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Enacting a Path from Despair to Happiness: A Critical Analysis of the It Gets Betters Project

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ENACTING A PATH FROM DESPAIR TO HAPPINESS:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *IT GETS BETTER PROJECT*

by

Lindsey Harness

A Dissertation Submitted in

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ABSTRACT
ENACTING A PATH FROM DESPAIR TO HAPPINESS:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *IT GETS BETTER PROJECT*

by

Lindsey Harness

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017
Under the Supervision of Professor John Jordan

Rhetorical agency is critical for addressing perceived community crises, especially for marginalized populations. Rhetorical agency, as it is used in this dissertation, refers to the capacity to act in a way that is recognizable and intelligible within the context in which it is presented (Campbell, 2005; Rand, 2014). Understanding rhetorical agency in this way recognizes that its enactment involves a complex interplay between the rhetor, his/her audience, and the rhetorical conditions characterizing the discursive context. Using a social media movement, the It Gets Better Project, as a case study, I analyze the LGBT population's strategic response to address the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. Through critical analysis, I examine the relationship between the rhetorical goal of a marginalized population and the use of a particular Internet technology to address a situation that seemed urgent and uncertain. Specifically, I argue that drawing upon the enactment of lived experiences in the form of personal video testimonies creates discursive possibilities and limitations for rhetorical agency particular to the rhetorical situation in which it emerges.

Keywords: rhetorical agency, LGBT, YouTube, social movements, social media, rhetorical template

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the marginalized who struggle to find their voice amidst the cacophony of hatred and silence yet continue striving to do so. May you never stop fighting to be heard; may you never cease enacting your truths. Our voice is our power; our struggle is our resistance.

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Chapter One: Introduction & Rationale

In 2010, there was a perceived spate of LGBT youth suicides that garnered a significant amount of media attention. Within a span of 14 days, five youth committed suicide. It was widely believed that each youth had been bullied for being gay or for being perceived as gay (see Alexander, 2011; Melnick, 2010; Parker-Pope, 2011; Popkin, 2010). Syndicated sex columnist and LGBT activist, Dan Savage, along with his husband, Terry Miller, believed that the suicides pointed to a social crisis that was in threat of becoming an epidemic. From their perspective, LGBT youth were committing suicide because of anti-gay bullying. The situation demanded an immediate response. As a way to address the perceived problem, Savage and Miller created and released a video that offered a message of hope to bullied LGBT youth. The video was housed within a YouTube channel, titled the "It Gets Better Project" (IGBP). Unbeknownst to Savage and Miller, the video, which promised youth that "it gets better," marked the beginning of a popular social media movement of the same name.

On September 21, 2010, the same day that the video was shared via YouTube, Savage (2010b) addressed the recent LGBT youth suicides on his blog, *SavageLove*. The blog post discussed the ramifications that LGBT youth face, especially those who live in areas without gay-positive resources. He also introduced the video he had made with Miller and invited LGBT adults to create their own video. In the same blog post, Savage explained that people interested in submitting a video could find a set of instructions on the IGBP YouTube channel.[1] After uploading a video to YouTube, it was expected that participants would email Savage a link to their videos (cited in Montgomery, 2010). Upon receiving the link, Savage and Miller would select videos to be added to the YouTube channel.

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[1] The original instructions for the IGBP have since been removed from the YouTube channel. Instructions, however, can now be found on the IGBP website.

Despite the foresight to create a forum where additional videos could be housed, Savage and Miller did not anticipate the popularity their video would generate (TalksatGoogle, 2011). In an interview about the IGBP, Savage explained: "Honest to God, we put up our video and thought 'Are we going to be the only ones?'" (cited in Hartlaub, 2010). Within 24 hours after sharing the video on YouTube, Savage received 3,000 emails from teenagers (Parker-Pope, 2010). The majority of emails contained messages that indicated the video was helpful. Beyond the video's popularity amongst the target audience, it became apparent that there were people besides Savage and Miller who wished to help LGBT youth. Within 36 hours after promoting the video, 100 people had submitted their own videos (TalksatGoogle, 2011). Interestingly, these videos, as well as countless others, are analogous to Savage and Miller's video.

In their video, Savage and Miller hoped to convince LGBT youth that, despite the pain and discrimination they currently face, a happier future is possible if they endure their present anguish. In an attempt to prevent LGBT youth from committing suicide as a result of anti-gay bullying, both men shared personal testimonies about their experiences of victimization and their current lives as happy adults. The video used the catchphrase "it gets better" to center a series of short anecdotes about their past and present lives as gay men in a society dominated by heterosexuality.

The rhetorical form exemplified in Savage and Miller's video was emulated in many of the subsequent videos. The video emerged as a rhetorical template for those interested in offering a similar response. Participants shared personal testimonies about their past experiences with anti-gay bullying and provided evidence that life had improved. The majority of the rhetors also mentioned "it gets better" in their videos. The sheer amount of videos that emulated the style and substance of Savage and Miller's message indicates that it was believed to be an effective

response to a perceived crisis. In addition, the original video, as well as the idea behind it, received widespread support from the public. It also invited criticism. These videos, along with the discourse associated with the IGB rhetorical campaign, are the focus of this dissertation.

The IGBP's novel use of YouTube, reliance on personal testimonies, and rapid circulation makes it an interesting campaign for rhetorical analysis. This dissertation analyzes discursive elements of the campaign that are of particular rhetorical interest. The IGBP strategically utilizes lived experiences and social media to address a perceived community crisis that is characterized by urgency and ambiguity. The IGBP is the product of the LGBT population's creative rhetorical invention. The use of experiential knowledge conveyed through a video-based medium illuminates interesting possibilities for addressing a particular rhetorical situation.

