

Name: Deborah A. Chirrey

Email: chirreyd@edgehill.ac.uk

Affiliation: Edge Hill University

Short bio: Deborah Chirrey is Associate Head of English, History and Creative Writing at Edge Hill University. She holds a PhD from Glasgow University. Her main research and teaching interests are language, gender and sexuality. She has published in the *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* and in *Discourse Studies*.

Key words: metaphor, coming out, advice, queer.

Title: Metaphors we come out by: how structural metaphors construe coming-out in internet advice texts.

Abstract

This paper uses Critical Metaphor Analysis to explore the main source domains of cognitive metaphors in on-line coming out advice for LGB individuals. It highlights how the ontological metaphor *to come out (of the closet)* is re-metaphorised by a number of structural metaphors, especially COMING OUT IS MOVEMENT. Noting that Queer theorists have critiqued coming out both as a concept and as an imperative, the paper argues that the coming-out advice examined here perpetuates this discourse through the use of COMING OUT IS MOVEMENT (ESP A JOURNEY) and COMING OUT IS CONFLICT and suggests that other structural metaphors could be more useful to the readers of coming-out advice.

Metaphors we come out by: how structural metaphors construe coming-out in internet advice texts.

1 Introduction

This paper explores how conceptual metaphors are employed in the discussion of coming out in internet sites that provide advice to those considering disclosing lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) sexuality.¹ The focus is on the topic domain of *coming out (of the closet)*, itself a metaphorical expression of the Event Structure metaphor CHANGE IS MOTION, which is re-metaphorised by several secondary metaphors, such as COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY and COMING OUT IS CONFLICT. The analysis identifies source domains which are common across all or most of the texts and uses Critical Metaphor Analysis to consider their impact on the beliefs and values that are associated with coming out. Furthermore, the discussion takes account of Queer critiques of coming out to examine how the choice of conceptual metaphors within the texts reinforces heteronormative and homonormative ideologies, suggesting that other conceptual metaphors may be more useful vehicles for the reader who plans to come out.

2 Coming out

The visibility of coming out in western culture is a relatively recent phenomenon resulting from the rise of the gay liberation movement towards the end of the twentieth century in which coming out is a political act to effect the ‘public visibility of queer people’ (Orne 2011: 684) as a means of advancing their political rights (Edelman 2014), a response to the assumption of heterosexuality (Rich 1980), and an act of ‘self-love, acceptance and authenticity’ (Orne 2011: 698). It is founded on an essentialist approach to identity that regards it as a pre-existing entity that awaits revelation, a view famously challenged by Butler (1990). This view of coming out has also come under criticism from Queer theorists who problematise coming out as a homonormative process that requires the individual to assume a visible, sanctioned and fixed gay identity which maintains its structural subordination to heterosexuality (e.g., Dhaenens 2013, Duggan 2002, McCormick 2015, Motschenbacher 2010, Orne 2011, Rasmussen 2004). Thus coming out, once promoted as a radical and subversive act of gay liberation, is repositioned as an act that reproduces the ‘normality and universality of the heterosexual matrix’ (Dhaenens 2013: 310).

Coming out has been the subject of a range of linguistic analyses to date, but none has examined it critically through the lens of metaphor. Kitzinger (2000) and Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2003) investigate discursive aspects of how LGB people disclose their sexuality to heterosexuals. Rendle–Short (2005) examines how individuals disclose their sexuality on talk-radio, noting the ease with which heterosexuality is disclosed in conversation in comparison with the complex process of disclosing non-heterosexuality. Chirrey (2003) analyses coming out as a speech act, and also how coming out is represented in advice literature (2011, 2012).

Other researchers explore the linguistic characteristics of coming-out stories, themselves a potential means of coming out. Wood’s (1997) analysis concerns four lesbian coming-out stories narrated via email which, she argues, are iconic of the processual nature of coming out. Liang (1997) analyses coherence in coming-out stories, arguing that the similarities and differences

correlate with their tellers' Asian or European heritage, although this has been critiqued by Kim (2009: 254). Morrish and Sauntson (2007) identify linguistic markers of evaluation in an on-line corpus of US-based coming-out stories. Saxey (2008) examines hundreds of examples of fictional and autobiographical LGB coming-out stories, contending that the coming-out story is not a reflection of LGB lives, but a means of both modelling the language of same-sex desire and enculturating the reader into what it means to be an LGB person and live an LGB life. Gray (2009) reports an ethnographic study of rural young people and their use of on-line resources to appropriate 'queer realness' (2009: 1172), highlighting the important role of digital texts in mediating how they construct their LGBTQ identities as 'cultural assemblages that work with the materials on hand' (2009: 1169). Bannink and Wentink (2015) use critical discourse analysis to explore how a Dutch reality tv show in which young LGB people come out to their families may hinder rather than aid LGB emancipation.

Zimman (2009) warns us to avoid conflating the coming-out experiences and narratives of LGB people with those of transgender individuals, as his analysis of transgender narratives reveals an absence of processuality (Liang 1997, Woods 1997), and the presence of two sorts of coming out: declaration, in which a transgender identity is claimed prior to transition; and disclosure, in which an individual discloses their transgender history following transition (2009: 60). For this reason, the current discussion focuses only on LGB coming-out advice.

