

Identity formation in gay male coming out stories

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Abstract

The use of narrative is a common tool in creating and sharing one's identity. For the gay community, one of the most salient examples of narrative's intersection with identity is that of the coming out story, as these create an autobiography of a gay individual's identity as such. This paper explores how, within an interactive setting, these stories make use of various narrative elements to develop the narrator's identity as a gay male. Using the framework of the narrative of personal experience to analyze the narrative dimension of tellership as well as that of the Most Reportable Event, the analysis will show that coming out stories serve important functions in the development of identity of the self, the larger gay community ("us"), and also those outside the community ("them"). Further, I argue that the purpose of the story, as found through the Most Reportable Event, goes far beyond simply relating the events of one's coming out to others, and instead points to the acceptance of the narrator's identity by members outside the "us" group.

Key Words: coming out, coming out stories, co-construction, identity, Most Reportable Event, narrative, tellership.

1. Introduction

Narratives play an integral role in human development and communication, and they can be used in many ways. One important way that these narratives provide meaning in our lives is through the formation and presentation of identity. In the gay community, it is widely accepted that one of the most important manifestations of narrative and identity is the coming out story. This paper seeks to answer the questions of why and how these stories are so integral to the identities of gay men¹, and explores the importance of the coming-out story through a narrative analysis of a set of coming-out stories told in an interactive setting.

Liang (1996) posits that coming out is an abstract and idiosyncratic concept, as its meaning differs from person to person and therefore becomes impossible to empirically define. However, to analyze coming out stories, a working definition of what constitutes coming out must be explained. Among the gay community, and shown through research (c.f. Liang 1996; Chirrey 2003), there are varying degrees of coming out, and as Liang explains, coming out exists on a sliding scale, not as a binary distinction. One can be out only to oneself, but not to the public; one can be out to close friends, but not co-workers or family; etc. In addition, one can be defined by others as gay based on one's actions, interests, etc. but not have formed a personal identity as that of a gay male, and vice versa. Generally, coming out refers to a conscious acknowledgement of being gay, whether to oneself or to others. According to Chirrey (2003), to come out to others requires, in some way, a performative Speech Act for coming out to truly have taken place. For the purposes of this analysis, then, I will use the assumption that applies to all members of the community of speakers used in the presented data – that of having fully come out in all aspects of one's life.

Being 'fully out' is not to say that the process of coming out is necessarily over. There is much overlap in the meanings of the coming out process and one's identity as being gay. Therefore, since we spend our lives constructing and sharing our identities, using narrative to do so (Ochs and Capps, hereafter O&C, 1996), it is fair to say that a self-identifying gay male will spend the rest of his life creating, explaining, and modifying his identity, which will in turn create an effect on the narrative of his life and his identity as a gay male, and which will subsequently affect his coming out story as well.

1 To be sure, coming out stories are an integral part of the lives of other members of the LGBT community as well. However, as the data in this analysis comes entirely from a group of gay males, that will be the focus of this paper and this analysis, and will thus be the referent of these stories throughout this paper.

As will be discussed below, the coming out story is, in essence, a subset of the life story, as it creates an autobiography of the narrator's life as a gay individual, and can span virtually, if not all, of one's life. Coming out narratives, like any narrative, differ in size, scope, depth, detail, length, time frame, etc. based not only on the individual and their personal experiences, but also on the audience. Much like Basso's (1996) study of Kalapalo narratives' use of co-construction and contextualization to create stories dependent on participants and collective experiences, coming out stories in an interactional setting similarly rely on such surroundings to aid and create meaning. This paper will explore the meanings and the importance that co-construction has on the narratives to create an analysis of the ways coming out narratives function and why.

The structure of this paper will be as follows: The background section will outline relevant definitions and previous research on which this analysis is based; the methodology section will explain the procedures used to collect and subsequently analyze the data; the data presentation and analysis will focus on analyzing the narrative data through the use of the framework outlined in the background and methodology section; and the interpretations/conclusions will synthesize the analysis and provide directions for future research.

2. Background

When analyzing discourse through the lens of narrative, there first must be a discussion of what constitutes a narrative. While the decades since the days of Labov and Waletzky's 1967 definition of narrative have produced a wide variety of working definitions for narrative (c.f. The Journal of Narrative and Life History's 1997 Special Issue), for the purposes of this paper, narrative will be defined in Labovian terms as a narrative of personal experience; that is, “a report of a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker by a sequence of clauses that correspond to the order of the original events” (Labov 1997). While Labov (1997) acknowledges this definition as an arbitrary designation for technical purposes, for this paper, the requirement of personal experience proves to be an important distinction to be made in defining coming out narratives, as the coming out stories of an individual are crucially linked to that individual's biography in a profound way.