At the time of this writing, there are several studies about the IGBP. For instance, one study investigates the meaning of the phrase "it gets better" through a textual analysis of the videos. The authors argue that the campaign is diverse and complex, creating a "textual public advocating a host of queer worldmaking activities" rather than one single project (West, Frischherz, Panther, & Brophy, 2013, p. 49). Tina Majkowski (2011), on the other hand, is more critical of the project's implications, claiming that the video-based campaign posits a troubling idea about the future for LGBT-identifying individuals because it homogenizes what it means to be non-heterosexual. Taking a different perspective, Dustin Goltz's (2013) examination of the IGBP focuses on the criticisms surrounding the campaign. In his study, Goltz counters critiques relating to the campaign's efficacy. He argues for its "radical potentials" by illuminating the disparate perspectives and identities represented within the project, which is itself made possible by the very criticisms seeking to antagonize its worth (p. 137).

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While these studies are helpful in understanding the campaign's effect on the target audience, its relevance to LGBT scholarship, and its problematic implications for LGBT activism, there are still several points of inquiry that warrant analysis. Among those still to be considered are how the discursive choices constituting the IGBP enable and hinder rhetorical agency for the LGBT population. The IGBP garnered a lot of attention and generated a good deal of popular discussion, but the implications for the rhetorical agency of LGBT people going forward is a complicated matter, and worth critical attention. In this dissertation, I pursue such an analysis. I analyze the IGBP as a strategic response by some members of the LGBT population to address a controversial issue. Through critical analysis, I examine the relationship between the rhetorical goal of a marginalized population and the use of a particular Internet technology to address a situation that seemed urgent and uncertain. Specifically, I argue that drawing upon the enactment of lived experiences in the form of personal video testimonies creates discursive possibilities and limitations for rhetorical agency particular to the discursive situation in which it emerges.

For the purposes of this project, I build from contemporary understandings of rhetorical agency in rhetorical scholarship. Specifically, I draw upon K.K. Campbell's (2005) definition of rhetorical agency as the "capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's community" (p. 3). As this definition indicates, rhetorical agency goes beyond possessing the ability to act. It does not emerge from the sheer will of a rhetor who seeks to influence others. Rather, rhetorical agency is the ability to act in a way that is recognizable and intelligible within the context in which it is presented; it emerges within a rhetorical process that is social and communal (Campbell, 2005; Rand, 2014). Understanding rhetorical agency in this way recognizes that its enactment involves a complex

interplay between the rhetor, his/her audience, and the rhetorical conditions characterizing the discursive context.

In the case of the IGBP, although Savage and Miller's video received considerable attention, it is important that the video is rhetorically situated as a text within a particular context. Therefore, I analyze both the content and context of Savage and Miller's video. While Savage and Miller's video is an integral part of the IGBP, it is not the only text that is worthy of consideration. Therefore, I also examine a selection of the subsequent videos that are accepted as a part of the official IGBP. In so doing, I look at the audience's response to the IGBP. My intention for this examination is to understand the surrounding rhetorical possibilities and constraints that influenced what these videos say and, according to the audience, what the videos perhaps should not say. After all, as rhetorical scholarship has attested, rhetoric is a collaborative process; therefore, any critical study of it must identify the integral role the audience plays in that process (e.g., Condit, 1997; Campbell, 2005; Rand, 2014). Dubriwny (2005) argues, "All rhetorical texts are collectively created, if only in the sense that any single rhetor exists within a discursive web from which rhetorical texts are created" (pp. 395-396). Whether or not a rhetor is deemed rhetorically competent is, in part, at the discretion of the audience. Accordingly, whether or not a message is received as rhetorically effective is, in part, dependent upon the audience's response. How the original message is re-shaped once the audience is introduced to it and invited to participate in the rhetoric is part of the collaborative rhetorical process.

What is persuasive for an audience depends upon the discursive conventions defining the context. These rules are influenced by material and ideological forces that can govern the rhetorical choices available (Campbell, 2005; Enck-Wanzer, 2006; Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Rand, 2014). For this reason, extending Campbell's definition of agency, Rand (2014) argues that

rhetorical agency "can be exercised only through available and socially recognizable forms of discourse" (p. 299). For a rhetor to be "heard, understood, [and] taken seriously" by a discursive community necessitates that s/he identify a rhetorical opportunity to act and strategically utilize rhetorical strategies that will appeal to the audience while simultaneously circumventing the external forces defining the opportunity (Code, 1995, p. ix; Campbell, 2005).

Recent scholarship about rhetorical agency gives attention to how marginalized populations are creatively utilizing the rhetorical resources available to them. This research focuses on the novel ways in which populations are responding to difficult rhetorical conditions, often finding ways of communicating messages that mainstream society might otherwise wish remained unspoken. Examples of such analyses include the use of tattoos to signify one's HIV-positive status (Brouwer, 1998), online communities advancing alternative understandings of feminist motherhood (Koerber, 2001), magazine articles imbuing a sense of empowerment for pioneer women (Kelly, 2009), non-governmental agencies efforts at creating communicative spaces for sex workers in India (de Souza, 2009), and the renovation of urban environments for performances of a diasporic identity (Enck-Wanzer, 2011). Although covering a wide range of topics and situations, what these studies have in common is that they seek to illuminate how individuals and groups "have managed to successfully use rhetoric to exert social power and establish rhetorical agency in a world that denies them a privileged status" (Stockdell-Geiseler, 2010, p. 9-10). As such, these and similar studies are useful in analyzing the specific circumstances of the IGBP, which also addresses concerns related to identity, rhetorical agency, marginalization, and creativity. Using the IGBP as a case study, this dissertation adds to the growing body of research about the possibilities and implications of rhetorical agency, especially in the rhetorical efforts of the marginalized.

Issues of Rhetorical Agency for the IGBP

In 2010, when there seemed to be a rash of LGBT youth suicides, Savage and Miller saw an opportunity to respond to what they perceived was a troubling situation. They believed that persuading LGBT youth to not commit suicide required a message of hope. The effectiveness of this message called for both the target audience and potential rhetors to adopt a shared understanding about what it means to be bullied for identifying as LGBT and what kind of future was possible for all LGBT people. Thus, as is true of any rhetorical campaign, the persuasiveness of the IGB rhetoric required overcoming certain rhetorical impasses. Identifying the rhetorical obstacles that influence what discursive choices are available to respond to the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides is important for understanding how the effort to enact rhetorical agency by the LGBT population is enabled and constrained. After all, the ability to circumvent these obstacles is necessary to achieve the rhetorical goal of the IGBP. In analyzing the context of the IGBP, I conclude there are two primary obstacles that characterize the rhetorical situation encompassing the campaign: accessibility and eloquence.