Studies of coming out tend to focus on western culture, especially that of the USA and UK (e.g., Markowe 1996, Ward and Winstanley 2005), with some studies including race and ethnicity as sites of diversity which impact on the coming-out process (e.g., Hunter 2009, Seidman 2004). Jhang's (2018) exploration of coming out by LGB Taiwanese individuals reveals that the taken-for-granted conflation of coming out with disclosure of sexuality is alien to cultures based on Confucian beliefs, where coming out is achieved by the eventual successful reconciliation within the family of Confucian values and a return to family stability. Jhang argues convincingly that cross-cultural studies are vital if we are to fully understand how coming out is understood and experienced by specific communities.

There are also studies that indicate that the discursive moves of coming out have had an impact on other areas of emancipation and activism. For example, Seif (2014) highlights ways in which the discursive strategies of LGBTQ Latina/o individuals have been adopted by undocumented Latina/o immigrant youth in Chicago as a means of advancing their advocacy for citizenship and opposition to anti-immigration laws.

3 Metaphor Analysis

As Allan (2008: 4- -10) recounts, it is not until the early twentieth century that metaphor received any serious linguistic attention, and it is the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that led to wide recognition among linguists of the importance of metaphor to linguistic study. They showed convincingly that metaphor is fundamental to how abstract concepts, such as emotions, life or time, are expressed. Furthermore, crucial to their approach is the premise that metaphor is 'not a figure of speech but a mode of thought' (Lakoff 1993: 210), thus their main area of interest is not linguistic metaphorical expressions but rather the insights that such expressions

can provide into how concepts may be structured in the mind. They argue that metaphor is a means by which we conceptualise abstract domains in terms of concrete domains. The two domains are mapped onto each other in the conceptual system by means of a set of ontological correspondences which tells us exactly how the abstract domain is being perceived in terms of the concrete domain. Complex abstract concepts usually have a number of conceptual metaphors associated with them as people need more than one source domain in order to understand and communicate the multifaceted nature of complex abstractions. In addition, the use of one metaphor rather than another allows speakers and writers to foreground different aspects of the target, which is an important rhetorical feature in describing and explaining abstract concepts. It is the approach of conceptual metaphor that is adopted here.

Certain conceptual metaphors such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY are referred to as structural metaphors, as the ontological mappings tell us in detail how the target is being conceptualised, but not all conceptual metaphors provide such detailed mappings. Ontological metaphors are those metaphors which establish ontological status to an abstract target as they enable us to describe experience in terms of concrete objects, containers, or substances, but they provide no detailed account of what they are like (Kövecses 2002: 34). Ontological metaphors do not structure the abstract concepts that are in their scope, but concretises the abstract concept and they have an reifying effect which can be an effective persuasive strategy within a text (Van der Bom, Coffey-Glover, Jones, Mills and Paterson, 2015). A third category of metaphor is the orientational metaphor. As Kövecses (2002: 35- -37) notes orientational metaphors provide only basic information about a target domain based on contrast between bipolar human spatial orientations, such as up/down, in/out or front/back. Like the ontological metaphors, they provide very little information to structure a target domain.

Charteris-Black defines Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) as ‘an approach to metaphor analysis that aims to reveal the covert (and possibly unconscious) intentions of language users’ (2004: 34). As such, it is a powerful tool for revealing the ways in which sexuality and sexual identities are conceptualised within texts and the ideologies that inform their representation. For example, Van der Bom *et al* (2015) critically analyse metaphor usage as a means of foregrounding, challenging and countering implicit homophobia in the equal marriage debate. In the current paper, CMA is used to reveal a mainstream construal of coming out that is informed by identity politics; that constructs coming out as the achievement of a fixed LGB identity; and that reiterates outmoded stage-models of coming out (e.g. Cass 1979). It is argued that this approach, although valuable in achieving certain aims of identity politics, can be reductive and misleading.

4 Data

The data considered here come from a collection of seventeen on-line texts that advise individuals who are considering coming out as LGB (see Appendix 1). In total, they number just over 28000 words. The texts were gathered in 2007-08 and 2019 through on-line searches that identified popular sites offering coming-out advice. The largest text is 4574 words and the shortest is 466. They have diverse authors: LGBT rights groups, (mental) health groups, counselling services or media organisations. Nevertheless, they have commonalities: they are all English language texts that originate in the UK, the USA or Australia; they are ideologically

compatible in promoting identity politics; the authors are liberal in their attitudes towards LGBT identities; and, although some of the texts caution individuals not to come out if their circumstances would endanger them, they generally champion coming out as a positive personal and political act. In terms of metanarrative, the advice texts structure coming out in ways similar to coming-out stories (Ponse 1978: 125) and to development models of coming out (Hunter 2009, Seidman 2004) as a series of stages moving from an initial sense of being different from others towards an acceptance of an LGB identity.

5 Methodology

The advice texts were examined for the presence of metaphorical expressions relating to the target domain *coming out (of the closet)*. In order to identify linguistic metaphor, the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejazz Group 2007, Semino 2008: 11- -12) was implemented. The meaning and main topics of the texts were established, the lexical units were identified manually and their meaning confirmed with reference to their contexts. The OED was used to search for a more basic contemporary meaning for each lexical unit in other contexts.ⁱⁱ If that were the case, then a decision was made as to whether the meaning in the texts under study contrasted with the more basic literal meaning, but could be understood in comparison with it. If so, then the lexical unit was identified as being a metaphorical expression. For example, the lexical unit *closet* has a more basic contemporary meaning than that used in these texts: the more concrete, older sense of a *wardrobe*, *cupboard* or *small room*, which is still current in present day English. The term is commonly used in the United States with the first sense but not in British English, however, as Semino (2008: 12) points out, basic meanings are not necessarily those in most frequent use. In the texts analysed here, the contextual meaning of the word *closet* is not its literal meaning, but a metaphorical one which refers to a metaphorical bounded space, or container which LGB people metaphorically conceal their minority sexual identity (Seidman 2004). Following the MIP, in this context, *closet* is a metaphorical rather than a literal expression.