Ochs and Capps (2001) take this definition as well to outline what they define as a group of narrative “dimensions”. They explain that these dimensions “will always be *relevant*

to a narrative, even if not elaborately manifest” (2001: 19, original emphasis), allowing for their implementation in different ways and to varying degrees within any given narrative. Thus, each narrative employs these dimensions individually and for differing purposes. They list the following as the relevant dimensions to narratives: tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance. As the scale of each of these dimensions varies, a differing narrative is presented, and O&C provide a way to look at the varying ways these dimensions are used to create narratives.

On one end of each spectrum, O&C identify the characteristics of 'canonical' narratives – those that have been studied for their clearly defined characteristics, such as can be found in L&W 1967: one active teller, highly tellable account, relatively detached from surrounding talk, linear temporality, and constant moral stance (2001: 20). On the other end of the spectrum, however, they define the characteristics of narratives that have been studied less and of which less is known; namely the side of the spectrum that occurs in highly interactive settings, defined by having: multiple active co-tellers, moderate tellability, narratives embedded in surrounding discourse, non-linear temporality, and fluid moral stance. As most of our opportunities to share narrative come in interactive settings, having these scales of the dimensions of narrative becomes increasingly important to analyze and understand the intricacies of narratives-in-interaction (Georgakopoulou 2006). In particular for this data, I will focus on tellership, and how the use of co-construction highlights the functions of coming out stories in interaction.

In addition to the focus on co-construction through tellership, this paper will also discuss the narrative feature of the Most Reportable Event as posited by Labov (1997). With Labov's definition that “a narrative of personal experience is essentially a narrative of the most reportable event in it,” this is relevant in seeking the main idea conveyed through these narratives and the function that the narratives serve. This will be discussed in more detail in the data analysis, and is a crucial component of the coming out narratives in this analysis.

3. Methodology

The data used for this analysis were collected among a group of gay male friends in one session during and after dinner one evening. In order to extract data, the participants were informed at the time of the recording that a discussion of coming out stories was requested, though no further prompting from myself was given once the conversation was underway.

Despite having knowledge of what topic I was interested in for conversation, no details were given as to what specifically was being researched, and conversation continued in an interactive pattern, changing topics and returning to previous topics throughout the data.

Within the narrative data, short segments were at times omitted from analysis at the request of the participants. It should be noted, however, that none of the portions that were requested be removed consisted of direct segments of any participants' coming out narrative. Aside from their embeddedness within the complete interaction, each omitted section comprised a tangential topic of conversation and therefore did not have a direct impact on the analysis.

Collectively from the six individuals present in the data, three coming out narratives and several side narratives were told. While several of the side narratives did involve aspects of one's past or moments within the time frame of their coming out story, they were not included in analysis because their purpose was only tangentially related to the coming out stories being told.

The analysis assumes and takes as a requirement that the act of coming out to both the self and to others has taken place for a coming out narrative to exist. Within this assumption, the analysis focuses on the dimension of tellership in the narratives, as well as a discussion of the importance of the Most Reportable Event (MRE) in the coming out narratives. Together, these features of the narratives show the ways coming out narratives function in identity development of individual as well as in- and out-group identity, and highlights ways that these stories serve a purpose beyond simply relaying the events of one's coming out.

4. Data Presentation/Analysis

As mentioned above, it is not crucial for each of the presented narrative dimensions to play the same role in each narrative, and indeed each of the collected narratives for this analysis does portray a varying degree of use for each of these dimensions. Thus, some of these dimensions can be more prominent in some narratives, and others may not be as salient. One of the crucial elements found in each of the narratives, however, was that of Tellership and Co-Construction. While the other dimensions are clearly present, the function of tellership highlights several aspects of what makes coming out stories so important in identity formation among members of the gay community.

Tellership, or the “extent and kind of involvement of conversational partners in the

actual recounting of a narrative” (O&C 2001:24), can range from having just one active teller, as in the canonical narratives portrayed in L&W 1967, to having multiple active co-tellers. The extent to which co-participation occurs depends on the dynamic of the group, as well as the social norms associated with the topics of discussion. In the coming out narratives presented here, while co-tellers inherently presented themselves as a result of being in an interactive setting, the analysis reveals distinctions in what is and is not allowed to be co-told in conversation. Tellership within this data was crucial for the construction of the narrator's identity by highlighting the importance of the creating and sharing of the identity of the self, as well as the creation and perpetuation of the identity of the larger group (both at the level of the friendship between these individuals and of the larger gay community). These factors, along with the importance of the Most Reportable Event, will each be discussed in turn below.