The context of the IGBP is characterized by a challenge of accessibility. Especially in areas where identifying as anything but heterosexual is viewed as deviant behavior, it is unlikely that LGBT adults will receive permission to talk to LGBT youth or will be invited to offer their perspective about the LGBT identity, at places like school assemblies or other community spaces. It is difficult to be listened to when speaking about anti-gay bullying, especially since speaking to LGBT youth often requires permission from people in authoritative positions (e.g., school administrators, teachers, parents, church officials). As a result, sympathetic adults often feel helpless when they hear about youth who are victimized as a result of their sexual orientation (Parker-Pope, 2011). Savage himself commented on the difficulty of getting a

message to various segments of the LGBT community. He explained, "We can't barge into these schools. I get to go to colleges and speak, but high schools don't bring me in, and those are the ages that young gay people are committing suicide" (as stated in Parker-Pope, 2011). Savage and Miller "knew that while bullied straight kids go home to sympathetic parents and a shoulder to cry on, bullied gay kids all too often go home to more bullying from their parents and their churches" (cited in Parker-Pope, 2010). Thus, the discursive context of the IGBP is characterized by a challenge of accessibility in regards to when, where, and how LGBT youth can access a message of hope. Addressing the issue of anti-gay bullying and suicides required finding a way to reach LGBT youth in a manner that did not require an invitation or permission.

While overcoming an issue of access is important to the success of the IGBP, it does not guarantee that the audience will listen to or be persuaded by the rhetor's message, nor does accessibility guarantee that potential rhetors will contribute to the campaign in a way that aligns with Savage and Miller's original intention. Even if the need to receive permission to access LGBT youth or engage with the rhetorical text is circumvented, the persuasiveness of the message could still suffer from a lack of listenability. After all, any effort of rhetorical agency requires that the rhetors be able to enter the cultural conversation. According to Herndl and Licona (2007), rhetorical agency involves a matter of identifying "how people enter into and effect arguments and debate, recalling that in order to participate in a debate, a speaking subject must first be recognized and able to enter the discussion" (p. 133). The rhetorical efficacy of a message is dependent upon the ways in which the rhetor or rhetors can come to voice about a particular issue and be received as a credible contributor to the conversation.

In the case of the context encompassing the IGBP, Savage's celebrity status as a syndicated sex columnist, the popularity of his blog, and his reputation as an outspoken LGBT

activist, places him in a unique position to respond to the issue of anti-gay bullying. However, Savage and Miller's decision to create a YouTube channel for the purposes of hosting video submissions from other LGBT people indicates that they did not intend to be the only people speaking about the problem. Therefore, a rhetorically effective message requires that LGBT people who have not earned credibility as a result of their social status rely upon other rhetorical resources as a means for approaching victimized LGBT youth in a way that is likely to generate their audience's attention. For this reason, I argue, that in addition to addressing a challenge of accessibility, the rhetorical situation encompassing the IGBP necessitates that the message utilizes discursive strategies that creates a sense of identification with both the target audience and potential rhetors. Establishing an identifiable rhetoric enables a discursive space to be created that invites the intended audience into the discourse (Campbell, 1989). Additionally, creating a message that is both identifiable and replicable enhances the likelihood that potential rhetors will participate in the rhetorical process. In this regard, the context of the IGBP requires a rhetorically eloquent message.

While various definitions of eloquence exist in rhetorical scholarship, for the purposes of this dissertation, I borrow from Condit's (1997) definition of eloquence as the capacity to "take an incompletely spoken, fragmentary set of experiences and to articulate those experiences in a coherent set of relationships that nourishes a particular audience in a particular context, perhaps even moving them to new visions from old ones" (p.107). This form of rhetorical eloquence occurs when a rhetor is able to navigate rhetorical constraints in a way that enables the audience to re-articulate their seemingly isolated experiences into a shared understanding (Condit, 1997; Campbell & Jamieson, 1978; Dubriwny, 2005; Crick, 2014). Addressing a need for eloquence can play a key role in efforts of rhetorical agency.

Rhetorical agency is possible when a rhetor's message is intelligible to the audience and the rhetor is received as rhetorically competent within the discursive community. In this regard, rhetorical eloquence involves discursive invention. What is said and how it is said matters to whether or not a rhetor and a message are heard by the audience to whom the discourse is addressed. Thus, the stylistic and substantive characteristics of a rhetorical text influence what possibilities and implications can emerge when attempting to enact rhetorical agency. Eloquent rhetoric can help efforts of rhetorical agency because it "move(s) audiences emotionally, convince(s) them intellectually, or reassure(s) them credibly" (Condit, 1997, p. 107). When eloquent rhetoric is successful, an audience, both the intended audience and potential rhetors, is more likely to be drawn to the message, collaborate in the shaping of that message, and act in the name of the rhetorical goal.

In the case of the IGBP, there are several reasons that make rhetorical eloquence necessary when approaching the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. First, the rhetorical efficacy of Savage and Miller's video depends upon the degree to which the intended audience, LGBT youth who are desperate for social support, are able to believe that a better future awaits them. After all, suicide is often the result of an inability to imagine a different outcome for a particular situation (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2015). Thus, offering social support to LGBT youth requires a response that persuades them to re-envision their lives not from a frame of despair but from a lens of hope. How the response is constructed has a significant impact on the ability of LGBT youth to identify with the rhetors and the message.

In order to create a message that encourages LGBT youth to re-envision their future, the message's argument needs to be powerful enough to counter evidence to the contrary. In other words, the LGBT population's effort to exercise rhetorical agency requires that the IGBP rhetors

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are received by the target audience as legitimate contributors to a cultural conversation. As Herndl and Licona (1998) argue, "[A]gency becomes a question of whether and how the subaltern can make her voice heard and achieve political legitimacy; that is, how she can (re)constitute her identity and (re)position herself within the public sphere" (p. 133). For LGBT adults, being received as credible is difficult, given that LGBT youth often experience a myriad of hate messages that counter a message of acceptance and hope.