Having identified the linguistic metaphorical expressions in the texts the next step is to decide which conceptual domain each one belongs to. Here researchers must use their own judgement and intuition, while recognising that reasonable alternative interpretations are always possible (Cameron, Maslen, Todd, Maule, Stratton, and Stanley 2009: 75- -6; Ritchie 2003). Having drawn up a list of source domains for each of the target domains, it is then possible to examine which are used for each target and, by calculating the number of metaphorical expressions used for each source domain, to identify which of these domains are the more prevalent for each topic for, as Charteris-Black (2005: 40) points out '[q]uantitative data are helpful in determining the relative importance to be attached to each of the different source domains for metaphor [being] employed'.

6 Analysis of *coming out*

The analysis considers the conceptual metaphors that are used for coming out in the texts in terms of whether they are ontological, orientational or structural metaphors.

6.1 Ontological and orientational metaphors for *coming out*

Probably the most familiar expression in English relating to the action of realising and declaring oneself LGB is the phrasal verb *to come out (of the closet)* and its derivations. In Pragglejaz Group's (2007) terms, it is a semi-fixed collocation, as *of the closet* is often omitted. In the context of speech or writing on the topic of issues of marginal sexual identities, such as the texts under consideration here, readers will easily interpret the phrase as a metaphor for realising and declaring that one is LGB.

The verb *to come out* is from the Old English intransitive verb phrase *cuman ut*. The original literal sense of this phrasal verb, which is still current in present day English, pertains to bodily movement, specifically 'to go' or 'to come out'. From circa 1200 the phrase developed a metaphorical meaning 'to be exposed to public view', and Kay, Roberts, Samuels and Wotherspoon (2010) classify this and other semantically related metaphorical items as Disclosure/Revelation (03.08.02.02). Within this section there are examples of this phrase, and variations of it, all with related metaphorical meanings. For example, from circa 1637 *to come out* is used with the sense of revealing one's thoughts and feelings, as are the phrases 'to come out in one's true colours' (1840) and 'to come out into the open' (1942); in addition, *to come out* is used with the broad sense 'to be disclosed/revealed' from 1820. The phrase *to come out of the closet* (1963) and *to come out* (1968) are noted in the OED as referring specifically to the public declaration of minority sexuality (Come, V, come out sense 13; Closet, N, sense 3d). Therefore, *to come out* is now lexicalised and a conventionalised metaphor (Semino 2008). In Goatly's (1997) terms, it is an inactive metaphor because the topic is referred to conventionally through a fixed meaning of the term as the grounds of the metaphor are fixed and the reader/hearer is not free to choose which aspect of the grounds to interpret as relevant.

The frequency with which the phrase *to come out* has been and continues to be used metaphorically to indicate revelation and disclosure suggests that there must be a strong and persistent motivation for it. It would seem that there is a perceived similarity between the embodied experience of one's physical self coming out of a physical place, and the experience of one's inner thoughts, mind or opinions being communicated to others. Both the physical and the abstract entities share the transition from enclosure to exposure, from containment to revelation, from private to public. *Coming out (of the closet)* is a linguistic manifestation of the Event Structure metaphor CHANGE IS MOTION and this insight helps us to perceive the grounds of this metaphor as the parallels between physical change as a result of physical motion and psychological or social change of identity as a result of abstract motion.

The metaphorical expression allows us to conceive of the abstract experience of disclosure as a basic physical action but, other than that, the metaphor provides us with no further information about that experience. There is no knowledge structure attached to the metaphor that can be used to provide a detailed mapping of source domain onto target domain. Thus this metaphor is best regarded as an ontological metaphor, one which enables us to perform the important task of naming the experience as a phenomenon so that we can refer to it. As will be discussed below, our knowledge of coming out is enriched through the use of numerous structural metaphors but our fundamental ability to perceive of it as a discrete experience and entity is due to the existence of the ontological metaphor *to come out (of the closet)*.

Goatly (1997: 103) notes of phrasal verbs that they have the potential to obscure their morphemic structure so that they are perceived as one morpheme. However, Gibbs (1993: 271- -2) highlights research that shows that people can and do analyse idiomatic phrases with reference to the separate elements that constitute them and that they can attach meanings to their separate parts. We can analyse *to come out* as consisting of the verb *come* plus the adverbial particle *out* and we can note that, on a few occasions in the texts, the extent to which people have come out is described in terms of how *out* they are (cf Liang 1997: 291), suggesting that the two elements of the phrasal verbs are transparent and perceived separately. Kövecses (2002: 35- -37) indicates that *out* is an orientational metaphor as it provides only basic information about a target domain based on human spatial orientations. Consequently, it does not provide much in the way of information by which one can structure a target domain. Kövecses makes the point that image schemes provided by orientation metaphors are often ‘bipolar and bivalent’ (2002: 36), and that *in-out* provides one of those spatial image schemas. He argues that *out* is usually negatively evaluated, while its binary opposite, *in*, is the positive member of the pair and he provides examples such as *pass out*, *veg out*, *snuff out*, and *out of order*, as evidence of this general point. Thus, the phrase *to come out*, in the sense we are concerned with here, may carry some essence of that disapprobation. As Baker (2008: 107- -118) demonstrates in his analysis of heteronormativity in newspapers, magazines and telephone calls, the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that society ought to be organised around that presumption remains a taken-for-granted view. Rarely asserted explicitly, it is its covert ubiquity that makes it such a powerful, persuasive and influential force in society. It is also an assumption that leads directly to the phenomenon of coming out.

