OUT OF THE COUNTRY, OUT OF THE CLOSET: POSITIONING IN GAY
IMMIGRANTS' COMING-OUT STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Queer coming out is widely discussed and theorized in the West. While the research on
coming out has explored many of its aspects ranging from parental reactions (Denes &
Afifi, 2014; Fields, 2001) to online identity formation (Craig & McInroy, 2015; Gray,
2009), a notable gap exists pertaining to coming out in cross-cultural contexts. Thus,
there remains much to be studied regarding LGBTQ individuals' lived experiences of
coming out in different cultural backgrounds. This thesis investigates four gay Indian
immigrants' coming-out narratives in interviews; it highlights how the narrators bring
about their social identities as they respond to available social constructs and the
sociopolitical landscape in the U.S. Heeding Rust's (1993) call for reconceptualization of
coming out as "an ongoing dynamic process of describing one's social location within a
changing social context" (p.74), I use discourse analysis to examine the narrators' use of
linguistic devices to accomplish positioning in their coming-out narratives. This
illuminates how these gay immigrants negotiate the challenges they face migrating from
India to the U.S. and reveals their reflections on these contrastive sociocultural contexts.
The analysis identifies and explicates three shared features in the coming-out narratives.
First, responding to the interviewer's question "what is coming out," participants
emphasize different aspects, including *coming out to others* and *coming out to self*, but

omit the inner conflict of accepting their gay identities found in previous studies (e.g., Liang, 1997). Second, their engagement in local queer communities in the U.S. reinforces their openness toward disclosure of their gay identities that would otherwise be impossible in India, indicating their identification with the queer discourse pertaining to coming out and their understanding of the transition from one social context to another as facilitating coming out. Finally, they cast themselves against the backdrop of marriage to resist traditional Indian heteronormativity while affirming their gay identities in the U.S.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Coming from Taiwan to the United States for education as a gay immigrant[1], I embarked on this project by asking questions that arose in my own life experience. When I was sitting across the room from my psychotherapist during a session, she asked me, "when did you come out to yourself?" I was put on the spot with a concept that sounded so foreign to me; I might have come out to some of my friends at that point but I had never *come out to myself*. This event later prompted me to contemplate the issue of what coming out means to gay immigrants. What is taken for granted in the U.S. may be completely unfamiliar to people coming from countries where coming out is less often discussed both in mainstream media or in academia. When gay immigrants find themselves situated amidst a new set of queer discourses[2], such as the practice of coming out as gay, they must negotiate the challenges and evaluations they face in migrating to the U.S., and reflect on these contrastive sociocultural contexts.

Queer[3] coming out is necessitated by heteronormativity, which entails the belief that people can be distinctly categorized as male and female where their biological sexes align with their gender identities, the idea that heterosexuality is the norm, and an understanding that marriage is between people of opposite sexes, namely, male and female. Coming out, in this sense, refers to an effort or an act made to challenge heteronormative assumptions. Herdt (1997), an anthropologist specializing in sexuality studies, notes that "coming out is another form of ritual that intensifies change in a young person's sexual identity development and social being" (p.126), implying the symbolic "death" of their heterosexual identities and the "rebirth" as gay men and lesbian women. Underlying the description is the prototypical metaphor that symbolizes the transitioning

from one status to another. Recent studies have shown that coming out is an ongoing process (e.g., Mohler, 2000) and can be observed linguistically (Liang, 1997; Wood, 1997). Coming out has also been theorized to include different components or stages (e.g., Cass, 1979), with a *coming out to self* that goes hand in hand with *coming out to others*. According to Davies (1992), "coming out to others constantly redefines one's notion of self, and the development of a self-identity drives the process of disclosure" (p.75).

Scholars later go on to address the issues surrounding queer disclosure or the *coming out imperative*, that is, the assumption that coming out is valuable whereas not coming out, or being *closeted*, is associated negatively with shame, dishonesty, or disempowerment. For example, Rasmussen (2004) examines research on coming out in educational settings and argues that the imperative to come out should be reconsidered to account for the complexities pertaining to coming out; rather than a natural and familiar process, coming out is "constructed differently depending on the individual (i.e., their race, age, family background) and the time, place, and space in which that individual is located" (p.149). McLean (2007) follows Rasmussen's observation and discusses the complex factors of coming out as bisexual men and women. Drawing on the coming-out narratives in interviews with 60 bisexual participants, her study demonstrates that the disclosure imperative fails to acknowledge that "coming out may not necessarily be the ideal situation for many people" (p.154), especially in the case where bisexuality is often misunderstood or misrepresented in the society.

Despite the comprehensive discussion, theorization and examination of coming out in the literature, few studies have shed light on how gay immigrants discover and

negotiate their gay identities when they come into contact with the dominant queer discourses in the U.S. Simultaneously, gay immigrants' coming-out narratives provide an outsider's lens through which we can glimpse some of these discourses by taking a different perspective. In this study, I attempt to answer the following questions by examining gay immigrants' coming-out narratives: How do gay immigrants learn about the concept of coming out? Do they find coming out away from their home countries different than coming out at home? How do they accomplish coming out in a different country? Why do they feel the need the come out in another country?

In exploring gay immigrants' identity construction, I take the approach of narrative analysis as narrative is considered an important resource for creating and maintaining one's identity. As Linde (1993) opines, "narrative is a significant resource for creating our internal, private sense of self and is all the more a major resource for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others" (p.98). In this vein, I take gay immigrants' coming-out narratives to be a window through which we can consider how their sense of self is constructed and how they communicate who they are through storytelling. Their identity construction becomes salient as demonstrated by their positioning in coming-out narratives recounting their interactions with people in another country.

In this study, I examine the positioning of self and other in the coming-out narratives elicited in sociolinguistic interviews with four Indian immigrants currently living in the U.S. Drawing on Bamberg's (1997) three levels of positioning in narrative and Linde's (1993) concept of coherence in life stories, I analyze how the participants position themselves in relation to others at different levels (i.e., in the world of the story, the world of the telling, and more broadly) to highlight the differences between self and other and

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underline the Discourses (Gee, 1990, 1999) pertinent to coming out in multiple distinct sociocultural contexts. More specifically, I show how positioning is accomplished primarily through quotation or what Tannen (2007) calls constructed dialogue and repetition, in conjunction with various other linguistic strategies (such as uses of pronouns). The analysis demonstrates that the four Indian immigrants in the study emphasize their differences from people around them in the coming-out narratives, create coherent and principled personae during the interviews, and relate their personal experiences to broader social phenomena such as family and marriage in the traditional Indian society in contrast to the sociopolitical landscape in the U.S.

This study contributes to the exploration of coming out as a practice within the gay community and coming-out narratives as a genre by focusing on how participants position themselves when telling their stories. Also, as global travel becomes increasingly frequent, the issue of migration has gained much saliency in the field. I begin by providing an overview of previous literature first on narrative and identity, then on migration, and lastly coming out. Next, I give some background about the procedures of data collection. In the analysis, I first point out the varying social orientations the participants show when they define what coming out is to them. Then I underscore the part where they reflect on the different social contexts in which they are situated. Also, I show in the examples how the participants see themselves in the cultural backdrops of family and marriage. Finally, I conclude the thesis with a summary of my findings and suggest their implications.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study focuses on the coming-out narratives told by immigrant gay men in that narrative provides a window into gay immigrants' interactions not only with others on an interpersonal level but also with the dominant Discourses (Gee, 1990, 1999) on an ideological level; their interactions on both levels are shown in their discursive positioning (Bamberg, 1997; Davies & Harré, 1990) during storytelling. My approach of narrative analysis and my attempt to scrutinize the positioning in narrative stem from Harré's (2008) contention that "narratology is a close ally of positioning theory. Narratological analysis reveals the normative constraints on an unfolding story line constraints that are expressible in the alternative language of locally valid patterns of rights and duties" (p.51-52).

In this section I first provide an overview of narrative analysis, including general definitions and different approaches. Then I present previous studies that contribute to narrative analysis in identity construction and migration studies respectively. I sum up this section with a discussion of coming out as a research focus and point out gaps that exist in the literature pertaining to coming-out narratives in cross-cultural contexts, that is, coming out viewed from gay immigrants' perspectives.

2.1. Narratives

Storytelling is a common mode of sharing experiences and a sense-making process in human interactions (Ochs & Capps, 2001), and it is often imbued with a society's and culture's morals or social norms. It is first and foremost a way of reporting and recounting past events. According to Labov and Waletzky (1967), *stories*, in the strict

sense of the term, are recapitulations of past experiences, "in particular a technique of constructing narrative units which match the temporal sequence of that experience" (p.13). Several models of narrative structure exist in various disciplines, especially in narratology, and they define narratives in terms of temporal or causal sequences (e.g., Prince, 2003). In linguistics, the most popular and important model has been the one proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967). They laid out the nature of narrative units and how they fit together, which were subsequently revised by Labov (e.g. 1972).

Built on the fundamental idea that narratives are composed of independent clauses in a temporal sequence, the Labovian model of narrative posits the existence of six units: *Abstract* refers to clauses that summarize the story and convey the gist of it; the abstract usually occurs at a story's beginning. *Orientation* is the setting of a story that "orient[s] the listener in respect to person, place, time, and behavioral situation" (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, p.32). *Complicating action* presents the major events that happened in the story. *Resolution* is the result of the story where the complication was solved. *Coda* signals the end of a story, bridging the past in the story world and the present. *Evaluation* provides the narrator's point of view on the recounted events and answers the questions "So what?" by showing the significance of the story. Labov (1972) further distinguishes *external evaluation*, in which case the narrative is interrupted so that the narrator can make explicit comments, and *internal* or *embedded evaluation*, which is conveyed implicitly in forms such as reported speech – or what Tannen (2007) calls "constructed dialogue" – thus, according to Labov, "preserving dramatic continuity" (p.372). Though Labov's model has been criticized for depending heavily on monological stories elicited in sociolinguistic interviews and for failing to take into account audience participation

and the possibility of narrative co-construction, it laid the foundation for narrative analysis in the next few decades.

2.2. Narratives in Interaction

In this study, I take the interactionist approach to see how interviews act as interactional events wherein storytelling is situated to highlight identity as a process of construction and co-construction. As research extending beyond the Labovian paradigm has shown, there exist a range of less-canonical tellings, such as habitual narratives or other types of non-prototypical "small stories" (see Georgakopoulou, 2007, 2008), and "narrative," though sometimes used interchangeably with "story," is adopted to encompasses more broadly these types of tellings, as in the present study. Scholars have since investigated narratives in various settings while considering factors such as the varied statuses of story recipients (C. Goodwin, 1986) and the local contexts in which narratives are situated (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998); such scholars argue that meaning is found "in the local state of affairs that was operative at that exact moment of interactional time" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p.4) The talk-in-interaction approach to narrative analysis maintains that the storytelling contexts be used as resources for gaining insights into and exploring narrative as a sense-making process.

Charles Goodwin (1986), for example, discerns audience diversity and the dynamics of participants' interpretation, and their influence on storytelling. He notes that audience members can be differentiated by their access to the domain of discourse (i.e. knowing vs. unknowing). Prior knowledge about the scene and the events can affect how audience members analyze the talk, align themselves to it, and participate in the field of action

(p.297). Goodwin's data analysis shows that audiences are not made up of passive listeners; they are shaped by the talk as much as they shape the talk. Storytelling is in this very sense a collaborative process in which meaning emerges as a result of the audience's active role in the interaction.

In a similar vein of storytelling being conceptualized as a co-constructed activity, De Fina (2009) argues that the fact that narratives are elicited in interviews does not mean that they are told without a context, but that they involve different interactional rules. One way to approach the influence that narratives and the interview as an interactional context have on each other is to study narrative genres as they "reflect and shape the relationships between interlocutors" (p.237). De Fina shows that narratives in interviews are a locus for interactional negotiations between interviewer and interviewee.

Discussing self-construction in narratives, Wortham (2000, 2001) points out that a view of narrative as mere representational through which narrators depict themselves in characteristic ways (2000, p.158) is plausible yet incomplete. He argues that interactional positioning is also part of how narrators construct the self in storytelling. Unlike narrative representation, interactional positioning, or what he calls "enactment," emphasizes how the narrators "enact" the self "in interactional events with respect to their audiences" (p.165). Through this concept, Wortham demonstrates that narrative self-construction is achieved through both representation in the story and enactment in the interaction.

In the past decades of narrative analysis, we can see that Labov and Waletzky provided a model to examine narrative structure that connects narrative to its formal functions, but as shown in more recent studies that consider not just the story itself but also the storytelling interaction, adopting a more interactive approach offers more power

and flexibility in analyzing the role of narrative in various discussions, among all, identity construction.

2.3. Identity Construction

The interactional approach to narrative analysis ties into the notion that identity is discursively constructed rather than a product in an essentialist sense. The topic of identity construction has gained popularity across disciplines. In the field of linguistics, the social constructivist orientation can be found in numerous studies and scholars have examined identity construction from various perspectives and approaches. Among them, Ochs' (1993) and Bulcholtz and Hall's (2005) articles contribute immensely to the study of identity in sociolinguistics with respect to approaches to the discursive construction of identity.

2.3.1 Theories on Identity Construction

Ochs (1993) suggests that speakers establish their social identities through "verbally performing particular social *acts* and verbally displaying particular *stances*" (p.288, emphasis in original). In her definition, social acts refer to any socially recognized behavior while stances refer to socially recognized attitudes. Using these verbal acts or stances, speakers not only construct identities of themselves but those of their co-interlocutors. Particular acts and particular stances form particular identities because of their links in shared cultural and linguistic conventions (p.289-290).

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose a framework consisting of five principles for the analysis of identity in interaction. First, identity is emergent in interactions; rather than a

ready-made source of linguistic or semiotic practices, identities should be viewed as social processes (p.588). Second, besides the macro-view of identity categories such as age and gender, identity can be locally shaped moment by moment as participants assume temporary roles. The third principle deals with identity construction through indexicality, that is, the meaning of a linguistic form derives from the interactional context and contributes to the formation of identity; a range of linguistic resources in the indexical processes include labeling, or membership categorization (Sacks, 1992), and stance staking (Du Bois, 2007; Ochs, 1993). Fourth, the relational foundation of identity construction entails that "social identities are never autonomous or independent but always acquire social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social actors" (p.598). Lastly, identity is partially intentional and not fully conscious; that is, it is "contextually situated" yet "ideologically informed" (p.605). Many studies of narrative discourse attend to the different aspects of Bulchotz and Hall's framework.