In fact, in the wake of the 2010 youth suicides, many LGBT-identifying people blamed the messages that LGBT youth received as a catalyst for the youths' deaths. Queerty's Max Simon (2010) claims that school districts, like the one attended by suicide victim Justin Aaberg, communicate strong messages about the perception of LGBT youth by choosing not to include policies for preventing and punishing acts of anti-gay bullying. Eliza Byard, executive director of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network, states, "If you're in the small community, the pressure is hard enough...People get enough signals about 'how wrong it is to be gay' without anyone in those communities actually having to say so" (cited in McKinley, 2010). LGBT-identified television host, Ellen Degeneres (2010) argues, "There are messages everywhere that validate bullying and taunting and we have to make it stop. We can't let intolerance and ignorance take another kid's life." As these statements indicate, preventing LGBT youth suicides requires that a message of support seems plausible enough to outweigh the hopelessness that results from anti-gay rhetoric. Thus, the extent to which the audience believes in a message that is founded upon a rhetoric of possibility depends upon a rhetor's ability to create a sense of identification, validate the message's truth, and establish his/her rhetorical authority to speak about the subject. A rhetorically eloquent message is needed to help LGBT youth see themselves

within the rhetors' discourse and to believe that, like the rhetors, they are capable of attaining a life that is characterized by acceptance and happiness.

Additionally, the context encompassing the IGBP calls for rhetorical eloquence because the effectiveness of Savage and Miller's response to a perceived crisis depends upon other LGBT individuals participating similarly. In this regard, LGBT-identifying people need to identify with the message and feel capable of participating in a way that will be heeded by the community. Convincing LGBT adults to share their personal stories of victimization and to interact with LGBT youth is a challenge. Beyond being denied permission to talk with LGBT youth, adults often must face the prospect that they will be accused of recruiting or seducing youth to adopt a "gay lifestyle" (Rimmerman, Vald, & Wilcox, 2000). Therefore, fearing that their motivation will be questioned, LGBT adults are often reluctant to interact with youth. Savage explained this hesitancy:

> [T]he deal culturally for queer people in this country since Stonewall has been this: you are ours to torture until you are 18, once you are 18 you can do what you want...but there is just one thing that you can't do once you are 18 - talk to the kids that are not yet 18 that we are still torturing, in the same schools, in the same churches, in the same malls, in the same suburbs where you were tortured. And if you try to talk to those kids we are going to accuse you of recruiting, of being a pedophile, of trying to seduce kids into the homosexual lifestyle...that accusation was so inhibiting that we [LGBT adults] didn't talk to LGBT kids. (cited in TalksatGoogle, 2011)

The "gay recruitment" narrative is often interpreted by LGBT adults as a threat, causing them to shy away from such interactions (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). As a result, a learned helplessness develops.

LGBT adults have a tendency to see their stories of victimization as painful memories rather than productive resources for change. In public discourse about the IGBP, Miller spoke to the tendency for LGBT adults to stay quiet about anti-gay bullying. He stated, "Like, I would never have known to talk about the bullying that I had as a teenager to anybody else because I just thought no one else was interested and no one else would understand" (cited in TalksatGoogle, 2011). Savage echoes this sentiment when he explained that LGBT adults do not share their stories of past experiences of victimization because the benefit of doing so is unrecognized. He asserted, "What good could come of it? And we didn't share those stories with one another as gay adults...what good could we do? Nothing could be done? We couldn't stop it" (cited in TalksatGoogle, 2011). Yet, not saying anything to help LGBT youth had proven unsuccessful. After all, LGBT youth were committing suicide. Therefore, the context encompassing the IGBP calls for a shared understanding that helps LGBT adults re-imagine and re-articulate their lived experiences as resources of change and to view themselves as agents of change. A message was needed that created a sense of identification amongst LGBT individuals and propelled them to work toward social change. For this reason, a rhetorically eloquent message could operate as an invitation, encouraging other LGBT adults to collaboratively participate in the shared rhetoric.

Rhetorical eloquence is particularly helpful for discursive efforts that require collaborative action to address a community issue. With rhetorically eloquent performances, a rhetor might piece together isolated experiences to communicate a larger picture of an identity or situation (Condit, 1997; Crick, 2014). Or, eloquent rhetoric can emerge when a discursive project calls upon the linking of individual experiences into a shared understanding (Condit, 1997). With either demonstration, eloquent rhetoric invites the audience to accept a revised understanding

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about their experiences and identity, to re-envision what is possible for their past, present, and future orientations, and to use this alternative vision to work toward a common goal.

When exercising eloquence, both rhetor and audience are likely to coalesce around a shared understanding and use this collective perspective to work toward a similar aim. Condit (1997) explains, "Eloquence well-performed helps people understand their experiences in new ways and, because these new understandings are shared ones, it allows people to coordinate their behavior around these understandings" (p. 107). As both rhetor and audience discursively act in the name of a common message, they communally construct the meaning of their experiences and identity. What emerges is the possibility for a shared vocabulary that can propel collaborative efforts geared toward social change (Jamieson, 1988; Dubriwny, 2005).

In response to the 2010 LGBT youth suicides, Savage and Miller attempted to be heard about the subject of anti-gay bullying by creating a rhetorical campaign that invites the audience, both youth and adults, to re-envision their experiences as LGBT-identifying individuals not from a perspective of isolation and hopelessness but rather from a perspective of identification and possibility. Yet, in analyzing the rhetorical situation of the IGBP, it is apparent that rhetors are faced with the challenge of accessing LGBT youth without having to receive permission from the traditionally powerful, of offering a message whose possibility is plausible enough to transcend feelings of hopelessness, and of re-imagining experiential knowledge as a means of empowerment. Savage, in particular, is faced with the challenge of taking what began as a single message and framing the response in a way that helps it be seen as the impetus of an intentional and organized campaign. Doing so helps to ensure that the original response is kept intact, inviting others to collaboratively participate in the shared understanding about the LGBT identity. By critically analyzing the Savage-Miller video, subsequent videos, and public

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discourse about the social media movement, my objective is to identify the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that emerge as a result of the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP. I develop this reading of the rhetorical campaign in several chapters.