4.1 Identity of the Self

With Coming out stories being a subset of one's autobiography, and serving as a backbone in the solidification of an identity as a gay male, these stories function profoundly on an individual level. Even in an interactional setting, the importance of the individual is highlighted in the way stories are told and what interlocutors allow themselves and others to share with the group. For example, the remark that directly led to the telling of the first coming out narrative expressly mentioned what was allowed to be said:

Excerpt 1. A's Story

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | A | how (.) what was his (.) coming out story (.) like |
| 2 | T | you'll have to ask. (***) about that [one- |
| 3 | A | [you don't know this |
| 4 → | T | oh I know it I jus- don't really feel like its. [°its his business you know° |
| 5 | A | [oh, ok. fair enough |
| 6 | T | I can talk about your coming out story (.) |
| 7 | | actually I'm not sure that I could, not that I know it (.) |
| 8 | | actually lets hear about your coming out story |

Excerpt 1 shows T's statement “its his business you know,” explaining that it is inappropriate for him to paraphrase or share aspects of his partner's story as suggested by A in line 1 of the excerpt. A accepts this, and is then prompted to share his own story. This

highlights the individualized, personal nature of coming out stories in the minds of the interlocutors, showing a perception that these stories are deeply rooted to the individuals themselves (as the absence of the person in question prevents not only the telling of that individual's story, but also prevents details of their story from being shared), and the understood importance that the narrator retain full control over the story's dissemination.

This isn't to say that the tellership of these stories is that of just one active teller. On the contrary, there are many instances where co-telling occurs and there are multiple co-tellers for the story while still maintaining the importance of the individual.

Excerpt 2. A's Story.

100 A and like, I'm in the car with my dad on the way to the airport, [like
101 → D [°@@@@° =
102 A leaving for the next three months and then he's like
103 → D =°@@@@°
104 A so. I hear that girls don't do it for you
105 PP @@@@@@@@@@
106 A {uh:::} oh my god I'm leaving in like five minutes,
107 I'm stressed out I'm li-
108 and you- you choose this time to bring it up? (1.0)
109 R well ↑he- you know
110 → D an- and what was your answer?
111 I remember that one
112 A it was like I gue:ss
113 PP @@@[@@@@@

Excerpt 3. A's Story.

67 A cause- I mean I- I feel like weird about talking to this to my mother this
like, particular, incident
68 T wai- be li- how did- her mom. know about you? (.)
69 A she babysat me when I was a kid=
70 D = from [the website
71 T [bu- bu- you were like, obviously gay:? Oh. N-
72 A [no I-] {I mean [they knew- they knew}
73 D [@@@]
74 T [oh ok I missed that part yeah sorry. I was {unintel.}
75 A and they- they recognized my name

[Identity formation in gay male coming out stories]

76 T ok. [Got it. Got it.
77 A [they knew who I was
78 so they called my mom =
79 T = ok. Got it.
80 A and she wanted some like, solace or something
81 I don't know but. a- pparently

As Excerpts 2 and 3 show, there are multiple examples of co-telling and co-constructing these narratives. Line 70 from Excerpt 3 even shows D responding to T's question about A's story. While this is in line with O&C, who state that “those present contribute to one's life history by co-telling the evolving story through verbal comments and questions, gestures, eye gaze, facial expression and other modes of body comportment” (1996), the important thing to note about this, however, is what can and cannot be co-told.

Looking at Excerpt 2, where D is quietly laughing in anticipation of a particular event in the narrative, as evidenced further by his question in lines 110-111, we can see that the co-telling is hinted at and not directly expressed, even among interlocutors such as A and D, who clearly know each others' coming out stories. Instead of telling a part of the story on their own, interlocutors signal through laughter or questions that an upcoming moment is important while allowing the narrator whose story is being told to relay all relevant information. With this, we can see that even co-tellers are aware of the individual nature of these narratives, allowing the narrator with the direct experience to share the events, as it has crucially entered into the narrator's biography of personal experiences, not those of the other members of the interaction.