Principally crucial in my study of gay identities in coming-out narratives are the idea that identity is emergent in interaction (identity is constructed and co-constructed from moment to moment in the discourse of storytelling event), positional in character (identity is achieved as the participants assume temporary roles or adopt diverse orientations), relational in nature (identity is revealed as the participants position themselves subjectively and others intersubjectively by pinpointing the similarity and difference between self and others, or what Bulchotz and Hall refer to as *adequation* and *distinction*), and partial (identity is displayed in social action within the constraints of ideologies and social structures). In the next section, I zero in on the positional aspect of

identity formation described in positioning theory, which plays substantially into my analysis.

2.3.2 Identity & Positioning

The interactive aspect of identity has been further examined drawing on several theoretical concepts. In positioning theory, Davies and Harré' (1990) maintain that "an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate" (p.35). They define positioning as "the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storyline" (p.37). This take on the presentation of self highlights not only the relationships between the speaker and the talk but also the relationships between the speaker and the audience. A narrative example they provide shows that positioning involves negotiation as a participant can adopt or resist a storyline, and contradictions may arise in conversations that can be either resolved or ignored. This, as Davies and Harré argue, indicates the agency of speakers in locating themselves in different storylines: "The possibility of choice in a situation in which there are contradictory requirements provides people with the possibility of acting agentively" (p.49).

De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006) encapsulate positioning as identity construction on several levels; besides the relationships between the speaker and the talk, self and other, positioning also includes relationships to "the dominant ideologies, widespread social practices and underlying structures drawn together as Discourse" (p.7).

This expands positioning theory to include big-*D* Discourses (Gee, 1999) as central to the construction of identity. Gee (1999) defines Discourses as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or 'types of people') by specific groups" (p.3). In Discourses, the world is constructed; our sense of who we are is also part of Discourses (Bamberg, 2014, p.133). According to Gee (1990), a Discourse can be seen as an 'identity kit' with instructions on how to take on a particular social role (p.142).

Scholars further demonstrate Davies and Harré's concept that positioning is an achievement of the self in interpersonal interactions and also a theoretical methodological tool: an approach to identity in narratives (e.g., Bamberg, 1997; *Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008;* Harré, 2008). Bamberg (1997), for example, proposes a narrative model of three-level positioning, mapping out the dimensions of self-presentation in narrating activity by addressing the multiple aforementioned relationships in positioning theory. Level 1 pertains to how the story characters are positioned in relation to one another; level 2 stresses the interaction in the storytelling world, that is, how the storyteller positions himself or herself to the audience; and level 3 addresses self and identity or how the narrators "position themselves to themselves" (p.337). Bamberg (2003, 2011; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004) has discussed the problem of agency, or *agency dilemma*, with his three-level construct, outlining the simultaneous operation of agent-world relationships between a world-to-agent direction (being positioned) and an agent-to-world direction (positioning itself).

De Fina (2013) argues that Bamberg's three-level positioning provides a means to bridge interactions on a micro level and Discourses (Gee, 1999) on a macro level. She

focuses on level 3 positioning, which "allows for an analysis of connections between local identity claims and negotiations and macro-level social processes" (p.47), to demonstrate how Discourses are connected to the here and now of the interaction. She analyzes a narrative about an ethnic conflict told by Francisca, a Latin American immigrant. At level 1, Francisca positions herself as the victim by positioning the African American girls at her school as attackers. At level 2, she positions herself to the interviewer as a person who made efforts to learn English and as an innocent/non-threatening character. At level 3, De Fina considers the Discourses about migration by looking at how, collectively, ethnic conflicts are a recurring theme in her corpus of narratives. Positioning level 3 is therefore the middle ground that links local identity and socio-cultural processes, including Discourses related to language ideology of learning English for integration, as in Francisca's story.

By examining multiple aspects of positioning in coming-out narratives told by immigrant participants, we get a better view of how they locally present their identities in the interaction and globally locate themselves within the social context through storytelling. As De Fina argues (2009), the interactive context in which stories are situated, even in interviews (see also De Fina & Perrino, 2011), serves as a resource for participants to enact their self-identities; in my study, the participants construct their identities as gay individuals not only in the heterosexual world but also in a foreign gay community. Lastly, participants' reflection on the larger cultural background reveals at level 3 their understanding of Discourses and how they adapt themselves to them. The construction pertaining to their gay identity thus occurs in the positioning in narratives elicited in sociolinguistic interviews.

2.3.3 Identity in Narrative

Storytelling is a rich site where identity construction can be observed and empirically examined as narrative is a powerful tool for creating meaning when individuals voice their experiences and share their life events. Schiffrin (1996) posits that because it allows us to "verbalize and situate our experience as text (both locally and globally)," narrative "provides a resource for the representation of personal and social identity" (p.191). The two stories she analyzes demonstrate that storytellers locally situate experiences in the ongoing discourse through linguistic devices such as syntactic form. Simultaneously, they globally situate their stories in a broader cultural theme through the use of metaphors. For example, a mother creates opposition with syntactic contrast such as pronominal switches between "we" (Jewish people) and "them" (Gentile people) to express her negative evaluation of intermarriage (p.172).

Schiffrin's analysis connects narratives with the aforementioned approaches to the construction of social identity. Relating to Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of how we verbally position ourselves in relation to discourse, Ochs' (1993) view on how we perform certain acts and take certain stances to construct social identities of ourselves and others, and Du Bois' (2007) notion of how we align with others when evaluating an object (which he refers to as creating a stance triangle), Schiffrin notes that "when we perform an action through speech, we are acting *toward* another person with some possible effect on that person" (p.196, emphasis in original). As we report events in the story world, we linguistically display actions and beliefs that index our identities as well as our relationships with others. Furthermore, her argument that "narrative is a means by

which to arrive at an understanding of the self as emergent from actions and experiences, both in relation to general themes or plots as located in a cultural matrix of meanings, beliefs, and practices" (p.194) corresponds to Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five principles of socio-culturally analyzing identities. Identity, rather than a fixed or categorical attribute, is emergent in moment-to-moment interaction; also, identity is not constructed independently but relationally to other social actors, and identity is situated both contextually in the particular here and now and ideologically in cultural and social presuppositions.

In discussing the narrative genre and its connection to constructing our sense of self, Schiffrin cites Linde's (1993) theorization of the creation and maintenance of self in life stories through language. Linde suggests that life stories are important social units in that they are a means of communicating and negotiating who we are (relating to the emergent and positional principle), they are used to "claim or negotiate group membership" (relating to the indexical and relational principle), and that they "touch on the widest of social constructions" (relating to the partial principle) (p.3). In her definition, a life story is "a temporarily discontinuous unit told over many occasions and altered to fit the specific occasions of speaker, as well as specific addresses, and to reflect changes in the speaker's long-term situation, values, understanding, and (consequently) discursive practices" (p.51) She puts forth the three characteristics by which self is maintained: *continuity of the self*, *relation of the self to others*, and *reflexivity of the self* (p.100). The continuity of the self is expressed mainly through time, that is, temporal continuity; it is evinced in narrative order (p.106) and addresses how the past is related and relevant to the present. The relations of self to others pertain to "distinguishing the self from others"

and "relating the self to others" (p.111); the distinguishability established by the social and interactive nature of narration echoes Bucholtz and Hall's relational principle. Finally, reflexivity of the self refers to "the ability to relate to oneself externally, as an object or as an other" (p.120), which involves social evaluation of persons and actions (p.121). Reflexivity is essentially the distinction between "the narrator" and "the protagonist" of the narrative.

2.3.4. Involvement Strategies: Repetition & Constructed Dialogue

While investigating the coherence in life stories, Linde sees it as a textual property deriving from the relations between one text and another. It is also "understood as a cooperative achievement of the speaker and the addressee" (p.12) that has been examined by scholars within linguistics taking several approaches, including discourse analysis. Besides the coherence created by texts, Linde considers what she calls "coherence systems," such as common sense, "the system of assumptions and beliefs that are assumed to be shared by all competent members of the culture" (p.18). To elaborate on the creation of coherence in my analysis, I focus specifically on two discourse strategies frequently deployed by the participants in the present study: repetition and constructed dialogue.

According to Tannen (2007), the various forms of repetition (self-repetition, repetition of others, etc.) serve multiple functions, ranging from *production* (producing language in a more efficient way), *comprehension* (facilitating the receiving of information with semantically less dense discourse), *connection* (contributing to making or emphasizing a point) and *interaction* (bonding participants to each other and to the

talk). Together these functions operate simultaneously to create a fifth function: the establishment of coherence and interpersonal involvement (p.58, 100). Speaker and hearer use repetition to show and ratify listenership, thereby displaying mutual participation and contributing to a better understanding of the talk.

One form of repetition that has been considered in the literature is the repetition of an utterance reportedly uttered at a previous time, often called quotation or reported speech. What is commonly referred to as "reported speech," Tannen claims, should be understood as "constructed dialogue" because a speaker is not merely a "neutral conduit" but someone who situates an utterance in a new context to achieve the present interactional goal, "an active, creative, transforming move which expresses the relationship not between the quoted part and the topics of talk but rather the quoting party and the audience to whom the quotation is delivered" (p.111). Constructing dialogue, in this very sense, is fundamentally transforming others' words into one's own discourse. This is how constructed dialogue plays a key role in establishing interpersonal involvement when it is used in storytelling: "the casting of thought and speech in dialogue creates particular scenes and characters" by "building on a sense of identification between speaker or writer and hearer or reader" (p.107).

In summary, in this section, I have reviewed some of the pivotal theories in identity construction and relevant studies in the exploration of identity in narrative. A fundamental theme is that identity, rather than being a fixed and categorical entity, emerges in interaction as participants position themselves and others through a variety of linguistic devices. Narrative provides a vantage point from which the process of identity formation can be linguistically observed. In this study, I examine the positioning of gay

immigrant men in their coming-out narratives, fleshing out the verbal construction of their gay identities as they intersect with their immigrant identities by calling special attention to their use of repetition and constructed dialogue.

2.4. Narrative & Migration

Because narrative serves the function of self-presentation and carries social and cultural meanings, a great number of migration studies employ narrative analysis as one methodological tool to investigate migrants' identity construction as well as the sociopolitical landscape in a country. Studies on migrants' identities have examined various types of narratives, different aspects of narratives, as well as disparate social groups (e.g., Kazmierska, 2003 on an autobiographical narrative of a Turkish woman living in Germany, and Sabaté-Dalmau, 2016 on the spatialization of unsheltered Ghanaian migrants' movements and mobility in a Catalan urban town). In this section, I review some previous works to showcase 1) how the studies build on the foundation of narrative model proposed by Labov and Waletzky, 2) how the studies explore non-canonical narrative types, such as hypothetical narratives and generic narratives, and 3) how the studies elucidate the formation of identities in storytelling. An overarching proposition shared by these studies is that social identity is constructed discursively in interaction and that narrative is a rich source for the exploration of identity work. What's more, they highlight the importance of storytelling in interviews – interactional events which involves negotiation and co-construction between the researchers and the researched migrants, whereby the latter strategically present themselves. Finally, I situate my study as an intersection of migration and coming out, paving way for the next section.

With the notion that narratives, including the ones elicited in interviews, are situated in local interaction and social contexts, De Fina (2003a) analyzes immigrants' stories in terms of what she calls *social orientation*, that is, how storytellers present themselves in stories in relation to others (p.51). This includes the use of person pronouns, especially the case of *nosotros* ("we" in Spanish), in recounting their migration experiences to convey a sense of collectivity. Participants may frame a personal experience as a collective one with a shift in pronouns and focus on the group to which they belong (see also De Fina, 2006).

Carranza (1998, 1999) explores narratives used as an argumentative device by Salvadoran immigrants in the Washington, DC area. She studies non-canonical narratives such as hypothetical events and habitual events in which the prototypical components in a story are absent or relatively less identifiable, an approach similar to the previously discussed small stories perspective. Narratives that involve hypothetical events, as Carranza (1998) postulates, are both evaluative and explanatory in that narrators make comments on what actually happened by presenting an alternative, thus contributing to their argumentative positions. Carranza (1999) further teases out some of the argumentative operations in storytelling like *consequence*, *analogy*, *contrast*, and *explanation* that characterize these Salvadorian immigrants' narratives in responding and resisting prejudices, reflecting the tensions and conflicts in intergroup relations.

Among studies that look at certain aspects of narratives, De Fina (2003b) focuses on orientation section in Labov and Waletzky's model in 13 accounts by Mexican undocumented immigrants and argues that orientation in the storytelling suggests narrators' position in the story world in relation to their current position in the interviews

and to their position when they crossed the border. She suggests that the vagueness in describing the location that is observed across narrators, for example, is indicative of a sense of displacement and lack of control and agency as they attempt to reconstruct their experiences (see also Baynham, 2003; Baynham & De Fina, 2005).

Baynham (2006) explores the concept of identity as performance in personal and generic narratives in interviews with married, male Moroccan migrants who left their families and moved to London, UK. By looking at positioning, he shows, for example, how one migrant relationally positions himself to the interviewer as educated, or how he verbalizes his inner thoughts about responsibilities for his family and relationally positions himself as husband and father.

The studies presented here point to the fact that narrative analysis productively examines the construction of various kinds of identities, including immigrant identities. It is thus promising for research focused on the intersection of immigrant identities and gay identities, though little such research exists. In his study that includes narratives of 48 gay men living in Ottawa, Canada and Washington, DC, Lewis (2014) investigates the significance of migration in individual development across their life course, and finds that participants' decision to relocate themselves has to do with not just economic concerns but also meaningful community identities (p.231). The study, though underscoring the multiple facets of gay men's migration and identity formation process by considering the effect of age, does not give a detailed and full account of how migration plays into the negotiation of their identities. A closer examination of gay men's narratives is therefore necessary for a better and deeper understanding of how they achieve identity construction globally through the description of their life circumstances

and locally through positioning in the storytelling interaction. The present study aims to address the intersection of the management of one's immigrant identify as well as gay identity.

2.5. *Coming Out*

Coming out is a widely theorized and discussed aspect of queer life in Western societies (Zimman, 2009). Though early works predominantly center on gay men, in recent years, different LGBTQ populations have been the focus of research, such as bisexual (Wandrey, Mosack & Moore, 2015), transgender (Zimman, 2009), and asexual (Robins, Low & Query, 2016). Coming out has also been examined in various settings, including in the family (e.g., D'Amico, Tremblay, & Chartrand, 2015; Denes & Afifi, 2014; Fields, 2001; Savin-Williams & DuBé, 1998), at the workplace (Marrs & Staton, 2016), and online (e.g., Craig & McInroy, 2015; Gray, 2009). Gray (2009) addresses how online representations from noncommercial website to personal ads play into rural youth's navigation of coming out in rural contexts as opposed to their counterparts in urban areas. In her study, technology (such as access to online forums) serves as a tool for rural youths in the U.S. to connect with local network and as a site where they negotiate their queer identity in "collective labor" (p.1170). While the body of literature on coming out has been growing rapidly, notable gaps exist. First, there has been an imbalance between the research on coming out in the West and that in many non-Western societies. Second, coming out has primarily been theorized using developmental models that limit the scope to a decontextualized linear process with a presupposed endpoint. Third, coming-out narrative has mostly been used methodologically in studies instead of

having been closely examined linguistically. Below I expound the previous studies to show what has been done and how my study contributes to filling these gaps.