Overview of Chapters and Theoretical Framework

The beginning of chapter two is dedicated to understanding the rhetorical process that is involved in efforts of rhetorical agency. I rely upon contemporary notions of rhetorical agency as the capacity to rhetorically act in a way that is rendered intelligible by an audience within a particular time and space (Campbell, 2005; Rand, 2014). The intelligibility of the rhetorical action is influenced by the rhetors' rhetorical choices, choices influenced by the material and symbolic constraints defining the context. Thus, in discussing the theoretical framework of rhetorical agency, I explain the different factors that constitute enactments of rhetorical agency.

The second framework informing my project explores the role of YouTube as a resource for the LGBT population to enact their rhetorical agency. I discuss the technological features of YouTube that assist rhetors, especially those who face an issue of accessibility. In addition, I identify the ways in which these features invite specific rhetorical practices; therefore, I explain the formal and stylistic conventions of YouTube that enable it to be used as a possible mechanism for rhetorical agency.

In analyzing YouTube as part of the IGBP, my purpose is to understand the medium's potential as a rhetorical resource, particularly for discursive efforts in which the persuasiveness of a message depends upon the circumvention of traditional modes for speaking, an enhancement of credibility, and the constitution of identification. I argue that the combination of camera technology and the self-reflexive practices encouraged by the medium aids the efforts of the IGB rhetors in trying to create a rhetorical space and message that is accessible, encourages

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identification, promotes a sense of authenticity, and offers an opportunity for audience

participation. Thus, in conjunction with strategic rhetorical strategies, YouTube may help

marginalized rhetors overcome rhetorical constraints hindering their rhetorical agency by

providing the rhetors a rhetorical space and template in which to speak and be heard.

To understand the rhetorical practices within the IGBP requires critically analyzing the

interdependent relationship between the rhetorical text and the rhetorical goal; therefore, I focus

my attention not only on the rhetorical impasse of accessibility but also on a need for eloquence.

While YouTube is a helpful resource for circumventing institutionalized rules and external

factors that previously hindered the LGBT population from coming to voice about anti-gay

bullying, there is still the issue of *how* one participates in a rhetorical campaign like the IGBP

after s/he has gained access to the cultural conversation. Thus, chapter two also discusses

rhetorical eloquence as an ability to translate individual experiences into a shared understanding,

offering a point of coalescence for a collective (Condit, 1997). I identify the ways in which the

rhetorical strategies of enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies help rhetors

of the IGBP enhance their listenability by offering the means to translate their lived experiences

into a shared discourse. Characterized by these strategies, the Savage-Miller video provides a

rhetorical template that other people can adopt and replicate as a means for speaking about anti-

gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides.

As a rhetorical strategy, enactment occurs when rhetors embody the argument they are

making (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978; K. G. Campbell, 1988; K.K. Campbell, 1988). That is,

either explicitly or implicitly, rhetors serve as the proof of their claim. Often times, rhetors

employing a strategy of enactment draw upon experiential knowledge in the form of personal

testimonies. Using their lived experiences as evidence, they seek to create a sense of

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identification with the audience, establish a sense of authenticity, and encourage the audience to

re-articulate their own experiences and identities. When the success of a rhetorical goal calls for

a re-envisioning of identities and experiences, enactment serves as a powerful rhetorical resource

for establishing credibility. The IGBP illustrates how, in their video, Savage and Miller use their

own past experiences as young victims of harassment and anti-gay bullying in an attempt to

create a sense of identification and connection with the target audience, inviting LGBT youth

who are desperate for social support to see their personal experiences reflected within the

message. The perceived effectiveness of the message enables it to be viewed and used as a

discursive pattern for subsequent video contributions.

Using Savage and Miller's video as a rhetorical model, IGBP contributors are provided a

guide to help them with their participation in the campaign and strengthen the listenability of

their discourse. As a result of the rhetorical and technological strategies constituting the original

IGB video, the IGB message allows a disenfranchised population to create and adopt a common

language, participate in "joint action through communal decorum," and coordinate around a

shared goal (Miller, 2003, p. 63). A rhetorical space is established in which discursive

performances are heard and taken seriously while simultaneously generating a "collective

rhetoric" as a means of resistance from hegemonic ideologies (Dubriwny, 2005, p. 395).

Following the discussion of the theories informing this dissertation, I focus specifically

on analyzing the possibilities and implications of rhetorical agency in relation to the IGBP.

Given the discursive impasses characterizing the rhetorical situation of the campaign, the

purpose of this dissertation is to understand how the rhetorical and technological choices

constituting the IGBP enable and hinder the LGBT population's rhetorical agency. In chapters

three, four, and five, my analysis pursues two rhetorical interactions. First, I identify how Savage

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and Miller viewed their project and situation. Second, I identify how the audience perceives and receives the IGB message.

In chapter three, I provide a detailed analysis of the video's rhetorical style and message, arguing that the video unfolds in three distinct parts. Each part relies upon the use of YouTube, enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies. I discuss how the rhetorical form constituting Savage and Miller's IGB video helps them overcome the constraint of accessibility and address a need for rhetorical eloquence, which had previously hindered their ability to speak about the subject of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. Examining how Savage and Miller respond to their perception of the rhetorical situation affords a better understanding regarding the reasons the rhetors made certain rhetorical choices in an effort to respond to the 2010 LGBT youth suicides.

I conclude chapter three by arguing that Savage and Miller's video and their public discourse regarding the project provide rhetorical directives about participation within the IGBP. In this regard, the video acts like a rhetorical model, inviting potential rhetors to re-envision their lived experiences as a rhetorical resource for rhetorical agency. The video and discourse about the IGBP invite potential rhetors to adopt a specific subject position, guiding them in how their participation in the IGBP should be performed. By providing a rhetorical model, Savage and Miller's video offers subsequent rhetors a way in which to contribute their voice to the rhetorical effort and potentially be received as a legitimate contributor to the discourse.

