of friendships, their sense of morality, and sometimes, their lives or accepting their gayness in the face of cultural disapprobation. As mentioned, European American males tend to emphasize the coming-out-to-self component at the expense of stories describing coming out to others. I now consider the structure of one narrative told by a European American speaker in order to discover the coherence principles employed therein.

The following narrative contains characteristics of what Polanyi (1985) refers to as *generic narrative*. Narrative clauses in generic narratives are signaled by modal verbs such as *would* and *used to*. But most striking about the story is the use of negation.

Um, I'm one of those people who had a great deal of trouble coming out to myself. Uh, I didn't come out to anyone in high school and I didn't come out to anyone during my four and a half years at Cal. Uh I, you know, I would see the MBLGA table or something, and, you know, I would never even think of approaching it. Um, it wasn't really until um, late last year th- that I started coming out, and this was after a period where, you know, I could see that there were a lot of costs associated with being in the closet for an extended period of time. Uh, basically, I found myself just kinda retreating from the world in a lotta of different ways. Uh, I've always, you know, have valued my friendship with my parents, but it was just ver- much easier just not to have to deal with /?/ Or even you know, I would even avoid calling them on the telephone, they they live in Orange county. Uh, same thing with friends. I just didn't keep up with people 'cause e- the easiest way to live a lie is to not uh, have to deal with someone, or just not have the issue come up. (Don [a], European American male, 27 years)

In addition to using the modal verbs, Don employs negated simple past tense verbs to describe a state of affairs by negation, that is, in terms of what has not happened ("I didn't come out to anyone in high school," "It wasn't really until um, late last year that I started coming out," "I just didn't keep up with people"). Thus, as well as describing the past, he evaluates it. He denies an expectation, either explicit or implicit, of the positive. The statement "I'm one of those people who had a great deal of trouble coming out to myself" reveals the speaker's assumption that coming out to oneself is expected. Following this is a series of statements describing what the protagonist had failed to do, and how he therefore fell short of morally proper behavior. The fact that the speaker subsequently terms the protagonist's behavior as "living a lie" indicates that the positive proposition which he has been denying should have taken place. Thus, the speaker's attitude toward the protagonist is one of censure. The past is therefore, as Labov (1972) and Tannen (1979) have noted, reportable because it shows that the events described deviated from what the speaker now holds to be expected or proper. This latter point is crucial.

Don has described the protagonist's efforts at concealment and the way in which the hypocrisy he felt at doing so prompts him to self-disclose. He remarks

on the fact that he started coming out after he began to see that his secretive behavior came at the expense of his own sense of morality ("This was after a period where I could see that there were a lot of costs," "I just didn't keep up with people cause the easiest way to live a lie is to not have to deal with someone or just not have the issue come up"). The assessment of the protagonist's behavior as "living a lie" is adduced as the reason which prompts him to self-disclose. Thus, the moral stance taken by the speaker vis-à-vis his own previous behavior is that of regret for his own cravenness and deceptiveness. The ways in which speakers understand their acceptance of their homosexuality have to do with depicting a protagonist who pushes his false assumptions to the limit until he finds that some aspect of his identity is at stake, such as his sense of moral self, as in Don's case.

We may now examine the coming-out-to-self constituents of the stories of Asian Americans to discover the coherence principles, the ways in that they justify and make sense of the incorporation of a gay self, that prompt them toward self-acceptance as gay. We saw in the previous section that speakers place a comparatively low emphasis on internal conflict. While European Americans recount their desperation and the measures they took to try to be straight or produce detailed descriptions of their attempts at denial, Asian Americans tend not to mention any desire to be heterosexual, nor do they dwell on inner struggles. Instead, speakers frame the absence of internal conflict in terms of circumvention of cultural valuations by having become aware of their attraction to members of the same sex before acculturation of knowledge of negative valuations of same-sex attraction. As seen earlier, Mark explained that he knew that he "was attracted to men before [he] knew that it was wrong" and thus avoided the conflicts that he might have experienced if he had been socialized into the belief that homosexuality was wrong. Thomas doesn't even address the issue of coming out to self at all because it is "boring."

The coherence principle invoked by Asian Americans is that they became aware of their same-sex attraction prior to learning the homophobic values of the culture. Ted, with whom I conducted an interview to elicit his coming-out stories, employed the same reasoning as Mark regarding acceptance of his gay identity, that is, he was attracted to men before he became aware of societal disapprobation. When I queried him about later socialization in values having to do with homosexuality and how that might retroactively affect one's self-image, he acknowledged that feelings about one's homosexuality could thereby be affected. Furthermore, as seen in the excerpt, he admits to having been aware of the negative valuation of same-sex attractions and the consequences of revealing it to others, in spite of his previous assertion that he learned of his homosexuality *before* he knew it was socially disapproved.

I guess so, it's it's um, y- yah, um, I think that uh, y'could, but in my case there's never a factor of um, wanting to change myself? An' I an' I an' I sort of uh attribute that to the fact that I was sort of aw- self-aware as being gay from a very young age. I'd never really wanted y'know to cure myself or to change myself. Uh my primary concerns were, how do I be a gay person and not let anyone else know about it, right? So it's not

like um, I just wanted to fool everyone around me. I didn't want to change myself. Right? So um, like yeah, I do- you do learn, well I I did know that everyone else would think it was wrong, even at that age, but it's not something I n- I really kinda took for granted myself. It's just something um, I knew would make other people ostracize me and therefore, they couldn't know. (Ted, Asian American male, aged 26)

But his explanation does not satisfactorily account for his success and the failure of others who also realize their attractions early on in avoiding internal conflict. Seeing this, he must assert that he never internalized the assumption that homosexuality should be negatively valuated ("it's not something I n- I really kinda took for granted myself"). This implies that at least some Asian Americans do not sustain completely the values of Western culture, particularly in the arena of homosexuality.