For stories such as T's, which was unknown to the interlocutors in the data, co-telling was almost exclusively limited to questions of clarity and evaluatory laughter, allowing T to have the floor for a greatly extended period of time and share his story unimpeded. Indeed, throughout the data, each of the interlocutors participated in a sense of tellership that ensured that each story, though co-told to some extent, remained individualized and highlighted the importance of each coming out story as a way for the individual to express ways that the narrative created and formed that individual's identity of the self.

4.2 Identity within the Group

In addition to the importance of a coming out story for developing a self identity, coming out narratives are used in several ways to form and display identity within the group,

not only of the individual's community of friends, but within the larger gay community as well. This, too, can be seen through the ways tellership directs a narrative, as well as the extent to which certain topics are or aren't discussed, relying instead on pre-suppositions and larger cultural knowledge.

Excerpt 4. T's Story

74 T so:, and then finally junior year >an I was like< I can't stand the shit
anymore
75 → so (1.0) and I was like, well I can come deal with gay things
76 so (1.0) I um- (1.0) you know? Joined the MIT gay club
77 and I had lots of {really} tragic and pathetic boyfriends you know (1.0)
78 → cause they're just- you know, super Castroized like ((falsetto)) oh my god
we're so fabulous we're so queer and look we're here ((end falsetto))
79 like ih- super activist political bitches
80 and I'm like you know I ↑don't like you guys.
81 and then I spose I have to like you because that's the like the only choice
82 but (1.5) uh:: I don't know [{...} you know

Excerpt 4 shows how, even without explicit co-narration, common knowledge and certain pre-suppositions exist among the group that signal membership within the group, on both a local level (this group of friends) and a more global level (the entire gay community). For example, line 78 describes a group of people as being Castroized. While this makes reference to the Castro district, San Francisco's gay neighborhood, no explicit definition needs to be explained beyond a brief example, in falsetto, of what someone who is “Castroized” would sound like. The members of the group, therefore, are left to assume what is being explained, and indeed, no one questions the understanding of what is meant by the term. This signifies a common ground of knowledge on the local level, as this data was collected in San Francisco and is told among a group of local friends. Further, the description is made in reference to a moment that happened considerably in the past, about individuals and places not related in any way to San Francisco, or the Castro, which shows how the speaker, T, is using a local reference point within the group to provide a lens for the group to interpret the actions of the individual he is describing.

Line 76, however, provides an example of the narrator's membership in the gay community as a whole, when he mentions dealing with “gay things”. Not going further with

what “gay things” entails and not being questioned for a definition signals that it is generally known what was meant by “gay things” in the context given. This is where the co-participants present for the interaction becomes significant; it is likely that phrase would have been changed or qualified had heterosexual interlocutors been present in the data.

Co-construction within the narratives also serves to highlight membership in the gay community, through sharing like experiences, evaluating comments made by other narrators, and more. These statements, when accepted and built upon, serve to build solidarity and camaraderie within the community.

Excerpt 5. D's Story

- 58 D that's the worst thing, you cause everyone keeps sa- as- asking like
((falsetto)) really?
59 u↑h::
60 A @@@
61 D yeah =
62 → T = even though my mom like, told me- like I was wrong like
63 I'm like mom you know
64 → D well [that's what my parents said for a long time
65 T [they were- like wel- ((falsetto)) well you know you're earliest
orientation was heterosexual:::
66 PP @@
67 T and I'm like > what you mean you- < like spying while I was jerking off?
cause [lik- it- i:ih::k
68 → D [right yeah my parents my- my mom {like} kept asking like are
you sure you just pref- don't prefer the company of me:n:?
69 and you're just confused about [wa-
70 → T [no trust me I prefer the company of men
71 PP @@@

In Excerpt 5, we can see T's embedded mini-narrative (lines 62-63, 65-67), coupled with D's alignment in line 64 with having experienced roughly the same reaction by his parents, to which T responds in line 70 with an aligning response for humorous effect. T's mini-narrative and subsequent aligning response provide ways to link D's story to the group and show solidarity as part of the same group and as understanding the struggles that D has gone through. This validity of D's story with a similar experience helps strengthen each individual's self

identity as well as their collective identity within the group.

Having similar stories and being able to tell them relevantly provides other group members, even those not narrating a story, to proclaim membership in the group as well; these co-constructed mini-narratives embedded within the discourse of another larger coming out narrative serve in some ways as a “membership card” to the community, validating each others' experiences and thus the identity of both that individual and his participation in the group.