In addition to understanding how Savage and Miller respond to the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides, the second rhetorical interaction I analyze relates to how the audience receives and perceives the IGBP as well as the arguments they make to justify their reception and perception. Audience, in this chapter, refers both to the target audience and

potential rhetors. Involved in this line of inquiry is an examination of how the rhetorical choices constituting the campaign influence the way in which the audience takes up, rejects, or modifies the IGB message. Thus, in chapter four, I examine how the audience attends to and reinforces the meaning of the campaign as a result of their sympathetic reception.[2]

I argue that the rhetorical form constituting the IGB message enables some members of the audience to overcome rhetorical impasses previously hindering their rhetorical agency. The discursive model provided by Savage and Miller's video enhances the likelihood that individuals who wish to contribute their own stories will be heard and supported by the rhetorical community. Additionally, the IGB message seeming offers LGBT youth an identifiable rhetoric to help them deal with a difficult reality. I conclude that the audience indicates their support for the campaign in two primary arguments: their identification with the intent of the message and the resource it provides as a means of resistance. The fourth chapter ends with a discussion about the important rhetorical possibilities for rhetorical agency that emerge as a result of the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP. Strategically utilizing rhetorical resources at their disposal, the marginalized population offers a rhetorical space and template in which to create, adopt, and circulate a shared understanding about past, present, and future experiences for sexual minorities.

Following the examination of the sympathetic reception of the IGBP, in the fifth chapter, I examine the antagonistic messages directed toward the campaign. For some people, the IGB message fails to meet their desires, needs, and expectations. Arguments opposing the campaign's approach and its message imply that a shared understanding about the lived experiences of LGBT people does not exist or that the common perspective offered by the IGB message fails to

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[2] In this dissertation, all quotes are represented as they were originally written or stated. Thus, any proofreading or grammatical errors are included without correction. Throughout the dissertation, the symbol [sic] is only used to indicate gender exclusive language as it appears in direct quotations.

align with the experiential knowledge of all LGBT people. This opposition emerges in several arguments.

Those who receive the IGB message antagonistically do not envision the context in which the campaign emerges similarly nor do they identify with the IGBP's portrayal of the LGBT identity and the experiences associated with this identity. Moreover, the IGB message is criticized as a grand narrative that creates a false reality for a vulnerable population while undermining and ignoring the "real" issues plaguing the LGBT population. What emerges from an analysis of the arguments advanced by critics is that the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP are perceived as ineffective by some members of the audience. Audience, in this chapter, refers to LGBT youth and potential rhetors. Consequently, not all individuals who encounter the IGBP are persuaded to adopt the message or the campaign's objective. Rather, their energy and attention is directed toward creating an alternative dialogue about the rhetorical situation.

Taking the antagonistic reception into consideration, the fifth chapter extends my analysis presented in the preceding chapters by analyzing and unmasking implications for rhetorical practices of rhetorical agency. I maintain that, while seeking to exercise their rhetorical agency, the rhetorical text of the IGBP threatens to constrain the rhetorical agency of LGBT people because it offers a homonormative account of the non-heterosexual identity. At the same time the campaign succeeds in overcoming some of the short-term obstacles and challenges faced by the LGBT population, the rhetorical form constituting the IGBP also creates possible long-term consequences for LGBT advocacy. Thus, it is possible that while the IGBP is perceived as a successful approach to a community crisis, it also can potentially serve as a means for alienating members of the LGBT population by diminishing the power of the lived experiences of some

LGBT-identifying people. The overall implication, then, is that it can limit who is perceived as a legitimate contributor to cultural conversations about the LGBT identity.

Following the chapters of analysis, I conclude the dissertation. I argue that exemplified within the IGBP is a rhetorical effort to speak about a particular facet of a marginalized identity that has previously been difficult to voice because of certain rhetorical impasses. Creatively and strategically using the available resources at their disposal, the LGBT population seeks to explore and contest what it means to be bullied and LGBT. Yet, some of the choices made to address the context are perceived as rhetorically ineffective. In analyzing the IGBP, interesting takeaways emerge for understanding rhetorical agency as it relates to social movement campaigns. I also discuss potentially interesting areas for future inquiry. As a result of the relationship between the rhetorical and technological choices made by the LGBT population, materializing from the campaign is an understanding about the possible instantiations of rhetorical agency and the implications of the rhetorical practices comprising such manifestations.

Project's Contribution

Research about rhetors whose rhetorical agency within mainstream society is significantly restricted extends understandings about rhetorical agency beyond the traditional assumption that all individuals have a comparable faculty to act toward the ends they desire or possess easy access to rhetorical sites for engaging in cultural conversations. Especially when considering unconventional contexts and marginalized populations, to study rhetorical agency is to examine the signs of rhetorical agency's presence and absence in varying forums, to understand the discursive rules that constrain and enable practices of rhetorical agency in their everyday lives, to identify the structural conditions that limit and facilitate rhetorical agency's existence, and to explore the various forms in which rhetorical agency is exercised as a means

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for resisting the rhetorical conditions upon which its absence is created and maintained. Especially when discussing a marginalized group's deliberate act of responding to a perceived community crisis, it is clear the concepts of rhetorical agency and rhetoric cannot be separated from one another. Understanding how both a message and technology work in tandem to create a space for rhetorical agency further elucidates this relationship.

This project contributes to existing scholarship about the novel ways in which marginalized populations use the rhetorical resources available to them for efforts of rhetorical agency. These efforts illustrate how individuals without taken-for-granted access to public forums engage in the rhetorical opportunity to participate in important cultural conversations despite rhetorical challenges. My project agrees with Hunt's (2003) claim: "Rhetoric that peculiarly overcomes the obstacles and takes advantage of the opportunities of its exigence is especially worthy of critical examination" (p. 379). This project recognizes that if studies neglect the ways in which marginalized populations exercise rhetorical agency, then "we are missing out on, and writing 'out of history,' important texts that gird and influence local cultures first and then affect, through the sheer number of local communities, cultures at large" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 19). That is, when attention is paid to the voices of oppressed collectives, rhetorical critics call forth "a richer understanding of rhetorical agency by examining how rhetors without taken-for-granted access do, nevertheless, manage to exercise rhetorical agency" (Geisler, 2004, p. 11). The focus, then, is not on rhetorical agency as a possession but rhetorical agency as a resource.