2.5.1 Coming Out in Non-Western Societies

Although coming out is a commonly discussed issue and is treated as an integral part in the life of LGBTQ individuals, this is not the case in many non-Western societies. This is evidenced in printed materials and online resources such as those by Human Rights Campaign (HRC) as well as the many self-recorded videos of coming-out narratives publicly accessible to viewers on YouTube in the U.S.; the same is not observed in non-Western societies and there is a lack of multicultural representation with respect to coming out. Even though coming out has been much studied from different perspectives (see Chirrey, 2003 on coming out as a speech act; and Guittar & Rayburn, 2016 on coming out as career management), its cultural implications require more attention.

Some non-academic publications strive to bring queer life to the surface and to increase visibility. In East Asia, for example, Wah-Shan Chou's works (e.g., Wah-Shan Chou, 1997) shed light on the lives of gay men in Hong Kong under the influence of Western culture. The extant studies highlight the experiences of queer people in diverse cultures. Sweet (1997) and Valentine (1997) each looks into the origins and uses of terms that denote homosexuality in Yiddish (*feygele*) and Japanese (*hen*) respectively and their cultural implications in Jewish American and Japanese society. Yip (2004) explores the experience of British non-heterosexual Muslims while King (2008) studies identity construction of gay Koreans in L2 learning. Rosario, Schrimshaw and Hunter (2004) interview 145 lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths in the U.S. to examine quantitatively the

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ethnic/racial differences in the coming out process and find that while Black youths are involved in fewer gay-related activities and Latino youths disclose their sexuality to fewer individual than White youths, there is no significant difference among racial groups with respect to identity formation. While they do not investigate narratives specifically nor do they cover the relation between migration and coming out, their study illuminates racial/ethnic difference that may shape coming out experiences.

While these studies lend insights into some aspects of coming out or topics related to queer life in various cultural contexts, they do not focus on how individuals' gay identities are interactively constructed in the narration of coming-out narratives and do not touch on how the recounting of gay immigrants' experiences in a foreign country can inform us of the local ideologies with respect to coming out.

2.5.2 Coming Out in Interaction

A key problem in the burgeoning literature in psychology and sociology on coming out is that it is oftentimes theorized using developmental models (e.g., Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1988) and that gender identity and sexuality are often presented in a relatively stereotypical and stable form. This approach, contrary to the social constructivist view of identity, fails to capture the interactive subtleties and the kinds of social practices that emerge in narratives as a means of expression. Rust (1993) discusses and compares the dominant paradigms in past research. She points out that the developmental model implies that there is an endpoint in the linear progress upon which individuals achieve maturity. Symbolic interactionists, she notes, challenge this view of identity formation and consider contextual factors instead, arguing that sexual identity is

formed in social situations not as a process of discovery but as an interactive process. Proposing a social constructionist approach, Rust holds that coming out should be reconceptualized as "an ongoing dynamic process of describing one's social location within a changing social context" (p.74) because not only can social constructs change over time but they may vary from culture to culture.

Rust's view corroborates Jandt and Darsey's (1981) contention that coming out is a communicative process: it is not an autonomous process but "a purposive human endeavor subject to scrutiny" (p.18). Building on Kelly's (1963) Personal Construct Theory (PST), they argue that gay men and lesbians come to identify themselves through access to resources of gay constructs that challenge straight images and through continuous interactions with those constructs, whereby they "change themselves by changing the constructions" (p.16). An approach that relies on discursive understandings of identity construction and of narrative as a key site fits in with this understanding. It facilitates investigation of how speakers tell stories through a diverse array of linguistic devices and illuminates the negotiations, challenges and evaluations between interlocutors in particular social contexts. Narratives offer a way into examining the dynamic process that Rust describes; through this process speakers bring about their social identities as they respond to their own positioning, the available social constructs, and the sociopolitical landscape.

2.5.3 Coming-Out Narratives & Linguistic Analysis

Though narrative has been adopted as a methodology in some studies, the genre of coming-out narratives is not widely studied through the lens of linguistics. Robbins and

Query (2016), for example, analyze narratives of 169 participants who self-identified as asexual to conduct a thematic analysis and propose a theoretical model of asexual identity development. Bacon (1998), in rhetorical studies, writes about the possibility of viewing coming-out narratives as a cultural rhetoric. In her view, storytelling is a way of representing one's self in the social and political context and, therefore, coming-out narratives can be developed into a political or cultural rhetoric that "both describe[s] a process of identity negotiation while simultaneously enacting that identity construction with their very performance" (p.257).

More directly related to the discipline of linguistics, Liang (1997) builds on Linde's (1993) concept of coherence in life stories and investigates the narrative components in coming-out narratives, including *coming out to self*, *coming out to others*, and *processuality* – coming out as an ongoing process reflected in narrative structure. She notices that while gay European American speakers tend to provide an account for their inner conflict pertaining to accepting one's self, gay Asian American speakers do not address this part in their stories. In comparison, they place more emphasis on coming out to others. Liang attributes this difference to their cultural backgrounds, and concludes that European American speakers in the group learned the homophobic values in western culture that necessitate the self-affirmation in their stories while Asian American counterparts attend more to harmonious social relations (p.306). This finding calls for further investigation into the possible explanations accounting for cultural differences in coming-out narratives.

Wood's (1997) study of coming-out stories aims to answer the question whether the typical narrative structure associated with conversational narratives is also found in email

data. Specifically, she looks at the resolution/coda section in the narrative model proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967). The four lesbian coming-out narratives under analysis are elicited from an email listserv consisting of thirty-five members. Wood notices a "stop-start-stop narrative structure"; after the narrators provide a narrative coda, they continue to tell another narrative. With her findings, Wood argues that the processual nature of coming out in real life – that is, it is a series of ongoing events – is reflected linguistically in narrative structure, with a story following another one, and that the processual nature can be found in her email narratives as well.

Zimman (2009) analyzes nine transgender coming-out narratives collected in interviews and contrasts his findings with the processual nature that Liang and Wood propose. He argues that transgender narratives do not fit into the pattern found in previous studies due to the characteristics exclusive to transpeople, including transitioning and their gender identity. He suggests two distinct definitions of coming out as transgender: *declaration* –"claiming of a transgender identity," and *disclosure* – "sharing one's transgender history after transition" (p.60). What's more, Zimman argues that the processuality ascpect of coming out is not found in transgender narratives because their stories end upon declaration "when an individual aligns gender role with gender identity" (p.63).

The processual nature of coming out, as proposed by Liang and Wood while contested by Zimman, is complicated by individuals' international and/or intercultural encounters as it plays into their identity formation. With increasing migration around the world, analyzing coming-out narratives in cross-cultural settings provides insights into storytellers' awareness of cultural differences, such as attitudes toward gayness. Taking

the social constructionist view on coming out, sexual identity cannot be understood without considering the social contexts in which it is embedded. Individuals, especially in the case of immigrants, find themselves experiencing the change of social constructs both over time and cross-culturally. For example, the coming-out imperative in the U.S. that Rasmussen (2004) points out in discussing the problem of encouraging the disclosure of one's gay identity in school may be perceived differently by individuals who were not born and raised in the same culture. This calls for further investigation on how immigrants from outside of the U.S. with a different cultural background identify the local discourses and react to them accordingly. To that end, the current study aims to obtain a deeper understanding of how gay immigrants discursively position themselves in coming-out narratives and how their gay identities are constructed in storytelling against their cultural backdrops and their observations during their time in the U.S.

CHAPTER 3: DATA & METHOD

3.1. Participant Recruitment

All steps of data collection, beginning with participant recruitment, were approved

by the Institutional Review Board of Georgetown University (IRB #2016-0572).

Participants in the study were recruited through snowball sampling based on my local

social network, which includes friends, colleagues, and my affiliation with groups both in

person and online. The LGBTQ Resource Center at Georgetown University offered

assistance in sharing the research opportunity of this study with interested students, and a

group for and by gay Asian men based in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and

Virginia) area provided a platform online for advertising the recruitment for this study.

Additionally, GradPride, a student organization for LGBTQ graduate students at

Georgetown University, also contributed to the dissemination of information about this

study. With a particular aim to facilitate the comparison and analysis of their narratives,

only one group in the LGBTQ community, gay men, were invited to participate in my

study. Furthermore, as this study looks at immigrants' coming-out narratives, all of the

participants are from countries outside of the United State; none were born or raised as

U.S. citizens. Inclusion criteria included gay immigrant men 18 years of age or above to

allow for participants to provide autonomous consent.

3.2. Sampling & Procedures

Over a six-month data collection period, five participants were recruited. One Greek

man reached out to me through my local connections. One Indian immigrant in the group

of gay Asian men in the DMV area agreed to participate in the study and introduced three

of his friends who are also from India. Since four of the men I interviewed were from India, I decided to exclude data collected from the interview with the Greek man from the analysis in order to have a more homogeneous sample. The scope of this study is thus limited yet more focused.

The study design included one semi-structured sociolinguistic interview with each participant, consisting of open-ended questions to elicit their coming-out narratives (see Appendix I for the interview protocol). Prior to the interview, participants were expressly informed of the purpose of the study and the procedure, provided an anonymous consent form, and completed an interview report form for basic information pertaining to the study. Participants were asked to provide information as detailed and specific as they wished. One part of the interview focused on experiences of coming out and another part focused on reflections on the social influence of coming out as gay men in the U.S. Prompts were used to stimulate in-depth discussion and prompts varied depending on participants' responses to the questions. The extracts under analysis come from the four interviews I had with the four gay immigrants from India. The four interviews were conducted in English, the lingua franca of the interviewer, me, a gay man from Taiwan, and the interviewees as none of us were native speakers of English. Throughout the process, the interviews were audio recorded. The recording equipment was set up and operated by the researcher. The recordings were afterward transcribed for analysis (see Appendix II for transcription conventions). All participants quoted herein have been assigned pseudonyms and all identifying names of people and other personal details have been changed to anonymize the data following the protocols approved by the IRB.

3.3. Participant Composition

The four participants whose interviews I consider for this study all self-identify as gay cisgender-males. They also all come from India; though the home country of the participants is the same, their ethnicity, region of birth, dialect spoken in the family, and religion vary. What's more, the duration of their stay in the U.S. varies, ranging from 16 to 25 and a half years in the U.S. Three of them came to the U.S. for higher education while one of them came for the purpose of work. All four participants live openly and engage actively in the local LGBTQ communities.

Table 1. Participants

Name	Pranav	Arjun	Reyansh	Daksh
Age	48	38	42	36
Gender	Cisgender-male	Cisgender-male	Cisgender-male	Cisgender-male
Sexual Orientation	Gay	Gay	Gay	Gay
Ethnicity	Marathi, Indian	Indian	Indian	Indian
Childhood Residence	New Delhi, India	Bengaluru, India	Lucknow, India	India*
Current Residence	Reston, Virginia	Rockville, Maryland	Washington, DC	USA*
Time Spent in the US/ Year of Arrival	25.5 Years/ 1991	16 Years/ 2000	17 Years/ 1999	18 Years/ 1999**
Purpose of Traveling	Education	Education	Employment	Education

*The participants were asked to provide information they felt comfortable disclosing as to specificity. Daksh chose to remain general regarding the location of his birth place and the state of his current residence.
**The difference in years between Reyansh and Daksh comes from the participants' exact date of arrival; one arrived early in the year of 1999 while the other later in 1999.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

In the analysis, I focus on examples extracted from the four Indian immigrants'
coming-out narratives to illustrate how they present themselves locally in the interaction
while positioning themselves globally against the cultural backdrops of both the U.S. and
India. First I illuminate their individual social orientations with respect to how they
define coming out and how they came to learn what coming out means to them
personally. In responding to my question "what is coming out," some participants
emphasize *coming out to others*, a departure from the Western theorization from some
scholars that *coming out to self* is the first and the most important stage (e.g., Cass
identity model, 1979) that precedes the disclosure of one's gay identity to others. The
varying degree of prominence they give to each component in their coming-out narratives
suggests that they attend to different aspects in Linde's (1993) framework of creating
coherence in life stories. This is reflected at level 1 positioning when they position
themselves in relation to other story characters, namely, the people around them. Also,
the first part of the analysis is presented as related to Liang's (1997) study comparing gay
European Americans' and gay Asian Americans' coming-out narratives. The findings in
the present study are in line with what Liang discovers in her data. Indeed, although the
component of coming out to self is not entirely absent in the participants' coming-out
narratives, like the gay Asian Americans in Liang's study, the four participants in my
study do not address the inner conflict or struggle before coming to accept their gay
identities. Even when prompted by my question, one of the participants, Daksh, rejects
the idea by claiming he never had that "problem" (see extract 5 for more detailed
analysis).

Then I turn my attention to how they became aware of and describe their social location in the changing social contexts (Rust, 1993). Likewise, the participants position themselves at level 1 relationally to other story characters, including the people they encountered in the U.S. after they arrived or the people they met back in India. This positioning outlines the differences they have observed between India and the U.S. The positioning at level 3, therefore, gains saliency as they reflect on the Discourses of the changing social contexts, portraying the contrastive social contexts by comparing the regional differences as well as the temporal differences. In recounting their life events, the participants position themselves at level 2 with a coherent sense of self to establish their gay identity and relive their coming-out experiences in front of me.

Lastly, I inquire into the close connections they build in storytelling between their coming-out experiences and Indian traditional values of family and marriage while negotiating and resisting some of those connections that involve heteronormativity to affirm their gay identities in the U.S. With a special emphasis on level 3 positioning, I notice the three recurring Discourses that the participants allude to: the close-knit social and family network that inhibits coming out in India, the considerable weight attached to getting married in Indian tradition, and the coming out imperative that reinforces the distinction between being honest and hiding on one hand and cast them as gay men with clear principles.

4.1. Individual Definitions of Coming Out & Social Orientations

To illustrate how the immigrant participants in my study came to learn the concept of coming out, I first investigate the social orientations in their stories before delving into

cultural specificities that mark these participants as gay immigrants coming from an Indian background. Social orientation, as defined by De Fina (2003), refers to "the position of the speaker with respect to the dimension of interdependence versus autonomy from other" (p.51). Taking this approach, I analyze the linguistic representation of self, namely, how identity is constructed through recounting personal experiences. More specifically, I analyze the linguistic devices narrators use to make relevant their ideas of coming out, including constructed dialogue and repetition. Each of the four participants takes a different approach to coming out that in turn reflects a disparate array of understandings of it. The significance of the discussion here, then, is to see the different aspects of self in stories that participants attend to.