4.3 Most Reportable Events

In addition to tellership, the Most Reportable Events (MREs) of each of these narratives highlight another important facet in understanding the function of coming out stories among members of the gay community. The struggle of locating MREs in discursive narratives come from their existence on the opposite side of the spectrum from canonical narratives where features such as abstract and coda are more obviously displayed. Even so, there are ways to see, based on discourse, where an MRE is likely to be located. Perhaps the easiest to see comes through looking at turn taking, and when the narrator loses his control of the floor. Often times, interlocutors will begin responding more frequently, change the topic of conversation, or begin their own narrative once what is perceived as the MRE has been stated (Sacks, Schegeloff, and Jefferson 1974).

Below are Excerpts 6, 7, and 8, consisting of the final lines of each of the narrative, with arrows highlighting the likely MREs:

Excerpt 6. Final 26 lines of A's Story

99 A and so, I was (1.5) gonna fly out to California for the summer
100 and like, I'm in the car with my dad on the way to the airport, [like
101 D [°@@@° =
102 A leaving for the next three months
103 D =°@@@@°
104 → A and then he's like so. I hear that girls don't do it for you
105 PP @@@@
106 A {uh:::} oh my god I'm leaving in like five minutes,
107 I'm stressed out I'm li-
108 and you- you choose this time to bring it up? (1.0)
109 R well ↑he- you know
110 D an- and what was your answer?

[Identity formation in gay male coming out stories]

111 I remember that one
112 A it was like I gue:ss
113 PP @@@[@@@@
114 R [you guess (0.5)
115 T wow (1.5)
116 A a::nd I don't know::
117 we talked about it for like, a minute
118 and then. He was apparently like very nervous about this too cuz he- he-
like started- to drive like by the exit to the airport
119 and like I screamed something
120 and he swerved across tra:ffic
121 a:nd it- {ended up ending} our conversation
122 D ((intermittent chuckles)) ha
123 A but um, my mom, °I've talked to her several times about it°
124 T that's [a really good story

Excerpt 7. Final 12 lines of D's Story.

82 D and then in the morning, my parents like drove by
83 → and my mom was like crying::
84 and then: :like the next three weeks later she'd call me on the phone
cry::ing
85 A ((chuckles))
86 D she asked me:: if like, I was attracted to little boys:: @@@[@@@
87 T [oh. h.:
88 D she asked me: [ho- if- if I was ever tou::ched as a chil::d
89 T [°awful°
90 D sh- she- my- my parents [were {...}
91 C [did she have like every completely broken stereotype
92 D no
93 C {like in existence}

Excerpt 8. Final 25 lines of T's Story.

206 T um: (1.0) and then finally. This year, what is it, two thousand and eight? (0.5)
207 like (1.0) out of the blue (0.5) u::m there was a day in May out I had my
weekly phone conversation with Mom:
208 like, I'm talkin on the phone
209 and- and she- she says ((falsetto)) and I just wanted to say:: that
California Supreme Co:urt. What they did,

[Identity formation in gay male coming out stories]

210 what they just said that any two people who love each other > {have
rights to} get married <
211 → well I just think that is the mos- wonderful thing
212 and it's a.bout time the young people of this country can stand up
213 an- an- and get. recognized for what's been right all along ((end falsetto))
214 and I'm like (1.0) Mo:::m?
215 PP @@@@
216 T who- who are you?
217 T you know?
218 D yeah
219 T for real, I was like, this can't be (0.5) for real.
220 so:: um (1.5) you know, it took a lo::ng time with her.
221 um: a lo:ng long long time
222 but I think, you know, in the end you can beat-
223 I mean you can't argue with reality
224 you're right so (2.0)
225 D but when you {.} you can
226 T you can [argue
227 D [{you can}, a lot of people do
228 T you can- you can argue
229 but you can't win in the end.
230 so: I say (1.0) persevere.

In each of the examples, the Most Reportable Event comes not at the moment of coming out, but instead at a later time: A's story highlights his father's reaction to the knowledge that A is gay, D's story highlights his mother's reaction to the news, which in turn leads others to take control of the floor and removes D from the center of discourse, and T's story features his mother's eventual acceptance of his sexuality before he gives resolving action and a clearly visible coda. For each individual, the specific act of coming out forms part of the complicating action of the narrative, and the Most Reportable Events instead tend to be in reaction to the coming out, typically by one or both of the narrator's parents.

In terms of Speech Act theory, we can see that the performative speech act of coming out is itself not the focus of the coming out stories. Instead, the focus of the stories is on the perlocution, or hearer's interpretation/response, of the coming out speech act (c.f. Chirrey 2003), and crucially of the narrator's parents, as there are perlocutions to coming out in the

complicating action of each of the narratives by other characters within the narrative, ranging from friends to siblings to classmates to extended family. Thus, it is not the mere fact that one is gay that is being shared through the coming out narratives, but instead the evaluation of their identity as such from others.

