

# Performing and Communicating Queer Identities online: YouTube Coming Out Videos

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## Research Questions

1. Which common features and structures exist between different coming out YouTube videos? Which moves appear to be "genre-specific" (cf. Swales 1990)?
2. Which strategies are used by the content creators to appraise their own identity and the coming-out process?
3. What role do everyday narratives play in constructing queer identities?
4. Are there differences concerning the communication of sexual identities vs. gender identities (cf. also Zimman 2009)?

## Methods/Frameworks

### Positive Discourse Analysis (cf. e.g., Martin & Rose 2007, Macgilchrist 2007)

Focusses on texts that "seek[...] possibilities for transformations which can overcome or mitigate limits on human well-being" (Fairclough 2013: 14)

### Appraisal Theory (cf. e.g., Martin & White 2005)

Concerned with "the means by which writers/speakers positively or negatively evaluate the entities, happenings and states-of-affairs with which their texts are concerned" (2005: 2)

### Queer Linguistics (cf. e.g., Bucholtz & Hall 2006)

Aims "to challenge and uncover dominant cultural ideologies surrounding heterosexuality and binary gender which are often hidden or implicit within language use" (Jones 2019: 87)



Gay



Lesbian



Bi woman



Bi man



Asexual



Genderfluid



Trans female



Trans male



Agender

## Common experiences

### Negative evaluation

- recognizing that I was gay, and honestly **hating myself** fully for it
- so **fucking scary** (.) it was **so scary** and it's like I- (.) for a while was (.) **scared to say** that
- I was really **scared of it** and I didn't want to be feeling that way
- I **didn't** think I was **right**
- this girl who's- who's just turned sixteen (0.5) and (1.0) has been **feeling really (0.5) broken** but without (0.5) really knowing why
- I was (1.0) **super nervous** to actually even tell my husband
- I remember just being so like **@deathly afraid@** of leaving my friend group of girls to go into the (.) boys bathroom
- I was **upset**. I knew I was trans but I didn't want to admit it as it seemed **traumatic**
- What is the thing that is making me **unhappy?**

After coming out

### Positive evaluation

- it shows that you can live (a) **happy, positive life** as a gay man
- it does **feel so freeing** really really fucking does
- labeling it (0.7) is what gave me clarity and it's what (.) made me **feel much more confident** in it because I did struggle so long
- And that's what's made me **happy**.
- it was the **biggest weight off my back** that I didn't even realize was (.) on my back essentially. [...] it's the **best decision** that I ever made.
- I honestly feel so: (.) a-**much better**
- I was like "This is me! This is what I have to do. This is what's **going to make me happy**, like @finally thank you, thank you@"
- I'm **still getting there**, but I'm **so much better** with it now
- Fully me. But like in a way that I'm **100% fine** with.

## Everyday narratives

More or less **banal events**, experiences and impressions that make up our **everyday lives** (Gülich 2008: 403)

'ordinary' events may turn out to be **significant**: established through **context** or **function** of narrative (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2002: 127f.)

I remember in **second grade** my teacher s- for whatever reason, like would make all the girls put their hair up into a ponytail and because I had long hair, she would make me put my hair up as well and **everybody was like** "Oh *hahaha, so funny, Sam has put, you know, (.) their hair up*". I didn't care, I thought it was - I was like, I was living the life, you know. **Anyways, back to the story.**

### Memory marker

### Chronology & Focussing on specific memory

### Quotative & Direct speech

### Return to the main sequence

### Dual role of the narrator

Use of 'their': Replacement of, presumably, masculine pronoun indicates **adaptation** of story to **current state of knowledge**; use of neutral instead of feminine pronoun indicates lack of knowledge at time of memory

## Summary: Common features and differences

### Common features in videos:

- Timeline of coming-out process (Self – Friends/Family)
- Evaluation of situation as negative before coming out, as positive after coming out
- Positive reactions by family and friends
- Reference to online content

### Differences between gender- and sexuality focused coming-outs

- Trans videos focus on different topics than others, partially because of the different stages in the transgender process (e.g., mentions of transition steps, revealing gender history)
- This is mirrored in the everyday narratives: a lot more variety of narrative topics; however, these topics are typical of trans narratives (cf. Zimman 2012)

## Outlook: Future research in QuIP (Queer Identities Project)

### Discourse shaping queer identities:

- Coming-out discourse on online platforms → which strategies do speakers use to find and establish their identities
- Language and discourse can help people to shape and establish their identities (cf. Queen 2014)

### Queerness in language variation:

- Sociolinguistics: gender often still as a binary category (but: Levon 2021; Bruns & Leiting in print).
- Sexual orientation also a valuable category (e.g., Motschenbacher 2010)

### Diachronic and contrastive perspective:

- Text corpora based on the San Francisco and Berlin archives
- Use of appraisal strategies (cf. Martin & White 2005) and common collocations to understand the history of queer identities in the U.S. and Germany

## References