Responding to previous work that addresses the differences between gay European and Asian Americans' coming-out narratives (i.e. Liang, 1997), I demonstrate in this section that the four participants, though all from India, display a certain extent of dissimilarity. Analysis of the five extracts below shows how they orient themselves differently and emphasize some of the aspects outlined by Linde (1993, p.100) — *continuity of the self*, *relation of the self to others*, and *reflexivity of the self*—more than the others. To elicit participants' understanding of what coming out is, I started each interview by asking them the same set of questions: *What is coming out*? *What does it mean to you*? The four Indian participants responded in different ways, indicative of the difference with regard to how they each define coming out. I begin with Reyansh's account, which is noticeably and distinctively reflexive, focusing on his self-realization; following is Arjun's definition of coming out that shows a proclivity for contrasting himself with other; next, Daksh more expressly highlights coming out to others; Pranav

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takes a different approach to my question that directs the focus of interaction onto the interview to continue his recounting of coming-out narratives. All of this suggests that they emphasize different aspects of coming out, thereby creating and maintaining coherence of self differently.

In extract 1, we see Reyansh's account of his coming out and how he makes it clear, using both what Tannen (2007) calls "constructed dialogue" and repetition, that coming out to him rests heavily on self-realization. He constructs his thoughts as dialogue to communicate what he believes to be coming out. The parts where he constructs dialogue mark a shift between the story world and the storytelling world where he externally evaluates the situation. The use of repetition is also significant in this example, especially variations on the phrase "me realizing that I am gay." This stands out in Reyansh's positioning in that he focuses more on himself than making a contrast between him and other people.

Extract 1.

→	1.	Reyansh:	So for <u>me</u>, coming out was primarily <u>me</u> realizing that I am gay.
	2.	Ping:	Mhm.
	3.	Reyansh:	And- and everything after that was more just another step of coming out
→	4.		To me, coming out was when I realized I was gay.
	5.	Ping:	Mhm.
	6.	Reyansh:	And that I wasn't bisexual, wasn't just something,
	7.		"Oh, I can be with women at some- just have some fun right now,"
	8.		"And be with men later on."
	9.	Ping:	Yeah.
→	10.	Reyansh:	Hehehe you know. So me realizing that, "no I am gay."
	11.		"I cannot possibly marry a woman."
	12.		"I'm only attracted to men."
	13.		And not just physically but also emotionally.
	14.		That even if I somehow (.) marry a woman and <u>am</u> able to have sex with her
	15.		Just for the purpose of procreation.

16. Ping: Mhm.
17. Reyansh: Even then, I would never be straight.
18.   I would always be attracted to
19.   Me realizing that is basically that main coming out
20. Ping: Mhm.
21. Reyansh: After that, everything else was just adding on top of it?
→ 22.   But for me coming out was me realizing that I was gay.
23. Ping: Ok.
24. Reyansh: To myself.
25. Ping: To yourself.
26. Reyansh: Yes. After that I think it's just, you know,
27.   You- you trying to make your life easier

Responding to my question prior to the beginning of this extract (*…what is coming out (.)*

to you), Reyansh sequentially and accordingly shapes his reply (*So **for me**, coming out*

was primarily <u>me</u> realizing that I am gay, line 1 and ***To me**, coming out was when I*

realized I was gay, line 4). The use of repetition, which functions on several levels, is

especially interesting in this example. In the interview (level 2), his repetition seems to

call my attention to the very fact that to him, coming out is construed as the realization

that he is gay. It serves not only to create involvement but also to structure Reyansh's

talk. According to Tannen (2007), speakers repeat words to "make individual utterances

into a unified discourse" and ultimately "to contribute to the point of the discourse"

(p.67). Furthermore, here repetition is used to mark the opening and closing of an

episode. Reyansh's repetition is both lexical and syntactic. In line 1, he introduces his

understanding of coming out (*So for <u>me</u>, coming out was primarily <u>me</u> realizing that I am*

gay.), which can be regarded as the opening of his explanation of what coming out means

to him. In line 4, when he reiterates, *To me, coming out was when I realized I was gay,* he

goes back to the initial point before going into the next part, that is, what happens

afterward. After he stresses that he will never be attracted to women with a fictional and

hypothetical narrative starting from line 14 and 15 with subjunctive (*That even if I somehow (.) marry a woman and <u>am</u> able to have sex with her/ Just for the purpose of procreation*), he sums it up by repeating again (*Me realizing that is basically that main coming out*, line 19), which functions similarly to a narrative evaluation. Line 22 can therefore be seen as his recapitulation and the closing of what coming out means to him (*But for me coming out was me realizing that I was gay.*) in that after that he moves on to talk about coming out to others. Through repetition, Reyansh forges an image of certainty; he is very confident of his gay identity and this is conveyed in the interaction as he repeats the key words in a rhythmic pattern. The repetition of "I am gay" and "I was gay" indicates the reflexivity of self in the story.

At the same time, Reyansh presents his inner thoughts back in time as dialogue to get his point across as well as to create involvement in the interaction. Here the discourse marker *oh* cues a shift from plain telling to reported speech (see Schiffrin, 1987 on discourse markers and Trester, 2009 on *'oh'* as a discourse marker), or what Tannen (2007) calls "constructed dialogue," which is also evidenced by the change in tense inflection (*Oh, I can be with women at some- just have some fun right now,* line 7 and *And be with men later on,* line 8). Tannen observes that people often express their thoughts in narratives in the form of constructed dialogue. She points out that "casting ideas as dialogue rather than statements is a discourse strategy for framing information in a way that communicates effectively and creates involvement" (p.112). Reyansh's incorporation of inner speech in dialogue demonstrates the process whereby he came to the conclusion that he was gay. From line 11 to 12, the reenacted dialogue reinforces this image and his strong conviction (*I cannot possibly marry a woman,* and *I'm only*

attracted to men). In using the constructed inner dialogue, Reyansh performs what went on in his mind when he first came out to himself and accepted his gay identity.

In sum, Reyansh's attempt in defining coming out is accomplished mainly through the use of repetition and constructed dialogue. Moreover, his account exhibits strong inclination toward coming out to self, which correlates to what Linde (1993) terms *reflexivity of self* in life stories. In the story (level 1), Reyansh positions himself as a gay man who is attracted to men both physically and emotionally. This idea is further strengthened by a hypothetical scenario in which he marries a woman. At level 1, his positioning is achieved through revealing his attraction to people of the same sex, contributing to the self-presentation of a gay man who is not interested in women at all. To answer my question and to bring out his gay identity, Reyansh does not highlight the relations of self to others. At level 3, he defies the heteronormative assumption that, as a man, he would be attracted to women and eventually marry a woman. His declaration of lack of interest in women is a way of reflexively positioning himself as a gay man.

In the next example, Arjun's response also shows a strong sequentiality, as the way he formulates his reply is clearly shaped by my question (*Like what is coming out **to you***, line 2 and ***To me, it was…***, line 3). His description of coming out points to the fact that while there is a component of reflexivity with respect to coming out, here the positioning of himself is achieved mainly through interactively positioning others, specifically "friends" (lines 3 and 4) and "family" (line 4); this serves to accentuate that Arjun is "different" (lines 8 and 15) from the people around him.

Extract 2a.
1.   Ping: So, can you tell me something about coming out.

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	2.		Like what is coming out to you. What do you think coming out is.
→	3.	Arjun:	To me, it was, I guess a statement that I was making in my circle of friends,
→	4.		And initially it was just friends, not so much family.
	5.	Ping:	Mhm.
	6.	Arjun:	Uh, to describe my own (.) how- how I see myself
	7.	Ping:	Yeah.
→	8.	Arjun:	And how I recognize that- that was different.
	9.	Ping:	Mhm.
→	10.	Arjun:	From um the ways my friends were, planning their lives out.
	11.	Ping:	Mhm.

After some brief description of his understanding of what coming out means, Arjun goes on to reenact his thoughts as dialogue, just as Reyansh does in extract 1; in doing this, he positions himself in relation to others. He also continues the theme of difference, using the word "different" in line 15.

Extract 2b.

12.	Arjun:	When I was first coming out, I had a conscious sort of thought,
13.		Saying, "I know from this point onward,"
14.	Ping:	Mhm.
15.	Arjun:	"My life is going to be very different."
16.	Ping:	Yeah?
17.	Arjun:	From all the lives of my peers and friends that I grew up with.
18.	Ping:	Mhm.
19.	Arjun:	And (.) some I had to make that statement.
20.	Ping:	Yeah.
21.	Arjun:	Uh, for my own self. Saying,
22.	Ping:	Mhm.
23.	Arjun:	"Yes, this is different and this is who I am."
24.		And I think it was just recognizing that, and- and articulating that.
25.	Ping:	Mhm.
26.	Arjun:	Difference. It was important at some point.

When Arjun recounts the moment when he came out to himself, he stages a conversation to create a stylized performance effect. The tense inflection corresponds to the fact that when constructing his inner speech as dialogue, he takes me, the interviewer, back to then and there in the past event. The dialogue in present tense (*I know from this point onward,* line 13 and *My life is going to be very different,* line 15) is embedded in the recounting in

past tense (*When I first came out, I had a conscious sort of thought,* line 12). This can be seen as the story world embedded in the storytelling world.

By constructing his own thoughts at that time as dialogue, Arjun highlights the reflexive aspect of his coming-out experience: he was aware of the difference deriving from his gay identity (*From all the lives of my peers and friends that I grew up with,* line 17), and that he was conscious of his gay identity (*Yes, this is different and this is who I am,* line 23). By presenting his inner thoughts as dialogue, as Tannen puts it, Arjun creates involvement in the interview; he invites me into his self-reflection on the moment of realization and recognition. The same time Arjun relives and reenacts that particular moment in his life, he also displays his positive attitudes toward his gay identity: there is no self-rejection or denial. He accepts and embraces that part of himself and integrates it as an essential part of his life (*And I think it was just recognizing that, and- and articulating that.* line 24 and *Difference. It was important at some point.* line 26).

In recounting his first time coming out to self in constructed dialogue, Arjun positions himself in the story (level 1) as someone who has come to terms with his sexuality and his gay identity. He shows no doubt about this part of himself. While his story shows some reflexivity of self (his awareness of the difference being gay), he creates the sense of self through the relations of self to other; more precisely, the separateness. Coming out by drawing attention to how being gay makes him different from his peers and friends indicates that Arjun conveys and constructs his social identity relationally, echoing the relational principle proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). In the interview interaction (level 2), he positions himself in relation to me as someone who is open about his gay identity and not afraid to share his past when being asked about it.

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Level 3 positioning is subtler in this part. Highlighting the "difference" between him and his friends, Arjun speaks to the heteronormativity that prevails in the society. As a gay man, he positions himself as being different from other people, presumably the heterosexual majority. By coming out, he makes the choice of not conforming to the heteronormative assumption.

In the first two examples, we see different social orientations with respect to how the participants define coming out. On the one hand, Reyansh emphasizes the reflexive part of coming out, that is, coming out to self; on the other hand, Arjun conveys the sense of self in his narrative by positioning himself in relation to others, thus leaning toward coming out to others. This, however, does not suggest that there is a dichotomy between coming out to self and coming out to others; instead, they are the two ends of a continuum. While Reyansh's account exemplifies the end of coming out to self by displaying more reflexivity defining coming out as realizing his own gayness, Arjun's definition of coming out shows the propensity of ratifying one's gayness based on the relation of self to others. What's more, the temporal continuity of self is another element in one's life story. In telling their coming-out narratives, the participants are also making sense of how they came to accept and present their gay identity. The next two examples fall on the other end and illustrate how participants think of coming out as disclosing their gay identity to others. Daksh's response marks a stark contrast with Reyansh's. In his story, there is significantly less emphasis on the reflexivity of coming out to self; rather, coming out to him is about "telling people who he is."

Extract 3.
1.   Ping: What is coming out.

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	2.		What does it mean to you.
	3.	Daksh:	Uh coming out to <u>me</u> means uh ((tsk)) telling (.) myself
→	4.		People I interact on a day to day basis who I am.
	5.		That's- that's how I look at it.
	6.		And that could be anyone.
	7.		For me, it started- of course it started back in my school days.
→	8.		So it was friends and while I was living with them, my roommates
	9.	Ping:	Mhm.
→	10.	Daksh:	And then it my <u>brother</u>, and the progression was my family.
	11.		That was how it started.
→	12.		Coming out, for me, was letting them know who I am.
	13.		You know, my sexual preferences and what not.
	14.	Ping:	Mhm.
	15.	Daksh:	Yeah. So, and then for me coming out does not stop like
	16.		Like it's not like a one time thing.

Consistent with the previous two participants' responses, Daksh's reply (*Uh coming out to **me** means uh (tsk) telling (.) myself,* line 3) is sequentially shaped and occasioned to my questions (*What is coming out.* line 1 and *What does it mean **to you**,* line 2). In his description, unlike Arjun's and Reyansh's accounts that center on the concept of self, coming out has more to do with disclosure; it's about telling people (*People I interact on a day to day basis who I am,* line 4). He then goes on to names the people he has come out to, including his friends at school and his roommates (*For me, it started- of course it started back in my school days,* line 7 and *So it was friends and while I was living with them, my roommates,* line 8). What follows is his brother and his family (*And then it was my brother, and the progression was my family.* line 10). This tendency is perfectly captured in his lexical choice of "progression," suggesting that his coming-out experience can be described as a linear and ongoing process. Listing the people he has come out to functions as repetition; as Tannen states, "repetition with variation… creates the vivid impression… through its intensifying, list-like intonation" (p.75). Soon after in line 12, he restates that "*Coming out, for me, was letting them know who I am.* and *You know, my*

sexual preferences and what not. This utterance has the same function of repetition; line 3 and line 12 are both answers to my questions and can be viewed as repetition that marks the opening and closing of the history of his disclosure. Repetitions in the beginning "operate as a kind of theme-setting" whereas "in the end, forming a kind of coda" (p.77). This short and concise story from line 7 to 11 told in past tense encapsulates the narrator's coming-out experience in the past with the iconic order that represents the temporal sequence of each coming-out episode. In a sense, this is a story that serves as the abstract for the other coming-out narratives to come.

Thus, we can tell from Daksh's reply to my question the way he construes coming out; it gives saliency to two aspects of coming out: the linear temporal progression and the self's relations to others. The story Daksh provides as his response to my questions also corresponds to a common framing of coming out as a linear process. However, he does note that there is no such endpoint in the process (*Yeah. So, and then for me coming out does not stop like.* line 15 and *Like it's not like a one-time thing.* line 16). The use of repetition linguistically and iconically represents that temporal progression.