In addition, not only is it the perlocution of the act of coming out that becomes most salient in the coming out narratives, it is specifically the perlocution of acceptance that becomes the “appropriate perlocution,” and the goal of a completed coming out narrative. In fact, only T's story (Excerpt 8) had an eventual perlocution of acceptance, and only T's story had clearly defined resolving action and a coda. D's story ended abruptly by other interlocutors sharing related stories, and while A's story appears to have resolving action and some sense of coda (see Excerpt 6, line 123), there is a sense of being unfinished, as though the conversations with his mother are a work-in-progress and have not yet culminated in acceptance. This is important, as it shows the use of these stories as they seek to validate and legitimize the narrator's gay identity to those outside of the realm of the gay community, creating a final, complete sense of identity that accounts for the self, the group, and also those outside of the group.

5. Discussion

Taking these examples, we can see that coming out narratives are important in many ways for these members of the gay community and their formation of a gay identity. Not only do they function in deeper ways than simply relating the facts of one's coming out, they work on several planes to create a complete identity. Tellership and ownership of one's story serves to emphasize, share, and create one's self identity. Co-construction and shared experience serve to build solidarity and membership within the gay community as a whole, and the highlighting of the response to coming out serves to seek legitimization for a gay identity from those outside of the community as well. Further research will be useful in looking at larger quantities of coming out stories from gay men in differing Communities of Practice to hopefully discover patterns and be able to draw more general conclusions about the ways coming out narratives are used discursively for identity formation. The features highlighted here are important to better understand the importance of coming out stories in the gay community, and what can be understood from the presence or lack of these features in narratives of this genre.

It also highlights the power that these stories have in creating a solid, complete, and

positive identity as a gay male. In a society where homosexuality is still marginalized and not fully accepted by many people, it is important for an individual to form a positive sense of identity, and to have a community with which it can be shared. While the definition of what makes an individual homosexual, gay, out, closeted, etc. may always be contested – and is certainly idiosyncratic in nature – it is comforting to know that embracing an identity that allows for the inclusion of one's sexuality can have a positive result, and that the process of coming out seems to continue far beyond the speech act proclaiming one's sexuality all the way to the point of acceptance of the identity that the speech act signals.

6. Conclusion

Coming out stories and related research has only begun, and there is much room for further research interests. For starters, Liang (1996) hints at, but does not really discuss the relevance or significance of episode in these narratives through the way the narratives are broken into thematic segments. Thus, taking the idea of episode from van Dijk (1981) may prove very fruitful, not only in structural analysis, but in the understanding of other functions of the coming out story as well.

In a heterosexually dominant society such as ours, homosexuality is often seen as a deviation from the norm. While in some ways this may be true, as the average heterosexual individual need not enter into a second period of identity formation, it should be remembered that all individuals spend their lives creating and re-creating their identities, and the analysis of the narratives associated with this process can be filled with useful ways to better understand this formation and the role that language plays in the process.

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Appendix B – Transcription Conventions

(Heavily influenced by Jefferson 1984)

Speaker Identity:

D:	Pseudonym of an identified participant
?:	Unidentified participant
D?:	Probable participant
PP	Multiple/all participants simultaneously

Turn Taking:

[]	Simultaneous Utterances
=	Contiguous Utterance: no gap between utterances (Used for single speaker or multiple speakers if there is immediate continuity with no overlap)

Conversation Patterns:

comma	short pause with low-rising intonation
period	short pause (less than 0.5 sec.) between utterances
?	rising intonation, not necessarily a question
(0.5), (1.5), etc.	pause - length indicated
↑	marked rising shift in intonation
↓	marked falling shift in intonation
hi:::::	lengthening of preceding sound, each : represents one extra beat
wha-	abrupt cut off, level pitch
<u>underline</u>	marked stress
bold	marked loudness
°degree signs°	utterance is quieter than surrounding speech
> fast <	faster delivery rate than surrounding speech
< slow >	slower delivery rate than surrounding speech
@@@	laughter

Commentary in Transcriptions:

((double par.))	Transcriber information, including description of paralinguistic cues, such as coughing, chuckling, etc.
(***) or (***) (***)	Omission of names given in conversation that are not participants
{...}	unclear speech
{I think this says}	probable, though unclear, utterance
→	used to highlight salient or currently discussed point in analysis