6.2 Structural metaphors for coming out

Table 1 identifies the source domains that structure the target domain *to come out* where there are multiple linguistic metaphors for that source in the data, while Table 2 indicates which source domains are to be found in each text. The discussion that follows focuses on the two numerically most frequent source domains: COMING OUT IS MOVEMENT and COMING OUT IS CONFLICT.

Table 1 Structural metaphors for *coming out* by frequency (N = 177)

Source domain	Freq	Example linguistic realisation	Text
MOVEMENT (esp. JOURNEY)	66% (58%)	Some people come out with no problems at all but for others there may be obstacles and setbacks...Everyone’s coming-out <i>journey</i> is different.	11
CONFLICT	18%	Warn a friend in advance that you are going to <i>drop the bombshell</i> , so you have somewhere to go if you need to give your parents and you a bit of space.	5
GAMBLING GAME	6%	So do realise that they might become very angry. Perhaps they feel you’ve <i>cheated</i> them somehow.	8

WORK	5%	In these instances your task will be considerably easier, as they've already <i>worked</i> through some of the stages on their own.	4
BUILDING	3%	This process is more difficult for women who come out later in life...they have therefore to <i>build</i> up a new, Lesbian identity.	10
DEVELOPMENT	2%	Coming out later in life often means going through a second ' <i>adolescence</i> '.	10

Table 2 Structural metaphors for *coming out* by text.

Text	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
MOVEMENT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
CONFLICT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				
GAMBLING				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓		✓		✓
WORK	✓			✓	✓				✓	✓							
BUILDING	✓	✓		✓						✓							
DEVELOPMENT	✓			✓						✓							✓

6.2.1 COMING OUT IS MOVEMENT AND COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY

By far the most prevalent conceptual metaphor used in this corpus to structure coming out is COMING OUT IS MOVEMENT which is part of the Event Structure metaphor CHANGE IS MOTION. In particular, almost all of these metaphors involve the entailment (LONG TERM) PURPOSEFUL CHANGE IS PURPOSEFUL MOVEMENT which includes numerically significant metaphors such as COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY and one-off metaphors such as COMING OUT IS DANCING. Other metaphors are included here as entailments of the MOVEMENT / JOURNEY metaphor. For example, the metaphor COMING OUT IS RELIEF, with linguistic realisations such as '*coming out is a huge weight lifted off their shoulders*' (Texts 5 & 6), indicates that not coming out is a harm and a burden that slows down motion and prevents progress on the journey.

COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY accounts for over half of all the metaphorical expressions for coming out (58%). It is used in these texts to structure the experience both of the LGB person who is coming out and of those to whom the revelation is made and who, as a result, have the option of coming out both to themselves and to others as the parents, brother, aunt, child, etc., of an LGB person. The use of this conceptual metaphor has been noted previously by Koller (2008) as being present in coming-out stories, and so is unsurprising to find it being used in coming-out advice. As noted above (Section 6.1) the metaphorical expression *to come out of the closet* is grounded in the similarity between the embodied experience of movement from containment to freedom and the public revelation of hitherto private thoughts and feelings. In itself, this fixed metaphor evokes the concept of a journey that begins within the closet and ends outside of it and it is feasible that it has underpinned and fostered the expansion of the JOURNEY metaphor as the main structuring metaphor of coming out.

Every journey has a starting point and, in this case, the conventionalised metaphor identifies this as the closet. The image of the closet suggests a container metaphor, as a closet is a bounded space that exists in three dimensions which is capable of containing something, and the texts between them have five metaphorical expressions which are all variations of the LGB person *hiding who they really are*. The container metaphor gives us another pieces of knowledge that the LGB person has agency as a conscious person to choose whether to move from being within to being out of the closet. Other than that, this metaphor does not supply much in the way of knowledge or image schema (Kövecses 2002: 36- -38) which would enable us to structure the experience of being in the closet or to embellish our idea of what the closet is and so the closet is arguably an ontological metaphor which allows us to name and to refer to the concept.

In western culture, journeys are generally familiar and commonplace human experiences. Culturally then, the use of the JOURNEY metaphor may serve to downgrade the experience of coming out from a nervously anticipated ordeal to a more humdrum occurrence. Furthermore, COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY is a subset of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Turner 1989) and increases the scope of the JOURNEY domain. The implication that the journey of coming out is part of the journey of life may act as a reassuring factor to the LGB reader, serving to normalise the entire experience, suggesting that coming out is another part of life's journey.

Closer examination of the metaphorical expressions for this source domain shows that around one third of the linguistic expressions involve either *step(s)* or *stage(s)*. The use of the linguistic metaphor *step(s)* infers progress forward, as one step follows from another, with the steps being graded as *the first step*, *the next step* or evaluated as, for example, *the most difficult step*. The implication is that coming out is a linear, forward progression, a suggestion which encourages the LGB reader as it not only implies inevitability of progression but has a positive evaluation in that it also links to the basic metaphorical scheme FORWARD IS GOOD (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). One purpose of metaphors that conceptualise complex phenomena in terms of steps and stages is that they give the impression that the process is divisible into smaller chunks. Thus they can suggest that coming out can be completed in manageable sections, rather than being a nebulous, challenging confusion of feelings, relationships and expectations. Again, though, the metaphor results in an oversimplification of reality, as the phenomena involved are not always discrete, nor do they occur in a predictable order. In her discussion of metaphors in medical texts, van Rijnvan Tongeren (1997: 76) argues that 'sequential step metaphors' can imply that intricate and perplexing medical phenomena, such as cancer, are more ordered and comprehensible than they actually are. Nevertheless, she suggests that this 'reductionist approach of analysing complex things into more simple constituents' is useful for explanatory and didactic purposes (1997: 76).