Going back to the brief discussion of the three characteristics of the self that Linde proposes (which were presented in the beginning of this section), I will demonstrate that, in the fourth example, the participant strongly emphasizes relation of the self to others as he responds to my questions. When asked what he thinks of as coming-out narratives, Pranav mentions the common conceptualization that coming out is a process as opposed to a one-time event. Immediately after that, he shifts the focus onto his coming-out experience and proceeds to tell his first coming out.

Extract 4.
→ 1. Ping: Like what would you say, you know, qualify as a coming out story.
  2. Pranav: Uh, there are several coming out- coming out as a process than an event.
  3.   That there are several coming outs.
  4. Ping: Mhm.
  5. Pranav: But if people are asked to say, uh, one coming out story, like one experience?
  6.   They uh:: I- I would think they usually tell the one.
  7.   That is most dramatic or the most difficult for them to do.
  8. Ping: Mhm?
  9. Pranav: Maybe the very first coming out.
  10. Ping: Yeah.
→ 11. Pranav: Yup. So I can tell you my first coming out?
  12. Ping: Ok.
  13. Pranav: Yeah it was to a- to a friend of mine here in the University of Maryland.
  14.   And uh he was like a white American guy.

Pranav's responses show clear sequentiality as well. However, unlike the previous three participants who provide a story in response to my questions and show different social orientations, Pranav replies in a way that directs the focus of interaction onto the interview format that emphasizes our relational roles as interviewer and interviewee and thus paves the way for his first coming-out narrative. In the example, we see how we communicate primarily at level 2 as storyteller and story recipient and the gradual shift from answering my question (*Like what would you say, you know, qualify as a coming out story*, line 1) in a directly way (*That there are several coming outs*, line 3) to building up to introducing his own coming-out narrative (*Maybe the very first coming out*, line 9) and finally to explicitly negotiating with me for the permission to tell a story (*Yup. So I can tell you my first coming out?*, line 11). Pranav's response shows an entirely different attention to what coming out, or more precisely coming-out narrative, means to him to usher in his story and from that point on redirect the focus of interaction onto storytelling by setting up the orientation unit of a story (*Yeah it was to a- to a friend of mine here in*

the University of Maryland, line 13 and *And uh he was like a white American guy*, line 14).

Even though all four participants are from India and later migrated to the United States, their reactions and responses to the questions that elicit their understandings of what coming out means to them personally indicate the heterogeneity inherent in their individual coming-out experience. This acknowledges the impossibility of identifying cultural patterns without exception. But at the same time, the social orientations that are observed in the interviews and reflected in their responses are in line with Liang's (1997) findings in her study. While gay European Americans in her study prefaced their coming-out narratives with "a sometime lengthy internal struggle with their gay feelings," the gay Asian Americans focused on coming out to others and "do not present a self that is racked with inner conflicts" (p.298). We can see that despite the fact that four participants emphasize different characteristics of the self in stories (from Reyansh's stress on reflexivity of the self to Daksh's highlighting of the relations of the self to others), the component of coming out to self is not characterized by internal conflicts or negative evaluations of self. In the case of these gay immigrants, Liang's hypothesis may apply here: gay Asian Americans "became aware of their same-sex attraction prior to learning the homophobic values of the culture" (p.305). Daksh's assertive response to my explicit question corroborates this as shown in the extract below.

Extract 5.
1.   Ping: And (.) some would- some people find coming out to one's self
2.   The most difficult.
3.   They might have this inner struggle or inner conflict for a long time
4.   Before they come to terms with their sexuality
5.   Like come to accept that, I'm gay.

	6.		Do you find that the case?=
→	7.	Daksh:	=No.
→	8.		Uh (.) no? I- I don't think I ever had that problem.
	9.	Ping:	Mhm?
→	10.	Daksh:	Yeah (.) I- no I always knew that I was gay.
	11.	Ping:	Okay.
→	12.	Daksh:	I just- I never had a struggle to accept that I am gay.
	13.		>I never had that- I don't even think< I would have any question
	14.		In my mind like, "°am I gay°?"

Daksh's prompt denial (=*No.*, line 7) indicates his strong rejection to the proposition that
I have just uttered from line 1 to 6 (*They might have this inner struggle or inner conflict
for a long time*, *Before they come to terms with their sexuality*, and *Do you find that the
case?=*). Here in line 14, he again casts his thoughts as dialogue (*In my mind like, "°am I
gay°?"*). It is not merely that they do not mention the inner conflicts but that they are
consciously aware of the absence of these conflicts. Even when asked directly, Daksh is
able to describe how he has always been like this and is comfortable with his gay
feelings, contributing to the creation of a coherent self in his coming-out narrative.
However, although the findings in the present study happen to coincide with the patterns
found in Liang's study, further in-depth exploration is required to account for this
phenomenon. A more specific methodology can be adopted to examine how social
orientations vary depending on people's cultural backgrounds and their upbringing.

4.2. Changing Social Contexts

In this section, I focus on the participants' awareness of the influence of coming out
in the U.S. and the contrastive social contexts between their old and new homes that the
narrators evoke. Following Harré's (2008) argument that "positions are clusters of beliefs
about how rights and duties are distributed in the course of an episode of personal

interaction" (p.53), investigating the positions each participant takes up in storytelling is an apt way to probe into the Discourses in the local cultural. For some participants, I asked explicitly in the interviews how they came to learn about the concept of coming out while the others brought it up without prompting. Either way, they all made a sharp and clear contrast between before and after coming to the U.S. and reported that they did not come out until they arrived in the U.S. Despite the commonality that they reveal regarding noting the changing social contexts, their stories focus on different aspects of the social contexts in which they found themselves. For Daksh, coming out was not an option when he was in India because there was no such concept as coming out; it was something he later acquired in the U.S., facilitated by queer discourses, for example, the discussion of coming out as gay, circulated among gay people around him. Reyansh, on the other hand, focuses on how the legal system and same-sex marriage in the U.S. justify his coming out in the U.S. Arjun notices that even in India, social contexts change not only from place to place but from time to time: queer discourses on coming out have evolved the time he was away from India.

Daksh expresses candidly that coming out was a novel concept to him that he encountered when he came to the U.S. and it was absent in India. He provides a story to substantiate how he came to learn of the idea of coming out. This story also revisits the theme seen previously in an extract from Daksh's interview (Extract 3): Coming out involves talking to a lot of people.

Extract 6.
	1.	Ping:	Yeah. And when did you first have the idea of coming out.
→	2.	Daksh:	Oh when I came to the US because I uh
→	3.		when I came to the US, that's when the whole idea of coming out came to me.

→ 4.   Because I- um, back where I grew up, there was no concept of coming out.
5.   Ping: Uh huh?
6.   Daksh: Um you- even if you want- even if you identify yourself as gay,
7.   It wasn't something you- there wasn't a concept called coming out
8.   Ping: Mhm.
9.   Daksh: So I think when I was coming to the US
10.   And I think a year and a half after I was <u>here</u>,
11.   Um, I met like-minded people
12.   And they basically, you know, just talked to me about, you know,
→ 13.   "Are you <u>out</u>."
→ 14.   "Did you come out to someone."
15.   You know, and you keep asking questions.
→ 16.   "What does it mean."
→ 17.   "What do you mean coming out."
18.   Ping: Mhm?
19.   Daksh: And uh basically that's when I realized.
→ 20.   "Oh there's like a (.) <u>thing</u> called coming out."
→ 21.   "Telling your friends and family is coming out."
22.   And so yeah I'd say two years- a year and a half after I moved to the US.
23.   Ping: Mhm.

Responding my question in line 1 (*And when did you first have the idea of coming out.*),

Daksh expressly marks a contrast between India and the U.S. in that it was in the U.S.

where he learned the idea of coming out (*When I came to the US, that's when the whole*

idea of coming out came to me., line 3) and that coming out was not an option because

there was no such concept to begin with (*Because I- um, back where I grew up, there was*

no concept of coming out. line 4). In line 6 and 7, he further adds that even if a person

identifies himself as a gay man in India, coming out is inhibited by the absence of such

concept (*even if you identify yourself as gay*, and *there wasn't a concept called coming*

out). Starting in line 9, Daksh reenacts the process whereby he learned about coming out

as a new concept. As shown in previous examples, he likewise presents his experience in

the form of constructed dialogue, voicing both the people who interacted with and

himself as a person who just arrived in the U.S.

Daksh stages a performance in which people ask him questions that prod him to ponder on what coming out means. The questions shown in immediate juxtaposition represent the frequency with which he first encountered these questions (*Are you out.*, line 13 and *Did you come out to someone.*, line 14). In line 16 and 17, he switches role to voice himself back then and animates the questions in a similar fashion, in immediate juxtaposition and at an accelerated pace, to iconically show the frequency and constancy of these questions (*What does it mean*, and *What do you mean coming out*). Toward the end of the story, he produces another *oh*-prefaced dialogue to deliver his inner speech (*Oh there's like a (.) thing called coming out.*, line 20) and demonstrates that he has come to grasp the meaning of coming out, which as previously shown in his case, is oriented toward disclosure, that is, coming out to others (*Telling your friends and family is coming out.*, line 21).

Throughout this part of his story, Daksh positions himself to depict the transition from unknowing to more knowledgeable with respect to coming out when he was relocated in a new country and encountered new social constructs. In the story world (level 1), he takes up the position of someone who had recently arrived in the U.S. from India and had no knowledge of coming out. He presents himself as non-agentive: in the story he is the target of questions he does not understand, finding himself immersed in a new social context where coming out is a widely discussed aspect of queer life. This is where he interactively positions himself in relation to the "like-minded people" (line 11); through the interaction with them, Daksh came to learn more about coming out as a practice and gained access to the information that had not previously been attainable for him before. This is in tune with Jandt and Darsey's (1981) proposition of coming out as a

communicative process: "interaction with other homosexuals facilitates the learning of vocabulary that not only explains but justifies homosexual behavior" (p.16). At level 2, Daksh recreates in the interview interaction the process of acquiring knowledge of coming out when he came to the U.S. Standing out from this part is the creation of coherence; Daksh makes a connection between his past and present selves. He first describes the turning point where being unaware of the concept of coming out and then verbally performs the personal experience in the U.S. through which he became informed about it, performing his reaction. Thus, he comes to display a sense of self, as Wortham (2000, 2001) describes as enactment, that is consistent with the personality he presents in the beginning of the interview and builds a coherent self by underlining the temporal continuity throughout his past in the recounting of the story through language. Above all, he establishes a connection between his migration from India to the U.S. and his obtaining the concept of coming out. This underscores the importance of migration in his life in terms of developing his gay identity; he is now more mindful of navigating relationships with others, for example friends and family, marking his arrival in the U.S. as an integral part of acquainting with the local gay discourses.

Reyansh also reflects on the differences he observed and experienced before and after his migration. Prior to this extract, he has been explaining to me how he manages coming out at work and that he feels the need to come out because now that same-sex marriage is legalized in the U.S., coming out takes on an extra "financial dimension" in addition to the "emotional dimension." Below he turns to addresses the difference relating to this aspect of being gay in a new country as compared to in India.

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Extract 7.

	1.	Reyansh:	And I think it- it- it- it- then again,
→	2.		Coming out in the US is different than coming out for somebody in India.
	3.	Ping:	Mhm.
→	4.		Or coming out in some other places
→	5.		Where homosexuality is <u>still</u> not something that is way (.) accepted?
	6.		And I guess say also it doesn't really matter
	7.		Because there are no benefits tied to you being <u>you</u> coming out.
	8.	Ping:	Mhm.
→	9.	Reyansh:	Even if you're out in India, it doesn't really mean you'll get any benefit.
→	10.		Any kind of financial benefits or.
	11.		Or then you can still get married or.
	12.		That you can get all of your spouse's benefits or (inaudible).
	13.		So, but <u>there</u> coming out is more just,
	14.		You're making your life a little more honest.
	15.		And a little easier for you to,
	16.	Ping:	Mhm.
	17.	Reyansh:	But here there are other things some other things to coming out.
	18.	Ping:	Yeah, it has to do with the system.

In line 2, Reyansh brings it up that coming out is different in the U.S. than in India, setting up a contrast between the two countries (*Coming out in the US is different than coming out for somebody in India.*). In this setup of opposites, India is conglomerated into other places where homosexuality is not widely accepted (*Or coming out in some other places*, line 4 and *Where homosexuality is <u>still</u> not something way (.) accepted?*, line 5). Because of the lack of financial benefits and legal protections by the system, in Reyansh's mind the need for coming out is compromised and undermined. This is when he provides a hypothetical narrative starting with a subjunctive "even if" to portray an alternative scenario of someone coming out in India (*Even if you're out in India, it doesn't really mean you'll get any benefit*, line 9). This narrative presents a fictional reality that serves to contrast with what coming out is like in the U.S. In his narrative, the

need for coming out is therefore diminished; coming out is dismissed as merely making one's life more honest and easier (*You're making your life a little more honest*, line 14 and *And a little easier for you to*, line 15).

Here Reyansh's account seems to provide a reason for his coming out in the U.S. and for not coming out in India. At level 1, he creates a generic character with the personal pronoun "you." This story character is positioned as someone in India whose gay identity is not accepted and whose rights are not guaranteed by the local legal system. Through this positioning in a fictional scenario, Reyansh makes a point that someone who attempts to come out in India would not benefit so much from doing so as he or she would in the U.S. In the interaction (level 2), this part serves the purpose of making sense of his decision to come out at work when he is in the U.S. Because of this difference, coming out at work appears natural and reasonable when the society in general is accepting and the system is working to support gay rights, making coming out more of a necessity. In describing the difference between the U.S. and India, Reyansh compares two dissimilar social structures at level 3. With the benefits that come with legalization of same-sex marriage in the U.S., Reyansh positions himself as more willing to come out and indicates that the benefits he mentions in the social context in the U.S. are conducive to a more meaningful coming out; on the contrary, in India, gay coming out is by comparison less crucial (*And I guess say also it doesn't really matter*, line 6). Rather, coming out is reduced to its emotional dimension; echoing what he has said earlier as seen in extract 2, coming out is ultimately realizing one's self to be gay while coming out to others is simply adding on top of that to make life easier. Reyansh's reflection on the social contexts illustrates how social orientations in coming out can change in accordance

with the experience of migration in terms of how participant position themselves vis-à-vis

Discourses (i.e., third level of positioning).

In the following example, Arjun also reflects on the contrastive sociocultural

contexts back in India and here in the U.S. His positioning indicates how the being in

India hinders coming out while being away from home in the U.S. facilitates coming out

as a gay man. His observation reveals not only the regional differences or temporal ones.