Despite difficult rhetorical conditions, efforts like the IGBP indicate that resisting harmful ideologies and practices is possible. This possibility, however, is not without implications. Studies geared toward understanding rhetorical agency as an ability to act in a way

that is deemed intelligible by an audience are particularly helpful for identifying how populations

without taken-for-granted access to public forums and cultural conversations navigate rhetorical

conditions that previously hindered their voice. This body of scholarship further identifies the

possibilities and implications of specific choices made in rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency.

As the IGBP reveals, the use of technology and certain rhetorical strategies enable and hinder a

historically subjugated population to address an absence of rhetorical agency.

This dissertation also speaks to the rhetorical salience of identifying how marginalized

populations strategically use the rhetorical means at their disposal to address circumstances

related to representational power. As rhetorical scholars focus on critical examinations of how

power and marginalization are discursively constructed and maintained, there is a need to

continue identifying the ways in which marginalized populations use rhetoric to help "participate

in the discovery, creation, and enhancement of their community narratives and personal stories"

in an effort to recognize and exercise rhetorical agency (Rappaport, 1995, p. 805). As

exemplified by the IGBP, for those persons for whom a single declaration of their self-hood

offline can lead to public ramifications, the strategic adaptation of Internet technologies cannot

be "explained or reduced to its technological components alone" (Waskul & Douglass, 1997, p.

378). Instead, it is important to see the medium as part of the rhetorical form and as a possible

resource for rhetorical agency.

Furthermore, scholarship focused on YouTube as an available means of resistance is

limited. My project seeks to fill this gap. I argue that the IGBP provides a potentially productive

model for efforts of rhetorical agency, especially when a marginalized population faces the

discursive impasse of accessibility and must address a need for eloquence. As is exemplified in

the IGBP, the possibilities and limitations of the medium as a rhetorical resource for rhetorical

agency come into being as a result of the rhetorical strategies used. In the next chapter, I delve

into the theoretical frameworks about rhetorical agency and the use of YouTube as a platform for

coming to voice in this manner. I conclude the second chapter by discussing my methodological

approach for critically analyzing the IGBP.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Overview

While LGBT individuals presently enjoy more rhetorical possibilities for participating in important cultural conversations than in the past (e.g., marriage equality), there are still several issues that have historically been difficult to discuss. The IGBP attempts to create a conversation about one of those issues: anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. In 2010, following a string of suicides by LGBT youth, Dan Savage and Terry Miller decided that addressing the subject of anti-gay bullying was important to helping LGBT youth in crisis find hope. Creating and sharing a video based in personal testimonies, Savage and Miller offer experiential knowledge about what it means to be bullied, to hope for a better future, and to find happiness. In addition to helping LGBT youth, the video also becomes a template for other LGBT-identifying people who wish to support bullied youth. Emerging from the popularity and effectiveness of the original video are subsequent contributions. Taken together, these videos constitute a rhetorical campaign, known as the It Gets Better Project (IGBP).

In examining public discourse about the campaign, the rhetorical situation of the IGBP is characterized by two rhetorical obstacles. First, the LGBT population faces an obstacle of accessibility. Those who wish to provide support to non-heterosexual youth must find a way to engage with LGBT youth without having to receive permission from those in traditional positions of power. Second, to prevent LGBT youth suicides necessitates that any message about this issue is powerful enough to counter the present-day suffering non-heterosexual youth suffer. That is, the persuasiveness of any message that responds to the rhetorical situation depends upon the ability of the rhetors to enhance the listenability of their message by creating a sense of

identification with the target audience. This requires a rhetorically eloquent message whereby individual experiences are translated into a shared understanding about the LGBT identity.

Using rhetorical agency as a leading theoretical framework, this dissertation explores the rhetorical choices constituting the LGBT population's effort to address the subject of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. The IGB contributors strategically utilize YouTube as a means for offering an accessible and personal message. In conjunction with the social media platform, the IGB message is based upon a rhetorical process of enactment whereby rhetors share their personal testimonies and experiential knowledge as proof that a better life is possible. With personalized videos, they invite the target audience into re-envisioning what is possible for them despite their present-day suffering. Additionally, they encourage LGBT-identifying people to transform into rhetors by re-envisioning their personal stories as a resource for change. By sharing their video and attempting to take control of how the IGBP is rhetorically framed in public discourse, Savage and Miller invite other LGBT-identifying people who are interested in supporting LGBT youth to use their experiential knowledge as a way of re-articulating what once might have been painful memories as proof of their own endurance and to see the positive outcomes that have manifested as a result of that endurance. Ultimately, I argue that the combination of YouTube and the chosen rhetorical strategies both enable and hinder the LGBT population's effort to enact rhetorical agency.

This chapter begins by providing a theoretical explanation of rhetorical agency. Next, I examine YouTube as a possible resource for rhetorical agency in this particular context, especially as it offers a means for helping the LGBT population create discourse that overcomes an obstacle of accessibility. By itself, however, YouTube is insufficient for reaching the target audience emotionally and moving them to adopt alternative understandings of their experiences

and identity. Thus, I examine how the rhetorical strategies of enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies work in tandem with the communicative possibilities of YouTube to come to voice about what it means to identify as LGBT. Overall, the IGBP relies upon a mediated form of public address to create a discursive and textual platform for the LGBT population to exercise their rhetorical agency. Despite the rhetorical challenges characterizing the context of the IGBP, the campaign provides a rich example of a rhetoric whose effectiveness and implications emerge as a result of the ability to recognize and heed an opportunity to act by using the rhetorical resources at their disposal.

An Overview of Rhetorical Agency

Agency can sometimes refer to a something a person possesses. For instance, agency can mean the ability to make a particular decision in a specific situation. Given this meaning, in the context of the IGBP, agency as a possession could refer to a youth's decision to not commit suicide. From this perspective, studying agency is to study the ability for people to make choices about their actions. It is the freedom to determine personal realities and to exercise autonomy. While understanding agency as self-determination is certainly important, this meaning does not help advance understandings about how people, especially those who are marginalized, utilize symbolic language to be heard about a particular subject in a rhetorical situation despite discursive obstacles. Thus, to identify how people strengthen their listenability in complex and ambiguous contexts, the focus of this dissertation is concerned not with agency as a possession but rather centers on the idea of *rhetorical* agency.