It is clear that the JOURNEY metaphor provides a powerful knowledge structure by which to understand coming out, as Table 3 indicates. As Charteris-Black (2005: 199) notes, 'journeys imply some type of planned progress and assume a conscious agent who will follow a fixed path towards an imagined goal. Journeys are therefore inherently purposeful'. The JOURNEY metaphor is one that can empower the person coming out, as it entails self-determination, the power to choose one's goal and to select one's path towards it.

Table 3 Mappings for the COMING OUT IS A JOURNEY metaphor

Source domain	Target domain
traveller	person coming out
start of journey	being in
end of journey	being out
events on the journey	events in coming out
forks in the path	choices in how to proceed
forward progress	coming out
distance travelled	measure of progress in coming out

Furthermore, the JOURNEY metaphor is one which can be applied to the idea of coming out as a one-off announcement or as an ongoing, processual experience (Liang 1997). For the former, the journey is short in duration and distance while, for the latter, it can be imagined as an extended experience that might take a lifetime. However, it is important to bear in mind that coming out is not actually a journey and that the elements that have been discussed here did not exist until the structure of the journey was mapped onto it.

Insights from Queer theorists allow for further critique of this ubiquitous metaphor. For example, Orne (2011) discusses the concept of ‘strategic outness’ by exploring how individuals manage levels of outness throughout their lives, deciding who needs to know and who does not in different contexts and relationships. The JOURNEY metaphor, in which coming out has a starting and finishing point via steps and stages, is therefore an unhelpful fiction which gives readers an unrealistic impression of how LGB people manage the reality of coming out and how they conduct lives where they are never fully out. Guittar and Rayburn (2016) argue that Cass’s (1979) work, which has popularized the ‘stage’ model of coming out, does not match up with their participants’ accounts of coming out, which resembles is a lifelong ‘career’ rather than a phenomenon that is ever completed or completable. Moreover, the JOURNEY metaphor entrenches a view of coming out that necessitates the young person’s step-by-step struggle from a position of confusion, fear or shame to a safe place as an acceptable, homonormative gay. In these respects, the advice texts have much in common with coming-out stories discussed by Gray (2009) in which the non-heterosexual is produced as a broken, damaged individual who must repair themselves by moving through stages to emerge from the closet.

6.2.2 COMING OUT IS CONFLICT.

This source domain provides 18% of the linguistic metaphorical expressions for the target coming out. Supporting this metaphorical domain is a number of similes in which sexuality is described as a weapon that the LGB person is always cautioned against using.

Most of the CONFLICT metaphors come from the domain of war, such as ‘[y]our life will be far more rewarding and enjoyable if you accept and embrace your sexuality rather than try to *battle against* or ignore it’ (Text 2). However others are from the domain of sport: ‘[i]f you are *wrestling* with guilt and periods of depression, you’d be better off waiting to tell your parents’ (Text 4). It is included in this category as it seems likely that in this context, it would be the

combative element of wrestling that would be made most salient to the reader. Since wrestling is not armed combat and since it involves only two individual opponents, it seems inappropriate to specify its source domain as WAR, thus the more general term, CONFLICT, has been selected instead. A primary metaphor such as MENTAL ACTIVITY (AND COMPETITION) IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (AND COMPETITION) may underpin both of these source domains (Deignan 2008: 159) as mental activity would be inclusive of both the emotional and the cognitive effort involved.

The CONFLICT metaphor has high frequency and distribution across the texts, arguably due to the salient and pervasive nature of our understanding and usage of conflict and war metaphors more generally in numerous discourses (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau 2018). The mapping of correspondences between the two domains, set out in Table 4, indicates that the opponents in this conflict are either the person one comes out to, or oneself in the coming-out-to-self process.

The CONFLICT metaphor foregrounds the potential for struggle both within the individual and antagonism between the lone individual who is coming out and those who are receiving the information, such as parents, relatives and friends. As such, it can be regarded as being problematic, as it is a linguistic means of discursively perpetuating what Dhaenens (2013: 309) refers to as ‘the unified reiteration of the victim trope that makes all gay youth vulnerable individuals’, a view which he challenges robustly. In addition, the conflict metaphor is linked to hegemonic masculine values (Koller 2002: 183--187) and may seem out of place in texts written for women, and for men exploring alternative masculine identities.

Table 4 Mappings for the COMING OUT IS CONFLICT metaphor

Source Domain	Target Domain
enemy	the person one comes out to; oneself in the coming-out-to-self process
the battle	coming out as a single event; coming out to oneself
the war	processual coming out
allies	supportive LGB and heterosexual friends
combatant	LGB person
weapons	Sexuality; action of coming out
defences	denial, or being closeted

Nonetheless, a more positive view of this domain is that the CONFLICT metaphor could be seen to restore power to the person who is coming out and to affirm them as the hero. In addition, it suggests that this is a struggle that can be fought and won if one fights hard enough.