In the beginning of this extract, he mentions an encounter with a younger gay man he was

acquainted with in India, thus presenting how social constructs may change over time as

well.

Extract 8a.

	1.	Arjun:	At that time, I did not want to come out to anybody.
	2.	Ping:	Yeah.
	3.	Arjun:	Um. (.) This was. (.) Nobody-
→	4.		At that point? There was no concept of coming out, I think.
	5.	Ping:	Mhm.
	6.	Arjun:	And (.) There was no openly gay person (.) in the college.
	7.	Ping:	Mhm.
→	8.	Arjun:	Which was- That's changed now, though.
	9.		I- I ran into um, um, a fellow college mate of mine a few years junior to me.
	10.	Ping:	Mhm.
	11.	Arjun:	But he was openly out and,
→	12.		He was like, "yeah, people have come out when they're in college."
	13.		I said, "good for you." Hehe.
	14.	Ping:	Hehe.
→	15.	Arjun:	That was unthinkable back then.
	16.	Ping:	Yeah.

Similarly to Reyansh, Arjun comments that coming out was not a concept available to

him when he was in India (*There was no concept of coming out, I think*, line 4). But he

goes on to add that this has changed. The sociocultural context in India has changed as

time progresses. To endorse this point, he provides a story of his encounter with a college mate who is of a younger generation (*I- I ran into um, um, a fellow college mate of mine a few years junior to me*, line 9). Their interaction is transformed into a brief interchange, once again the form of constructed dialogue. Arjun invites me to witness the scene where the action took place and conveys his point by using each character to stand for a different time. The college mate's words portray a modern Indian society where young gay men are more open about their identities in public (*yeah, people have come out when they're in college*, line 12), contrasted with Arjun's telling that coming out was not an option for him back when he was in India and when he was in college owing to the circumstances that there was no concept of coming out and that there were no fellow students who came out as gay (*There was no openly gay person (.) in the college*, line 6).

In the story (level 1), Arjun positions himself vis-à-vis this college mate to show the gap in time by specifying the other story character being "a few years junior." Setting up this relation, Arjun is able to convey the message that things have changed but back then there were circumstantial constraints that prevented him from coming out. His remark that "*I said, good for you. Hehe.*" (line 13) with a laughter token seems to imply that he treats this change in sociocultural context light-heartedly, not pejoratively. It is as if he is saying "you are lucky enough to be living in this time when you can openly express your gay identity." His closing statement in this part "*That was unthinkable back then*" (line 15) reinforces that image of him not being able to do the same when he was in college. At level 2, the story is used to show Arjun's awareness of this change in attitudes toward gayness and therefore to justify the fact that he had not come out earlier. This explains the embedding of this story; it is bracketed by utterances that stress not being able to

come out. At level 3, Arjun positions his past self to the present self; because of the contexts he was in, it was not ideal for him to come out when he was young and in India. But now being in the U.S., he has come out to several people, including his friends and family. The comparison he makes between now and then and the U.S. and India draws attention to the development of his gay identity over time and with migration.

Immediately following the previous extract, Arjun goes on to say that coming out was made possible after migrated (*So coming out was a (.) possibility only after I came to the US*, line 17). Without my prompting, he introduces the idea that coming out was a new behavior that he did not take on until he left India and arrived in the U.S. He notes that distance away from his home country could be a reason. As he recounts his past experience of choosing not to come out in India, another theme surfaces in his story.

Extract 8b.
→ 17. Arjun: So coming out was a (.) possibility only after I came to the US. <But yeah.>
18. Ping: Why do you think is that? So. (.)
19. Arjun: Good question. Um, well, to friends? I almost did a few times.
20. Ping: Mhm.
21. Arjun: But (2.0) there was nothing to fall on it [did not] go well.
22. Ping: [Oh.]
23.   Yeah. Like there was not, I guess, a safety net, [or something.]
24. Arjun: [Yeah, yeah.]
25. Ping: Or support.
26. Arjun: Yeah. It's- it's. <u>Here</u> for example
27.   It was not like there was- was a safety net waiting for me to sort of catch me.
28.   If things didn't go well.
→ 29.   But I knew that distance was a safety net.
30. Ping: Mhm.
31. Arjun: So it's like if it doesn't go well it doesn't go well.
32.   And I'm half way across the world.
33. Ping: [Yeah.]
34. Arjun: [Hehe.] Life's still going on.
35. Ping: Yeah.

When I follow up with Arjun's remark that it was possible for him to come out only after coming to the U.S., he elaborates by saying that distance provided him with a safety net if his coming out was not accepted (*So it's like if it doesn't go well it doesn't go well*, line 31 and *And I'm half way across the world*, line 32). In other words, coming out was made possible exactly because of his migration from his hometown to a new country. This would not have happened if he had stayed. He can come out free of worries that there might be negative reactions. This reveals two things. First, in his mind, coming out is mostly difficult when it comes to friends and family back home in India and second, as there is no mentioning of negative reaction to his coming out in the U.S., he seems to be conveying that he might presuppose that coming out is not only made possible but made easy here.

After that, Arjun unveils his fear of potential impact of coming out in India. This part of the story instantiates an essential theme that recurs across all four participants' coming-out narratives. Coming out was not an option because of the structure of social network in India. It is tight-knit. Friends and family are united or bound closely together. In this example, he uses a hypothetical narrative construction to explore this theme, beginning with "Let's say."

Extract 8c.

	36. Arjun:	But back <u>then</u>, part of the thing I was scared about was.
→	37.	So, ok, let's say I come out to my friends.
	38. Ping:	Mhm.
→	39. Arjun:	And if it doesn't go well or. If they- if they talk about it to their parents.
	40. Ping:	Mhm.
→	41. Arjun:	Um, my parents knew their parents. So it's [like