Nonetheless, the ways in which Asian Americans make sense of having accepted their sexuality is similar to the way whites do. Just as European Americans claim to arrive at a point at which some aspect of their survival is no longer viable under the assumptions (i.e., the negative valuation of homosexuality) derived from the cultural common-sense system as defined by Linde (1993), so too do Asian Americans claim that their innocence regarding the same cultural values enables them to accept themselves as gay. Both groups justify gayness outside of any system of cultural norms, but one does so as an outsider of the culture, both maturationally and also, by implication, ethnically, and the other does so when it finds that cultural assumptions cannot accommodate its existence. The exception is the case of Mike, for whom the television portrayal of a boy who attempts to kill himself because of his gayness is vivid enough to enable him to imagine the same fate if he indeed continued to remain depressed. For him, self-acceptance is a question of survival as it is for the European Americans, which suggests that Mike may have internalized Western homophobic values.

### *Conclusion*

Researchers in cross-cultural psychiatry have recognized the apparent somatization of emotions among members of Chinese culture<sup>8</sup> (Marsella, Kinzie, and Gordon in Draguns 1990: 260). Even third- and fourth-generation Chinese Americans in Hawaii have been found to experience depression as physical symptoms, in spite of their assimilation into American culture (246-247). One possible explanation, employed in psychotherapy textbooks that address crosscultural issues (cf., e.g., McGoldrick, Pearce, and Giordano 1982; Berman 1990), is that whereas the overt expression of emotions would interfere with personal relationships, thereby drawing attention to the individual at the expense of relationship, somatization of emotions into physical pain allows for the retention of some form of social structure (e.g., the role of caretaker and the one cared for).

According to Linda Wai Ling Young (1982), this attention to harmonious relations is also manifested in Chinese discourse strategies. Whereas Westerners, particularly Americans, prefer a discourse strategy in which a point of view is first presented and then followed by supporting arguments, the Chinese see the West-

ern strategy as confrontational and disruptive of social harmony. In Chinese discourse, reasons are stated first so that listeners can be led gradually to the position held. But to the Westerner, this strategy is oblique, hence the stereotype of the "inscrutable" Chinese.

One can speculate that Asian American gays evidence some aspect of this orientation toward external (i.e., social) reality in their coming-out stories. As we have seen, in all of the stories told in the rap session in question (as well as in the stories collected by the researcher in interviews and in informal settings), the protagonist is portrayed as one whose attention is directed toward the external aspects of coming out. He may report the external consequences of his feelings (e.g., Mike's poor academic performance) or the social circumstances of his disclosure (e.g., the words uttered in coming out). But in all instances, Asian Americans downplay the inward-looking, coming-out-to-self component of the coming-out story.

That Asian Americans tell coming-out stories at all means that the coming-out story constitutes one discourse genre in their repertoires of linguistic behavior. That is, it marks them as communicatively competent members of an American gay community. They demonstrate understanding of its role in defining an American gay identity. But the fact that their stories do not reveal the inner conflicts to the same extent as those told by European Americans can be attributed to adherence to the values of Asian culture, whether as a cultural predisposition to withhold expression of emotions or as a bypassing of certain presuppositions of Western culture (such as the communication of emotions and the homophobia that are embedded therein). That their stories assume a distinct form, different from those of European Americans, reflects their tie to Asian culture and thus indexes their identity as Asian. In telling their coming-out stories, they reaffirm not only their own existence as gay Asian Americans but also that of the gay Asian Americans in the audience.

#### NOTES

1. Although its legal implications have yet to be assessed, the signing into law by Clinton of the federal Defense of Marriage Act defines marriage, as used in federal statutes, as an institution between a woman and a man, and is, if anything a symbolic gesture affirming the institution of heterosexual marriage and heterosexuality.

2. The Kinsey scale is a seven-point gradient scale of sexual orientation based on sexual behaviors and preferences, ranging from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. Homosexual behavior comprises all but the exclusively heterosexual category.

3. Because the subjects of this study are male, the masculine generic pronouns will be employed hereinafter.

4. The term for this is "straightening up," a pun on the word *straight* used for heterosexuals.

5. It should be added that an account of recognition of homosexual tendencies does not in itself constitute a coming-out story. Coming out implies a commitment to a gay identity. Accounts related in aversion therapy or in the Catholic confession booth, or more recently, in Ex-gay Ministries (*SF Weekly*, 1 March 1995), are not coming out stories. Rather, the coming-out story is defined here as those stories told to receptive audiences for the purposes of creating solidarity and community with other lesbians and gays, and the reinforcement through (re)construction of the teller's lesbian or gay identity.

6. Because all of the stories analyzed in this chapter can be divided into at least two of

the three constituents, the letters are used to designate the corresponding constituents for those stories as well. Where no letter appears in the line identifying the speaker of a passage, it can be assumed that it is excerpted from but does not itself form one of the constituents.

7. Wood (1995, this volume) suggests that the difficulty in bringing the reader back to the present, evidenced in the absence of codas, is reflective of its ongoing, incomplete process. The iconic representation of the coming-out process is also seen in the coming-out stories told by the participants in the rap session. The order in which the stories are told (beginning with coming out to self, followed by coming out to other, and concluding with the people still to be told) and the way they comprise a series of narratives rather than a single one, as exemplified by Mark, illustrate the processual nature of coming out.

8. The notion of somatization is seen by Dragus (1990: 246) as a possibly Western bias toward the psychological origin of emotional pain. He suggests that externally-oriented cultures, like that of the Chinese, may experience emotional correlates of depression but emphasize sensitivity to "actual bodily manifestations of depression".

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