7 Discussion

It is clear that linguistic metaphorical expressions and their underlying conceptual metaphors are fundamental to the construction of coming out in the selected texts. The use of metaphor goes beyond the expected ontological metaphor, *to come out (of the closet)*, and extends to a number of structural metaphors, such as COMING OUT IS MOVEMENT (ESP. A JOURNEY) and COMING OUT IS CONFLICT, which are secondary metaphors that conceptualise an already metaphoric target

domain (Koller 2002). It is also notable that all of the common source domains are used by more than one text, indicating that the metaphors are discursively systematic (Cameron 1999), as they construct a view of coming out that has to some extent become conventionalised as the common sense and natural view within this particular discourse community.

Holmgren (2008: 103) argues that ‘metaphorical structuring is not always automatic and unconscious ... but may serve very deliberate and strategic purposes’. The writers of these texts have made use of specific conceptual metaphors to communicate their attitudes and beliefs about coming out to their readers. For example, the JOURNEY metaphor maps out an aspirational, steady and positive progression to one of three final destinations: a settled lesbian, gay or bisexual identity. It highlights the investment that these texts have in the imperative of coming out. The CONFLICT metaphor acknowledges the difficulties that may have to be faced as inevitable challenges in the process, but valorises the struggle and positions coming out as a victory. In the preceding analysis, it has been argued that these metaphors are not entirely satisfactory, as they can construe coming out in unhelpful ways. Furthermore, they are prime examples of how LGB identities are linguistically constructed via what Motschenbacher (2010: 26) calls ‘discursive materialisation’, as they reiterate established sexual categories, coaching individuals in how to perform sexual identities in conventional and sanctioned ways (McCormick 2015). As mentioned earlier, the JOURNEY metaphor includes a final destination which maps onto a desirable, stable and authentic LGB identity. The potential fluidity of an individual’s sexuality throughout their life and their personal experience of that sexuality as it interacts with other facets of their identity and with their preferred sexual practices, is here rendered invisible and replaced by a homonormative identity category (Duggan 2002) which has ‘become normalized and legitimized over time’ (Milano 2012: 62). Moreover, the texts, in reiterating the hetero-homo dyad, reinstate it as a significant social structure; reinforce the oppressive power asymmetry of ‘normal’ versus ‘deviant’ sexual identities; and require the LGB reader to assume the subordinate position.

Another critique of the source domains of these metaphors is that they do not permit the texts to pay attention to how intersecting oppressions, such as class, race, disability, economics, legal privilege, or gender conformity, may make coming out more or less possible for an individual. Rasmussen (2004: 146-147) provides a clear example of how this can operate in her account of Akanke, who identifies as a Black Jamaican woman. As a University student and as a lesbian parent living in Britain, Akanke is aware of the discrimination that she faces on account of both racism and homophobia. Although she would prefer not to be closeted, Akanke cherishes the support that she gains from the Black community that surrounds her and thus remains closeted in order not to jeopardise that support. The complexity of this and other lived experiences is not contained in the metaphors that structure coming out as a process that is reductive and partial

Despite these criticisms of the JOURNEY and CONFLICT metaphors, Landau, Keefer & Swanson (2017: 63) remind us that, ‘if observers rely on [a rhetorical metaphor] to understand a complicated issue, they may be reluctant to abandon it’. For example, one reason for the dependency on the JOURNEY metaphor is the historical imprint that the ontological metaphor ‘coming out’ has had: as ‘coming out’ is a linguistic manifestation of the Event Structure metaphor CHANGE IS MOTION, invoking physical movement and change in location, so the JOURNEY metaphor is an effective trope in structuring those concepts. That being said, it is

arguably time for the writers of coming-out advice to reconsider their use of metaphor in order to provide a better account of the diverse experiences of coming out. For example, a minor source domain in the texts is COMING OUT IS DEVELOPMENT, a metaphor that could be employed more frequently in order to exploit its ability to construe coming out as change that is fluid, individually determined and never completed. Alternatively, there is much to commend the metaphor used by Guittar and Rayburn (2016) in their discussion of the ‘career management’ of coming out. COMING OUT IS CAREER MANAGEMENT has great potential to structure an understanding of coming out that chimes with their findings that coming out is a life-long process of change and adaptation of the self in ever-fluctuating and mutable circumstances.

Appendix 1

- Text 1 *University of Illinois Counselling Centre.*
<http://www.couns.uiuc.edu/Brochures/comout.htm>. Retrieved October 2007.
-
- Text 2 *Lesbian and Gay Foundation.* <http://www.lgf.org.uk/Getsupport/Coming-Out-support/>. Retrieved October 2011.
-
- Text 3 *Coming out and staying out - a guide for gay and bi men.*
<http://www.gmhp.demon.co.uk/coming-out>. Retrieved November 2007.
-
- Text 4 *Out proud.* <http://www.outproud.org/>. Retrieved June 2007.
-
- Text 5 *I've got something to tell you.*
http://www.bbc.co.uk/onelife/sex_relationships/relationships_gay/coming_out/.
 Retrieved October 2008.
-
- Text 6 *Australian Young Adult Health.*
<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=240&np=300&id=2075>. Retrieved October 2007.
-
- Text 7 *Gay and Lesbian Resources.*
<http://www.psychpage.com/learning/library/gay/outparents.html>. Retrieved October 2007.
-
- Text 8 *A beginner's guide to coming out.*
<http://www.channel4.com/life/microsites/O/out>. Retrieved July 2008.
 Retrieved July 2008
-
- Text 9 *Reach Out Come Out.* <http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=87>. Retrieved October 2007.
-
- Text 10 *Coming Out as a Lesbian Later in Life.*
<http://www.lesbianinformationservice.org/oldbook.htm>. Retrieved October 2007.
-
- Text 11 *Coming out as a young person*
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/coming-out/coming-out-young-person>
 Retrieved January 2019
-
- Text 12 *Coming out for LGB*
https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/coming_out_1.pdf Retrieved January 2019
-
- Text 13 *Brook sexual health and wellbeing for under 25s*
<https://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/advice-on-coming-out> Retrieved January 2019