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                                                                      [Ah it] will eventually-
→  43. Arjun:   It will- it will eventually come back to my folks.
   44. Ping:    Yeah.
   45. Arjun:   And that I could not even imagine. Hehehe.
   46. Ping:    Mhm.
   47. Arjun:   And so uh (2.0) that was not even an option. Hehe.
   48. Ping:    Mhm.
```

In the story (level 1), Arjun positions himself as a potential victim of others underscoring how friends and relatives form a closely connected network. He further positions each character as intimately interconnected with one another. This type of networks that renders coming out in India unmanageable for him; he could not possibly confide to one person and expect his gay identity to remain only between the two of them. Instead, because of the pattern of how information circulates in traditional Indian family and social networks, Arjun in the story world is in a position where he cannot come out to anyone, not even his friends for the news will, in the hypothetical scenario, eventually come to his parents and family through a word-of-mouth tradition. In the interaction with me (level 2), Arjun verbally displays the stream of this information flow: *I come out to my friends* (line 37) → *if they talk about it to their parents* (line 39) → *Um, my parents knew their parents* (line 41) → *it will eventually come back to my folks* (line 43). This depiction vividly presents to me what the social network is like in his hometown and how this pattern can be detrimental to his coming out. At level 2, he positions me as an outsider to his culture and therefore finds it necessary to explain to me the likely progression and consequences of his coming out. This justifies his choice for not coming out when he was in India. At the same time, he uses laughter not just to ease the tension but also to suggest the main point, the evaluation of the narrative (*And that I could not even imagine. Hehehe*, line 45 and *And so uh (2.0) that was not even an option. Hehe*,

line 47). These lines lead back to the fundamental issue at hand: coming out was

impossible for him back in India.

The same can be observed in the interview with Daksh. In the example provided

below, Daksh is reflecting on his decision of coming out and how coming to the U.S. had

an enormous influence on it.

Extract 9.
1.	Daksh:	If I were in India I would never come to the US
2.		I don't know what I would have done, right?
3.	Ping:	Mhm.
4.	Daksh:	Be- I definitely would not have gone <u>mad</u>.
5.		But would I- would I have been this clear and open about the fact that
6.		"<u>Hey</u> I'm gay."
7.		"I'm proud about it and I can go out and tell everyone about it."
8.		I don't think so.
9.		I just think when you grow up in that environment, it makes it more difficult.
10.		I think when you're here? When you're far away? It's easier.
11.	Ping:	Mhm.
12.	Daksh:	You can do and say stuff.
13.		Because you're far removed from them.
14.		So yeah, I think it's easier when you're away from your family and everyone.
15.		To come out. To be yourself.
16.		When you're back in your environment where culturally you're also boxed in?
17.		But you're also boxed in because of a lot of
18.		Family drama which happens around you
19.	Ping:	Mhm.
20.	Daksh:	Everyone is everyone's business back home.
21.		It's not like here.
22.	Ping:	Yeah.

The two storylines run parallel to each other: the fictional Daksh in India and the present

Daksh in the U.S. In his words, staying in India and situated in an environment where he

feels "boxed in," he wouldn't be so certain about his gay identity. He constructs dialogue

out of his inner thoughts to convey this message that highlights his openness and outness (*Hey I'm gay*, line 6 and *I'm proud about it and I can go out and tell everyone about it*, line 7).

At level 1, Daksh reflexively positions himself in the fictional scenario in India as being "culturally boxed in" (*When you're **back** in your environment where culturally you're also boxed in?*, line 16), compared to the positioning of self in the U.S. as being clearer and more open (*I think when you're **here**? When you're far away? It's easier.*, line 10). When he stages the parallel situations for him, he is also showing me at level 2 positioning how things would evolve differently. I am positioned as the spectator to witness the disparity between the two social contexts from an outsider's point of view. Lastly, by stepping out of the story world to make evaluations and to position himself at level 3, Daksh explicitly states that in the U.S., distance from his cultural background and home country affords him the space and freedom to come out (*You can do and say stuff*, line 12, *Because you're far removed from them*, line 13 and *So yeah, I think it's easier when you're away from your family and everyone*, line 14). This observation coincides with Arjun's in that being within the close-knit social networks, there is little room and chance for the expression of a gay identity without being overwhelmed by the intricate management of all of their relationships all at once.

In this section, we see in the examples that the participants narrate their different positions in opposing social contexts to accentuate their current and present statuses of being out. Each participant notices the radical changes regarding queer discourses from India to the U.S. Both Daksh and Arjun openly remark on the absence of the concept of coming out in India in contrast to their observation in the U.S. whereas Reyansh

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downplays the importance of coming out in India because the legal system does not provide either protection or benefits for gay men. In addition, Arjun describes that even in India, the social context has changed over time compared to the time when he was in college in India. All of them reenact the vicissitudes of their personal experiences and interactions with other people by constructing dialogue to communicate their point, evaluate the circumstances, and invite me to relive their transitions from one country to another, thereby constructing their present gay identity. It is through the construction of dialogue that they make sense of this drastic shift in their lives and restore the continuity of self, connecting and making relevant the past to the present. The narration not only serves to bridge the disconnect between before and after immigration and create a coherent sense of self over time but to highlight their gay identities in the U.S.

4.3 Family & Marriage in Indian Traditions

In previous sections, the examples have demonstrated that the four gay Indian immigrants participating in this study show different social orientations when it comes to coming out by attending to different aspects of it in their definitions. These examples have also shown that, more prominently germane to their history of immigration, the positioning in coming-out narratives reflects the transitioning and relocation from one sociocultural context to another, from their home country, India, to a new country, the U.S. In this section of the analysis, even more pronounced in their recounting is the self-reflection on their own cultural backgrounds. Two of the themes that stand out are family connections and marital relations. Each of these is epitomized by the selected examples from the interviews presented below. Shared among the examples is the manifestation of

the close social network in India and the great values placed on marriage, both of which the participants perceive as societal pressures. The former is considered to be an obstacle that obstructs coming out in India whereas the latter is used as a cultural touchstone, their determined resistance against which brings their gay identities to the fore.

First, we see Reyansh's reflection of fitting himself into the traditional Indian values on heterosexual marriage. By telling a story of meeting another gay man online, he interactively positions the other story character to make a comparison. The twist toward the end of the story is intended to be comical and humorous; the ending, however, also points to the fact that the societal pressures of getting married plays an indispensable role in his cultural background and pertains largely to traditional Discourse in India.

Extract 10a.
1.	Reyansh:	>And it's funny< when I first came to this.
2.		I was like, I always think,
3.		"Oh I will at some point go back home and marry a girl something."
4.		And uh so- so there was this friend of mine who I met on online (those days).
5.		There was no Grindr.
6.		It was some website called Gay dot com.
7.	Ping:	Uh huh?
8.	Reyansh:	But you still have chat rooms, and small (part of the word) actually.
9.		And so I met this guy.
10.		And then we became friend.
11.		And then I told him at some point I would get married.
12.		And he was like so mad at me.
13.		"Oh you can't you <u>that</u>."
14.		"It's not fair to the <u>girl</u>."
15.		"Cause you know you were <u>gay</u>."
16.		"And you would ruin her <u>life</u>."
17.		And the whole thing. Whole period going on like, months.
18.		Him- him harassing me.
19.	Ping:	Hehe.
20.	Reyansh:	<u>And</u> I- after I, you know, a couple of years later,
21.		He actually ended up marrying a girl.
22.	Ping:	((*laughs*)) What?

23. Reyansh: Hehehehe.
24.   I found out that he is married to a girl now. Hehehehehe.
25.   So it's easier said than done.
26. Ping: Yeah.

Reyansh prefaces the story with a comment, hinting that what is coming is meant to be interpreted in a humorous way (*>And it's funny< when I first came to this*, line 1). Setting up the background of the story, he again transforms his thoughts into dialogue, performing how his mind processed back then (*I was like, I always think*, line 2 and *Oh I will at some point go back home and marry a girl something*, line 3). The frequent appearance of "and" or "and then" from line 9 to 11 represents the rapid progression of this encounter and interaction, indicating that one thing happened immediately after another. For a performance effect and to better communicate the conflicting opinions, Reyansh constructs dialogue between himself and the gay man he met on a dating website. As a character in the story, he told him his conviction that even though he was gay, he was still planning on marrying a woman to fulfill the expectation of him as a man and conform to the heteronormative assumption (*And then I told him at some point I would get married*, line 11). This is met with backlash from the other story character, saying "*Oh you can't you that*" (line 13), "*It's not fair to the girl*" (line 14), "*Cause you know you were gay*" (line 15), and "*And you would ruin her life*" (line 16).

At this point (level 1), Reyansh positions himself as a gay man who is fully aware of his identity by displaying behaviors such as visiting Gay.com to meet other gay men. Simultaneously, to make a comparison, he positions the other story character as someone who holds opposite beliefs and challenges his conformity to getting married. At level 1, Reyansh takes up a position as a gay man who is still subject to heteronormativity. The

surprising ending is more meaningful at level 2 and 3. First, he wants to show me the complete reversal of the characters' roles and the fact that the other story character who bashed him for making remarks about marrying a woman turned out to eat his words and marry a woman in the end (*And I- after I, you know, a couple of years later*, line 20 and *He actually ended up marrying a girl*, line 21). Reyansh successfully builds up the suspense through this positioning that runs contrary to my expectation. Indeed, I react with a huge surprise and join him in savoring the story's unfolding with joined burst of laughter (<laugh>*What?>,* line 22, *Hehehehe*, line 23 and *I found out that he is married to a girl now. Hehehehehe*, line 24).

Reyansh uses the story to convey what he thinks of himself: he is not a lying person. Even though he had the thought of marrying a woman (*Oh I will at some point go back home and marry a girl something*, line 3), he did successfully resist it in the end by not conforming to heteronormativity and therefore restores the coherence of his sense of self and constructs a gay identity both in and outside of the story world. This way, Reyansh conveys a positive self-image by contrasting himself with the other story character and again justifies himself for the transition from his initial conformity to heterosexual marriage in the past to his acceptance of his gay identity now. At the same time, I as the listener catch the story's undertone that is clearly manifested by Reyansh's external evaluation in line 25 (*So it's easier said than done*). This leads to level 3 positioning, where Reyansh casts both himself and the other story character against the cultural backdrop that accentuates the importance of marriage in one's life. In contrast to who he is right now, Reyansh positions himself as someone who ends up not marrying a woman,

having resisted the heteronormativity that was imposed on him and that he internalized back then.

In the next example, Reyansh ends the previous story of his online encounter with another gay man and proceeds to make comments on the social context in which heterosexual marriage is highly valued in India. In telling a generic narrative in present tense, he makes commonplace the way people in India inquire about his marital status or his plan to get married, thereby positioning himself in the larger Discourse of marriage in Indian tradition.

Extract 10b.

27.	Reyansh:	For Asia you always think but there's so much pressure from family:,
28.		And then, you know, you have that-
29.		I was able- I mean at that point I was thinking I would marry a girl
30.		But, you know, when I saw that I could possibly have a normal life
31.		Then I would, you know, I try to resist the pressure from my family
32.		And every time I go my mom would ask the same question.
33.		When are you getting married-
34.		((*loud*)) And you know. I'm sure you know this too.
35.		In India, now just your immediate family that is ask- always asking
36.		This is your business when you're getting married.
37.	Ping:	Yeah.
38.	Reyansh:	It's everybody that you know of who has [nothing to do] with your life
39.	Ping:	[Hehe]
40.	Reyansh:	All your neighbors, people who work at your home, people-
41.		Random people on the street,
42.	Ping:	Hehehe.
43.	Reyansh:	They're always curious as to why when you're getting married. Hehehe.
44.		((*laughs*)) I mean, like- somebody in the neighborhood, you know
45.		Who has nothing to do with my right
46.		Why are you not getting married.
47.		Like it's none of your business.
48.		It's a common thing in Asia.
49.		People are always interested in you getting married so.

Reyansh begins by making a remark on the way families in India are inquisitive in terms of one's marital status, whether someone is married or not or when someone is getting married. This is framed by Reyansh as a source of "pressure" (line 27). In describing this, he alludes to the Discourse that marriage, or heterosexual marriage to be precise, is considered an essential part for everyone in India, and the arrangement of a marriage calls for responsibilities for parents and relatives. In short, marriage plays such an important role in India culture that it entails the social obligations, kinship bonds, traditional values, and even economic repercussions for many people involved. People, especially family, take upon themselves the duty to make a marriage happen. It is within this social climate that young men are often asked the question "when are you getting married" or "why are you not getting married" upon learning that they are still single. It is also because of this phenomenon that all four participants in the study, when recalling their coming-out experiences, all reported that they had been at several points in their lives pestered by these questions.

In the narrative characterized by the use of present tense to show a sense of ongoing and prevailing fact and to show the habitual nature of events, Reyansh positions himself at level 1 in relation to multiple story characters, including family, "neighbors" (line 40), "people working at your home" (line 40), and even "random people on the street" (line 41), namely everyone. This exaggerated portrayal of the situation suggests that extent to which he frequently gets these similar questions prying into his personal affairs (*They're always curious as to why when you're getting married. Hehehe*, line 43). This positioning indicates that, as shown in Arjun's account and those of the other participants, social

networks in India is tight-knit, interpersonal relationships are intimately close, and personal space is usually limited.

In the interaction (level 2), Reyansh reaches out to me for my approval in line 34 when he says, "*I'm sure you know this too*," tapping into the Asian cultural background that we mutually share. When telling this, he is also making a connection with me by assuming that I alike am familiar with the situation he is in. In so doing, Reyansh is positioning me as an Asian who understands the important role marriage plays in the society and the way people in general inquire about such personal affairs as one's marital status, thus creating an alignment with me, the interviewer, who shares certain levels of commonality in our cultures (*It's a common thing in Asia*, line 48 and *People are always interested in you getting married so*, line 49).

At level 3, Reyansh situates himself in the Discourse relating to marriage in India. For one, marriage is deemed so essential in the society and parents and relatives consider themselves responsible for being involved in the marriages of their children. This is part of his Indian identity but at the same time, contradicts his gay identity because of the incompatibility between his same-sex attraction and the heteronormative marriage system designed for people of opposite sexes. That is why being asked questions pertinent to marriage is a recurring theme in the participants' coming-out narratives. What Reyansh describes here (*It's everybody that you know of who has [nothing to do] with your life*, line 38) corresponds aptly to what Daksh says in extract 9 (*Everyone is everyone's business back home*, line 20).

The same topic can be found in Pranav's coming-out narrative. In recounting his coming out to his labmate from Taiwan, Pranav also mentions this question about getting

married and even suspends the story to explain to me what it is like for an Indian man to be expected to get married.

Extract 11.
1.   Pranav: So, we went to computer lab one evening.
2.   And he already <u>knew</u> me.
3.   Like we were acquaintances.
4.   So, uh, we were the only two people in that lab.
5.   Um, there was no one else. So he came up to me,
6.   And he was like, oh, and he started chatting with me.
7.   He was like, oh Pranav, when are you going to get married.
8.   Like when you,
9.   Because that's what Indians do after doing their masters,
10.   They would find a job and get married.
11.   And live happily ever after.
12.   Ping: Hehehe.

Leading up to the point where Pranav comes out to his labmate, he is interrogated for his future plan of getting married. In the story world (level 1), Pranav positions his labmate as someone who holds heteronormative assumptions and imposes them on him (*He was like, oh Pranav, when are you going to get married*, line 7). Relationally, he himself is thus positioned as a gay man whose gay identity is yet to be disclosed. At this point in the story, or at that time in his time, he still "passes" as a heterosexual man, as Goffman notes (1963), having systematic control over his identity information.

At level 2, Pranav steps out of the story world and addresses me as the interviewer to give me some background information concerning the Indian convention of getting married (*Because that's what Indians do after doing their masters*, line 9, *They would find a job and get married*, line 10 and *And live happily ever after*, line 11). In an interview setting, his account underscores the interactional rule that he is held accountable to provide explanations. However, by doing so, Pranav is also distancing

himself from that social convention as he choose the terms "Indians" (line 9) and "they" (line 10), excluding himself from the people who live up to this master narrative. Also, unlike Reyansh, who calls to attention the Asian background that he and I share in extract 10b, Pranav does not seem to assume that I necessarily have the in-group knowledge. At level 3, Pranav resists the heteronormativity imposed upon him and challenges the Discourse related to marriage in Indian culture by pinpointing it, preparing me, the story recipient, for the imminent coming out about to take place in the story.

In the next example, Arjun tells a story of another gay man coming out to him; in the meantime, he interactively positions the other story character as contrasting with himself as he presents himself as an openly gay man, who is out and honest, resisting the heteronormativity of traditional marriage in India and constructing his gay identity as coherent by alluding to the Discourse of coming out as an imperative.

Extract 12a.
1. Arjun: (2.0) So, (1.0) And some people I know, uh, who are gay.
2.   Made a conscious choice not to come out.
3. Ping: Mhm.
4. Arjun: And they carry on, you know, their compartmentalized life.
5. Ping: Mhm.
6. Arjun: Got married (.) Have kids. And I <u>assume</u> that they still having their affairs.
7. Ping: Mhm.
8. Arjun: And, uh, in fact, one of them, uh, came out to me.
9. Ping: Mhm.
10. Arjun: So it was like, a couple of years ago.
11.   Um (.) uh, this is, you know,
12.   Back then I was not trying to actively hide or anything or come out then.
13.   So. I would get this question like,
14.   Why are you not married, why are you not married.
15. Ping: Mhm.
16. Arjun: And at some point- if it's not a close person, I used to laugh it off no answer.
17. Ping: Yeah.
18. Arjun: But if you know the person then there is no point in hiding.

19.   And then I would tell them, I'm not married because I'm gay.
20. Ping: Mhm.

In the beginning of this story, Arjun makes a critique on the phenomenon that he has observed, that is, some gay men who he knows of "made a conscious choice not to come out" (line 2). In his opinion, these gay men, by not coming out even though they are aware of their gay identities, lead a "compartmentalized life" (line 4) and enter a heterosexual marital relationship, conforming to the pressure from family and society. By delineating two different permutations of living a life as a gay man, at level 1, Arjun reflexively positions himself as being out in the story world. He creates a persona that is selectively out to people around him. He then interactively positions those who are not out as "hiding." At level 2, Arjun comes off as being out to me by saying "*And then I would tell them, I'm not married because I'm gay*" (line 19). He presents himself as someone who does not "hide" his gay identity. I am, on the other hand, positioned as someone who witnesses his forthrightness and openness when it comes to coming out to people with whom he is acquainted.

Positioning himself in a broader cultural landscape at level 3, Arjun refers to two dominant Discourses. The first one deals with the important role marriage plays in Indian cultural described in the previous section. He presents in constructed dialogue the questions he got rather regularly (*So. I would get* this *question like*, line 13 and *Why are you not married, why are you not married*, line 14). By repeating the question twice quickly, Arjun iconically represents how frequently he would get asked. Second, the way Arjun frames his current state of being out in his circle touches on the coming out imperative that Rasmussen (2004) points out: coming out is being honest while not

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coming out is hiding (*Back then I was not trying to actively hide or anything or come out then*, line 12 and *But if you know the person then there is no point in* hiding, line 18).

In the remaining part as shown in the following extracts, Arjun's story continues to unfold the story while he interactively positions another story character, who is also a gay man, by making critical evaluations about the man's behavior and assuming his state of mind.

Extract 12b.
21. Arjun: So, hehehe. And uh. So this person, so- so- so.
22.   He knew that I- he, uh, oh I suspected.
23. Ping: Mhm.
24. Arjun: I was like, ok. [Hehe.]
25. Ping: [Hehehe.]
26. Arjun: And he said, I am too.
27. Ping: Mhm.
28. Arjun: Yeah. And he was married.
29. Ping: Yeah.
30. Arjun: And now he has a kid. And uh, I'm like, o.k?
31. Ping: Hehe.
32. Arjun: And you're telling me because?
33.   Um, he was torn about it.
34.   So, saying, uh, I feel like I sort of deceive my wife.
35.   And uh. My folks pressured me into getting married.