- Text 14 *Ditch the label*
<https://www.ditchthelabel.org/top-11-tips-for-coming-out-as-lesbian-gay-or-bi/>
Retrieved January 2019
-
- Text 15 Proud trust – home of LGBT youth
<https://www.theproudtrust.org/for-young-people/advice-and-support/coming-out/>
Retrieved January 2019
-
- Text 16 LGBT foundation
<https://lgbt.foundation/coming-out> Retrieved January 2019
-
- Text 17 BBC advice – coming out
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4k02pR7FP6J4C83C5t7HZdM/coming-out> Retrieved January 2019

ⁱ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive critique of earlier versions of this paper and their helpful suggestions for its improvement.

ⁱⁱ Although the limitations of dictionary definitions are well documented in linguistics, the purpose here is to distinguish between literal and non-literal meanings and the OED performs this task adequately (eg Jaworska 2017).

References

- Allan, K. (2008) *Metaphor and Metonymy. A Diachronic Approach*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- Baker, P. (2008) *Sexed Texts. Language, Gender and Sexuality*. London, Oakville: Equinox.
- Bannink, A. & Wentink, D. (2015) ‘I need to confess something’: coming out on national television. *Discourse & Communication* 9(5): 535- -558. DOI: 10.1177/1750481315600301
- Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Cameron, L. (1999) Operationalising ‘metaphor’ for applied linguistic research. In L. Cameron and G. Low (eds) *Researching and Applying Metaphor* 3- -28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI [10.1017/CBO9781139524704.004](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524704.004)
- Cameron, L., Maslen, R., Todd, Z., Maule, J., Stratton, P. and Stanley, N. (2009) The discourse dynamics approach to metaphor and metaphor-led discourse analysis. *Metaphor and Symbol* 24(2): 63--89. DOI [10.1080/10926480902830821](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480902830821)
- Cass, V. C. (1979) Homosexual identity formation: a theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality* 4: 219- -235. doi.org/10.1080/00224498409551214

-
- Charteris-Black, J. (2004) *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. New York: Macmillan. DOI 10.1057/9780230000612
- Charteris-Black, J. (2005) *Politicians and Rhetoric. The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Houndsmill, Basingstoke and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI 10.1057/9780230319899
- Chirrey, D. (2003) "I hereby come out." What sort of speech act is coming out? *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 7(1): 24- -37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9481.00209>
- Chirrey, D. (2011) Formulating dispositions in coming-out advice. *Discourse Studies*, 13(3): 283-298. DOI:10.1177/1461445611400672
- Chirrey, D. (2012) Reading the script: an analysis of script formulation in coming out advice texts. *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 1(1): 35- -58. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.1.1.03chi>
- Deignan, A. (2008) Corpus linguistic data and the conceptual metaphor theory. In M. S. Zanolto, L. Cameron and M. C. Caval (eds) *Confronting Metaphor in Use. An Applied Linguistic Approach*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamin Publishing Company. 149- -162. DOI: 10.1075/pbns.173.10dei
- Dhaenens, T. (2013) Teenage queerness: negotiating heteronormativity in the representation of teenagers in Glee. *Journal of Youth Studies* 16(3): 304- -317. DOI [10.1080/13676261.2012.718435](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2012.718435)
- Duggan, L. (2002) The new homonormativity: the sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D.D. Nelson, *Materializing Democracy: toward a Revitalised Cultural Politics*, Durham NC: Duke University Press; 175- -194. DOI: [10.1215/9780822383901](https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383901)
- Edelman, E.A. (2014) Neither in nor out: taking the 'T' out of the closet. In L. Zimman, J.L. Davies & J. Raclaw (eds) *Queer Excursions: Rethorising Binaries in Language, Gender and Sexuality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 150- -169. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199937295.003.0008
- Flusberg, S. J., Matlock, T. & Thibodeau, P. H. (2018) War metaphors in public discourse, *Metaphor and Symbol* 33(1): 1- -18. DOI [10.1080/10926488.2018.1407992](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2018.1407992)
- Gibbs, R. W. (1993) Processes and products in making sense of tropes. In A. Ortney, (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Second edition 252- -276.
- Goatly, A. (1997) *The Language of Metaphors*. London: Routledge.
- Gray, M. L. (2009) Negotiating identities/queering desires: coming out online and the remediation of the coming-out story. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14(4): 1162- -1189. DOI [10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01485.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01485.x)
- Guittar, N.A. and Rayburn R.L. (2016). Coming out: the career management of one's sexuality. *Sexuality and Culture* 20(2): 336- -357. DOI 10.1007/s12119-015-9325-y
- Holmgreen, L. (2008) Biotech as 'biothreat'? Metaphorical constructions in discourse. *Discourse and Society* 19(1): 99- -119. DOI 10.1177/0957926507083691
- Hunter. S. (2009) *Coming out and Disclosures. LGBT Persons across the Lifespan*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Jaworska, S. (2017) Metaphors we travel by: a corpus-assisted study of metaphors in promotional tourism discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 32:3, 161--177, DOI: 10.1080/10926488.2017.1338018.

-
- Jhang, Jhu Cin (2018) Scaffolding in family relationships: a grounded theory of coming out. *Family Relations* 67(1): 161- -175. DOI: 10.1111/fare.12302
- Kay, C. J. Roberts, J. Samuels, M. and Wotherspoon, I. (eds) (2010) *Historical Thesaurus of English*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kim, A (2009) Speaking “out”: ideologies, identities, and individuals in coming out stories. *Intersections* 10(1): 239- -278.
- Kitzinger, C. (2000) Doing feminist conversation analysis. *Feminism and Psychology* 10(2): 163- -193.
- Koller, V. (2002) A shotgun wedding: co-occurrence of war and marriage metaphors in mergers and acquisitions discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 17(3): 179- -203. DOI [10.1207/S15327868MS1703_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327868MS1703_2)
- Koller, V. (2008) *Lesbian Discourses: Images of a Community*. New York, London: Routledge. DOI [10.4324/9780203928691](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203928691)
- Kövecses, Z. (2002) *Metaphor: a Practical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1993) The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortney (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Second edition. 202- -251. DOI 10.1017/CBO9781139173865.013
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980) *Metaphors we Live by*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. and Turner, M. (1989) *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press. DOI [10.2307/431779](https://doi.org/10.2307/431779)
- Landau, M.J., Keefer L.A., & Swanson, T.J. (2017) ‘Undoing’ a rhetorical metaphor: testing the metaphor extension strategy. *Metaphor and Symbol* 32:2, 63- -83. DOI [10.1080/10926488.2017.1297619](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2017.1297619)
- Liang, A. C. (1997) The creation of coherence in coming-out stories. In A. Livia and K. Hall (eds) *Queerly Phrased. Language, Gender and Sexuality* 287- -309. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI 10.13140 / 2.1.4286.8801
- Markowe, L. (1996) *Redefining the Self: Coming Out as Lesbian*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- McCormick, T. L. (2015) Queering discourses of coming out in South Africa. *African Studies*, 74(3): 327- -345. DOI 10.1080/00020184.2015.1067998
- Milano, T. (2012) Queering the matrix? Language and identity troubles in HIV/AIDS contexts. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics* 41: 59- -75. DOI 10.5842/41-0-83
- Morrish, L. & Sauntson, H. (2007) *New Perspectives on Language and Sexuality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Motschenbacher, H. 2010. *Language, Gender and Sexual Identity: Poststructuralist Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.29>.
- Orne, J. (2011) You will always have to out yourself: reconsidering coming out through strategic outness. *Sexualities* 14(6): 681- -703. DOI 10.1177/1363460711420462
- Oxford English Dictionary online*. Retrieved from <http://www.oed.com> October 2017.
- Ponse, B. (1978) *Identities in the Lesbian World: the Social Construction of Self* (Contributions to Sociology 28), London: Greenwood.
- Pragglejaz Group (2007) A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol* 22(1): 1- -39. DOI 10.1207/s15327868ms2201_1

-
- Rendle-Short, J. (2005) 'I've got a paper-shuffler for a husband': indexing sexuality on talk-back radio. *Discourse and Society*. 16(4): 561- -578 DOI:10.1177/0957926505053057
- Rich, A. (1980) Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 5 (4): 631- -660. University of Chicago Press Journals.
- Rasmussen, M. L. (2004) The problem of coming out. *Theory into Practice*, 43(2): 144- -150. DOI: 10.1207/s15430421tip4302_8
- Ritchie, D. (2003) ARGUMENT IS WAR – or is it a game of chess? Multiple meanings in the analysis of implicit metaphors. *Metaphor and Symbol* 18(2): 125- -146. doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms1802_4
- Saxey, E (2008) *Homoplot: the Coming-out Story and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Seidman, S. (2004) *Beyond the Closet: the Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life*. New York; London: Routledge, 2004.
- Seif, H. (2014) "Coming out of the shadows" and "undocuqueer": undocumented immigrants transforming sexuality discourse and activism. *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 3(1): 87—120. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.3.1.05sei>
- Semino, E. (2008) *Metaphor in Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614456090110060603>
- Van der Bom, I., Coffey-Glover, L., Jones, L., Mills, S. & Paterson, L. L. (2015) Implicit homophobic argument structure: equal marriage discourse in the Moral Maze. *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 4(1): 102- -137 DOI: 10.1075/jls.4.1.04mil
- van Rijn-van Tongeren, G. (1997) *Metaphors in Medical Texts*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. DOI 10.1017/CBO9780511481499
- Ward, J & Winstanley, D. (2005) Coming out at work: performativity and the recognition and renegotiation of identity. *The Sociological Review*. 53(3): 447- -475. <https://doi-org.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2005.00561.x>
- Wood, K. M. (1997) Narrative iconicity in electronic-mail Lesbian coming-out stories. In A. Livia and K. Hall (eds) *Queerly Phrased. Language, Gender and Sexuality* 257- -273. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI 10.13140 / 2.1.4286.8801
- Wilkinson, S. & Kitzinger, C. (2003) Constructing identities. A feminist conversation analytic approach to positioning in action. In R. Harré and F. Moghaddam (eds) *The Self and Others. Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political, and Cultural Contexts* 157- -180. Praeger: Westport, Connecticut, London.
- Zimman, Lal (2009). 'The other kind of coming out': transgender people and the coming out narrative genre. *Gender and Language* 3(1): 53- -80.