36. Ping: Mhm?
37. Arjun: Yeah. He's Indian too. Different origin but anyway.
38.   But he grew up in either US or Canada.
39. Ping: Mhm.

After depicting his approach to coming out at that time, Arjun resumes the story with both story characters coming out to each other in a very brief and subtle way. In the form of constructed dialogue, the interchange shows that they are both in the know and can therefore do without much explanation or even the mentioning of the word "gay." The coming out ritual is carried out in a minimally succinct manner (*He knew that I- he, uh,*

oh I suspected, line 22, *I was like, ok. [Hehe.]*, line 24 and *And he said, I am too*, line 26). At this juncture, they mutually convey the message and disclose their gay identities. What Arjun says subsequently serves as narrative evaluation, casting some doubt on, and possibly showing rejection of, on the other story character (*And uh, I'm like, o.k.?,* line 30 and *And you're telling me because?,* line 32) after marking out the fact that "he was married" (line 28) and that "now he has a kid" (line 30). This recounting provides a striking contrast that, as a gay man, the other story character ends up marry a woman and has a child, having a typical heterosexual family.

In the story (level 1), the other gay man is portrayed in a negative light with the contrast that is made to highlight the incongruence between his gay identity and his behavior which matches that of a heterosexual man. Knowing that he is a gay man, he is regarded by Arjun one of those gay men who "made a conscious choice not to come out." First, he is described as dishonest, though recognizing his own dishonesty (*I feel like I sort of deceive my wife*, line 34) and second, as having bent under pressure (*My folks pressured me into getting married*, line 35). The constructed dialogue here evidently show that Arjun does not simply repeat what the man said but meticulously selects the words to paint a picture of him being a gay man who chose to pass and to not come out and who eventually married a woman, living a "compartmentalized life." In the interview interaction (level 2), suspending the story in line 37, Arjun tells me "He's Indian too" and that "But he grew up in either US or Canada" (line 38) to emphasize the fact that even though both of them are Indians, he, growing up in India and later coming to the U.S., can be out and open about his gay identity while the other man, growing up in the West, yields to the pressure and adapts himself to heteronormativity. This accentuates the

decision Arjun has made to be out and the fact that he has successfully resisted the heteronormative assumptions, such as marriage, imposed upon him.

At level 3, Arjun addresses his emotional state (*Um, he was torn about it*, line 33) by calling attention to the societal pressures and a larger Discourse of the coming out imperative as well as passing in Goffman's (1963) terms. Throughout, not coming out is perceived as "hiding" and "deceiving." This squares with the recognized tenet of Goffman's "passing." Goffman observes that a person who bears a stigma has control over how much information to disclose. For someone who chooses passing, according to Goffman, "he must necessarily pay a great psychological price, a very high level of anxiety, in living a life that can be collapsed at any moment" and "the passer will feel torn between two attachments" (p.87).

Arjun tells the story to express a sense of aversion to such behavior; not coming out is treated unfavorably by him. Based on his postulate, gay men who choose to succumb to the pressure and enter a heterosexual marital relation are making their lives harder. In the last example, Arjun sums up by positioning himself in contrast to the story character and commenting on the social changes that he has observed. In lines 40 and 41, he is voicing the gay man who had gotten married.

Extract 12c.

40. Arjun: "So my folks pressured me into getting married."
41.   "And I could not resist it and I got married."
42.   I don't buy that anymore. I mean, I can see that happening.
43.   Like, twenty years ago,
44. Ping: Mhm.
45. Arjun: Meaning, people who were twenty years older than me can buy that argument.
46. Ping: Mhm.

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47. Arjun: But in my age group, you're kidding me.
48. Ping: Yeah.
49. Arjun: So, and so, yeah and so, he- he, uh,
50.   Then I asked him, does your wife know. No.
51.   So, but then. You know.
52.   I guess he has (1.0) his affairs side to side.
53.   And has a kid, it works for him.
54.   But you can see he's torn up about it.
55. Ping: Yeah.
56. Arjun: Uh, so, if it works for some people, good for them.
57. Ping: Mhm.
58. Arjun: But I knew it would not be something that I could,
59. Ping: Mhm.
60. Arjun: Think of doing.

Right after Arjun voices the other gay man who came out to him in the story world and

positions him as giving in to the societal pressures (level 1), he puts the story on hold and

provides his evaluation by stressing "I" to suggest a shift of reference: I am speaking as

myself, not as the story character, to evaluate him. His negative evaluation shows his

disapproval of the person in the story and his behavior (*I don't buy that anymore*, line

42). Arjun then creates a contrast by taking a step back as he says people in the past or of

the last generation may get by with this excuse for marrying a woman as a gay man

(*people who were twenty years older than me can buy that argument*, line 45). However,

he cannot understand people of his age using the same excuse and doing the same thing

(*But in my age group, you're kidding me*, line 47). This evaluation ties back to Arjun's

observation in extract 8a that the contrast in social contexts is not just that between India

and the U.S. but also that between the past versus present. Coming out is no longer

unthinkable as it was when he was in college in India. Therefore, the man's excuse, in

Arjun's opinion, does not suffice to justify his action.

This external evaluation is premised on two of Arjun's reflections: his previous

observation that the social construct has changed in India, as evidenced his story in

extract 8.1, and his belief that attitudes toward gayness are different between India and the West. These two reflections each relates to a Discourse. First, social or cultural contexts may change not only from culture to culture but also from time to time. Arjun's evaluation illustrates that, from his perspective, society in India has moved toward more liberal and more accepting attitudes on gay issues, which facilitates gay men's coming out. While it used to be difficult for someone to come out as gay, he does not think it is the same in India, and therefore, family or societal pressure should not be treated as an excuse for passing as a heterosexual man and marrying a woman.

Second, the distinction made between India and the U.S. can also be found here. Describing the other gay man as growing up not in India but in either the U.S. or Canada, Arjun refers to the notion that coming from a Western background should make it easier for him to coming out as gay, thus rendering his excuse even more inscrutable. The Discourse that the West, or at least the U.S., is more accepting is a common theme that appears across four interviews. In the short extract below, Pranav also notes that "people are less homophobic" in the U.S. than in India when asked by me what he thinks about the coming out in the U.S. Even though there still are people against LGBTQ populations in the U.S., the participants in the study generally believe that the act of coming out and the discussion of it are more acceptable in Western societies, reinforcing the ideology that the West is more progressive considering gay issues.

Extract 13.
1. Ping: Do you find it easier (.) here in the United States away from home?
2. Pranav: Uh from a coming out perspec[tive or] from a gay-
3. Ping: [Yeah.]
4. Pranav: Oh yeah coming out yes. Absolutely yes.
5.   Because people are less overtly homophobic.

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6.   Or even they are homophobic they know that t's not-
7.   At least in the city that it's not the right thing.
8.   So they- they keep quiet about it.
9.   Like, they don't make any homophobic remarks or anything.
10.   And many people are genuinely accepting and welcoming and so on.
11.   Not so in India.

In extract 12.3, Arjun responds to my question with another contrast between himself and the gay story character he is describing in a synonymous way to how Pranav distances himself in extract 11 from other "Indians" even though he himself is ethnically an Indian, too, using the person pronoun "they." Arjun sets up the two opposing sides between "them" and him (*if it works for some people, good for **them***, line 56, *But I knew it would not be something that **I** could*, line 58 and *Think of doing*, line 60). Here "some people" refers to the gay men who make a conscious choice of not coming out and even go as far as to getting married mentioned in the beginning of extract 12a.

The separation between the storytellers and the story characters contributes to the creation of coherence of self in positioning level 1 and the construction of their gay identities, corresponding to Bucholtz and Hall's relationality principle. Both Arjun and Pranav position themselves as openly out gay men relationally against other Indians who do not come out. Even more important is that this distinction is built on the ideology pertaining to the coming out imperative. It shows how the gay immigrants participating in the study position themselves by alluding to a constellation of dominant Discourses that mark their gay identities having come out after coming to the U.S. as immigrants. While reflecting on how they are situated in the Indian tradition of marriage, the participants also make use of it to position themselves as different from their gay Indian counterparts who eventually yielded to the societal pressure and failed to come out as gay. This

positioning approach, drawing on Discourses at level 3 (the coming out imperative that

gives value to queer disclosure and the heteronormativity attached to marriage) and

differentiating the participants from other story characters at level 1, helps construct their

gay identities and simultaneously give verisimilitude to their sense of self being gay in

the U.S.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I ask the questions coming from a gay immigrant's perspective on queer coming out. I aim to answer them by taking the approach of narrative analysis to tease out the positioning in the participants' coming-out narratives. The first part of the analysis answers how gay immigrants learn about the concept of coming out by examining the different social orientations they take when it comes to defining coming out. The second part of the analysis deals with what they find different when they came out away from their home country by delineating the contrasting social contexts depicted in their stories. In the final part of the analysis, I attend to how they accomplish coming out in a different country through their positioning that reflects the interrelation between Discourses and their life experiences both as gay men and as immigrants. This thesis also addresses the research gap that the genre of coming-out narratives, though having been used methodologically in some studies (e.g., Robbins & Query, 2016), has been understudied. The present analysis offers a lens through which to examine the identity construction of four gay immigrants from India who currently reside in the U.S.

First, I have demonstrated the ways in which the participants born and raised in India came to learn about the concept of coming out after their arrival in the U.S. either for education or for employment and have shown how the different social orientations in their definition of coming out illustrate the multifaceted nature of coming out as a practice. In telling their stories to substantiate what they believe to be coming out and what it means to them personally, they attend to and highlight different and yet complementary aspects of coming out. These aspects tie into Linde's (1993) notion of coherence of self in life stories, including *continuity of the self*, *relation of the self to*

others, and *reflexivity of the self*. Standing out in the first section of analysis is that the participants address each of these aspects to a varying degree; while some emphasize the reflexivity of the self, or *coming out to self* in the coming-out narratives, others incline toward the relation of the self to others, or *coming out to others* in their stories. Regardless of their social orientations, however, none of them mention having inner conflicts in the process of coming out, echoing Liang's (1997) finding that, although gay Asian Americans might touch on coming out to self, they tend not to show signs of inner conflicts or struggles before they come to accept their gay identities. I suggested that a specific methodology should be designed in order to address this issue and potentially explain this cultural difference in coming-out narratives.

The analysis further details how the participants underscore cross-cultural differences in the nature of coming out by positioning themselves in two contrastive social contexts in the stories, both in more canonical stories where they recapitulate past events and in hypothetical narratives where they are situated in a fictional scenario that leads to how they came to the decision of not coming out until they left their hometowns in India for school or for work in the U.S. They reflect on their interwoven experiences of migration and coming out and the process by which they acquire the concept that was previously absent in their culture in India. The interactions in which the participants learned about coming out or actually came out to people around them are presented in the form of dialogue in the story world to communicate the message of coming out prompted and facilitated by being in the U.S. (level 1) and to create involvement in the interview by positioning me as a witness who watches the performance and thereby validates their gay identities constructed at level 2.

In the last section of the analysis, I demonstrated that the participants allude to four dominant Discourses related to coming out when they cast themselves against the cultural backdrops to forge the gay identities in the U.S. as immigrants. First, they refer to the coming out imperative based on the clear distinction between being out and being closeted. While the former is preferred and valued, not coming out is considered not favorable as observed in the extracts where the participants position themselves as being openly out and comfortable in their own skin against some other gay Indian men who are not out and are described as hiding, deceiving, or emotionally torn. Second, some of them mention the attitudes toward gay issues between India and the U.S. They generally believe that coming out is easier in the U.S. than in India because of the overall sociopolitical landscape that encompasses the queer discourses as well as the legal system. Third, the participants represent in narratives how the social networks in India are so intimate and close-knit that coming out is almost impossible and can be unmanageable. In contrast, some of them frame the social contexts in the U.S. as highly, if not extremely, individualistic, which helps the expressions of self, including their gayness. Fourth, marriage is indissolubly linked to heteronormativity. When reflecting on their experiences being asking when they are getting married, they all associate marriage with marrying a woman. In their narration, claiming that they are not getting married is synonymous with coming out as gay and, in fact, it is a way for them to resist heteronormativity and display their gay identities.

The findings add to the emerging research on positioning in narratives at three levels in Bamberg's (1997) model with a fine-grained analysis that investigates the linguistic devices deployed by the participants to bring out their gay identities. They demonstrate

how, as Schiffrin (1996) notes, narrative is locally and globally situated at once. While the narrators consciously, and perhaps meticulously, formulate their positions with an acute awareness of their social location in the U.S., they are also referring to and subjecting their experiences to the Discourses in the society. All the while, they are attuned to the interactional rules in the interviews, negotiating with me, the interviewer, the way to define coming out and display their identities. For example, Pranav seeks my permission to tell another story whereas Reyansh suspends the narrative and addresses me regarding our shared Asian background.

Furthermore, in the examples I have identified constructed dialogue and repetition as powerful strategies for narrating various aspects of coming out. These two linguistic strategies are employed by the participants to reenact the scene where they came to learn of the concept of coming out in the U.S., where they noticed the difference in social contexts, and where they encountered other gay men. I have also identified other important linguistic features that play an important role, such as uses of pronouns. They make a distinction between "I" and "them," relating to Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) relationality principle, to give saliency to their gay identities. The choice of personal pronouns shows that not only are they different from the heterosexual majority but that they are different from their gay Indian counterparts who failed to resist the heteronormativity and ended up marrying women. The participants locally and verbally construct a clear gay identity in the story world as well as in the interview interaction. Thus, my study lends insight not only into narrating coming-out experiences in cross-cultural contexts, but also how the micro-level linguistic strategies contribute to narrative coherence and a coherent gay identity.

My study intersects with the ongoing research regarding coming out as a life-long process by closely examining the moment-to-moment interactions in interviews that elicit the participants' coming-out narratives. While the participants' framing of their coming out in the narratives is in line with the common theorization that coming out is a process, it is critical and necessary to take into consideration how the participants' life experiences as immigrants play into their coming out processes. Apparently, arriving in a new country presents a disconnect in their understanding of gayness and their sense of self. A thorough examination of their narration shows that the gay immigrant participants reflect on the disparity between two social contexts and position themselves accordingly. By doing so, they not just create coherence of self in their life stories but also illustrate the efforts to make sense of their experiences coming out as gay immigrants in the U.S., a departure from previous theorization that did not include immigration as one of the factors in individuals' coming out processes.

The findings also contribute to a better understanding of gay immigrants' coming out in cross-cultural contexts and hold meaningful and practical implications for how we reconceptualize coming out. For example, practitioners such as psychotherapists working with gay men or individuals of other groups in the LGBTQ community may use them to foster their awareness of the myriad aspects of nuances of coming out (for example, different coming-out practices) when it comes to people from different cultural backgrounds. Indeed, this study suggests that gay men born and raised in different countries may not have acquired the concept of coming out until they came to the U.S., where coming out is more widely discussed and theorized. As a result, chances are that

they have various definitions of what coming out means to them depending on their personal experiences and interactions in a new country.

In conclusion, I have shown that linguistic analysis based on positioning theory can be adopted to explore the construction of gay identity in the participants' coming-out narratives. This thesis contributes to our understanding of how narratives, especially non-prototypical or "small stories," including hypothetical narratives and habitual narratives, are used to portray the identities of gay immigrants. Also, the gay immigrant participants' experiences cast light on the intersection of the formation of their gay identities and the migration history in their lives. With an interactive approach of narrative analysis, the focus of this study fills the gap in the research on coming out by examining coming-out narratives told by gay immigrants who come from non-Western societies to highlight the dominant discourses surrounding coming out in different social contexts. In writing this thesis, I hope to have contributed to these various scholarly literatures, while also suggesting that gay immigrants' experiences — and narratives — merit further research attention. Most importantly, the analysis contextualizes the participants' coming-out narratives in multiple layers of interactions, building on the three levels of positioning to gain an illuminating theoretical insight into the intricacy of identity construction for these gay immigrants coming from India to the U.S.

NOTES

1. I use the term "immigrant" to refer to people who leave their home countries for other countries and settle, usually but not always, with permanent residency, which applies to the participants in this study. "Migrant" is not used here as it is a broader umbrella term that include refugees and asylum seekers.

2. I use the term "discourse" in Foucault's definition: "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, p.149). Queer discourses, in this sense, are ways of talking about non-traditional gendered and sexual identities that in turn define who the speakers are. Big-*D* Discourses, as proposed by Gee (1990), include ideologies and social practices that contribute to the construction of identity and our sense of self.

3. I use the term "queer" to refer very generally to sexual or gender minorities who are non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming. The term is not without controversies as people have argued against its derisive connotation in the word's origin or its use as an academic jargon. "Gay" is used in this thesis to refer specifically to cis-gender males who have same-sex attraction to other men. It is a social identity based on the erotic preference for people of the same sex. I avoid using the term "sexuality" as it intricately encompasses more cultural phenomena (see Cameron & Kulick, 2003 for more discussion) and stick to "gay identity" throughout to refer to the participants' self-awareness of their same-sex attraction.

APPENDIX I: Transcription Conventions

Symbol	Name	Use
[text]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
=	Equal Sign	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
(# of seconds)	Timed Pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech.
(.)	Micropause	A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
. or ↓	Period or Down Arrow	Indicates falling pitch.
? or ↑	Question Mark or Up Arrow	Indicates rising pitch.
,	Comma	Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation.
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
>text<	Greater than / Less than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.
<text>	Less than / Greater than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker.
°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech.
ALL CAPS	Capitalized text	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech.
underline	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
:::	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance.
(hhh)		Audible exhalation
(text)	Parentheses	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
((italic text))	Double Parentheses	Annotation of non-verbal activity.
"text"	Quotation Marks	Indicates reported speech or constructed dialogue

Jeffersonian Transcription Notation is described in G. Jefferson, "Transcription Notation," in J. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Interaction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

APPENDIX II: Interview Questions

1. What is coming out? What does it mean to you?

2. Did you learn about coming out before you came to the U.S.?

3. What is the word for coming out in your native language?

4. Tell me about your coming out experiences.

5. Do you think there is a difference between your home country and the U.S. when it comes to coming out?

6. Do you think it is easier for you to come out in the U.S.?

7. Have you come out to someone with different nationality or cultural background than yours?

8. Has someone with different nationality or cultural background than yours come out to you?

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