The meaning of rhetorical agency varies. As Campbell (2005) argues, it is the "polysemic and ambiguous" nature of rhetorical agency that enables it to be imbued with disparate meanings (p.1). Rhetorical agency is conceived as "[an] invention, strategies, authorship, institutional

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power, identity, subjectivity, practices, and subject positions" (p. 14). Rhetorical agency is conceptualized as the collaborative rhetorical process between similarly-minded individuals that produces a discursive text (Grabill & Pigg, 2012) and is the creative use of rhetorical strategies for purposes of resistance (Campbell, 2005; Enzk-Wanzer, 2006; Holling, 2000). It is also defined as the ability to use language to participate in decision making about one's interests and needs (Holling, 2000), the capacity to employ symbols and participate in the identification of problems and the construction of solutions (de Souza, 2009), and the "ability to read audiences and create a response" (Sowards, 2010, p. 240). Taking these definitions into consideration, rhetorical agency requires a capacity not only to engage in decision-making but also to use one's decision as a means of public articulation. It is possible for a person to know that something needs to be said about a particular message, yet feel as if s/he lacks the public voice to offer a message that will be received by the audience. On the other hand, a person can possess a public voice, yet lack a coherent message in which to use his/her voice.

For the purposes of this dissertation, rhetorical agency is defined as the ability to speak or act in a way that is likely to be sympathetically received, heard, and understood by the audience to whom the discourse is addressed. At the core of rhetorical agency's meaning is the capacity to use symbolic language in a way that is heard by the audience within a particular context. Thus, rhetorical agency as considered in analyzing the IGBP is the ability to *rhetorically* act. It is the capacity to use symbols to as a strategy of empowerment. Empowerment, then, refers to the ability to craft a message in a way that elicits rhetorical merit.

This consideration of rhetorical agency aligns with contemporary notions of the concept. Campbell's (2005) definition extends this meaning and recognizes rhetorical agency as "the capacity to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's

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community" (p. 3). Doing so, she argues, "permits entry into ongoing cultural conversations and is the *sine qua non* of public participation" (emphasis in original, p. 3). In other words, to be recognized as a valid speaking subject necessitates that a person speak or act in a way that is intelligible to the discursive community s/he is addressing.

Understanding rhetorical agency as a matter of rhetorical competence avoids giving precedence to the rhetor or solely his/her ability to act (Lundberg & Gunn, 2005; Rand, 2015). In other words, rhetorical agency is not simply a matter of a rhetor's sheer will or ability to use a "magic bullet" to move the audience toward his/her objective. Rather, rhetorical agency is a continuous mediation between a rhetor's objective, the audience's expectations, and the rhetorical conditions defining a particular situation and a discursive community. As such, rhetorical agency is "communal, social, cooperative, and participatory" and is "simultaneously constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of context and culture" (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). These conditions are external forces that can be environmental, rhetorical, and ideological (Campbell, 2005; Rand, 2014

Emerging from the material and symbolic forces that define contexts are discursive parameters that help determine the kind of rhetoric that warrants acknowledgement (Code, 1995). After all, as Campbell (2005) argues, "Symbolic action presupposes others who know the words and syntax of a shared language and how to use them - when it is considered appropriate for whom to say what" (p. 3). Any rhetorical performance occurs within a social environment that is characterized by particular conventions about what response is appropriate, how the response should appear, and who should engage in the response. The conventions for giving a eulogy at a funeral, for instance, differ from the expectations of a wedding toast. While both situations call for a form of public speaking, the content and style of that speaking depend upon

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the specific context in which it emerges. Yet, even when a rhetor can assume the rhetorical

expectations for a situation, s/he cannot guarantee what strategies will be rhetorically effective

within the situation. Thus, part of rhetorical agency involves the rhetor's capacity to engage in

strategic decision-making about the conventions defining the context, the rhetorical resources

available to him/her within the context, and the most effective means for using these resources as

way of responding to the context.

While difficult rhetorical conditions might characterize a discursive context, rhetorical

agency includes the capacity to successfully navigate the external forces that enable and

constrain the rhetorical resources available (Campbell, 2005; Enck-Wanzer, 2006; Holling, 2000;

Lundberg & Gunn, 2004; Rand, 2014; Sowards, 2010). In this regard, enacting rhetorical agency

is a matter of rhetorical invention. Campbell (2005) concludes rhetors are '"inventors' in the

rhetorical sense, articulators who link past and present, and find means to express those strata

that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments in

time" (p. 5). Efforts to enact rhetorical agency require creativity and strategy, especially when

rhetors occupy a marginalized social position. Thus, while everyone is capable of rhetorically

acting, the ability to exercise discursive rhetorical agency can be difficult to achieve.

Part of enacting rhetorical agency requires that a rhetor recognizes the opportune moment

for acting. Rhetorical agency, then, requires that a rhetor identify when the resources at his/her

disposal are likely to be effective for addressing the situation. For this reason, rhetorical agency

involves *techne* (Campbell, 2005). *Techne* involves the "study, training, and experience that

enables one to recognize what means are available in a given situation" (p. 6). It "emerges

ideally as an ability to respond well and appropriately to the contingencies of circumstance" (p.

3). Rhetorical agency requires rhetors to recognize "how and when to use different styles and

strategies for persuasion" (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). Any effort of rhetorical agency requires a rhetor attempt to identify a "*kairotic* moment at which a particular stratagem, formal, tropic, or argumentative, will have salience" (emphasis in original, p. 7). To enact rhetorical agency is to recognize the opportunity to respond, identify the rhetorical resources to create a response, and exercise the capacity to respond in a way that meets the rhetorical parameters defining the situation while also navigating the external forces that can constrain the available options.

As a matter of rhetorical invention, understanding the audience's expectations for discourse guides a speaker in what can be said, when it can be said, and how it can be said. To aid in this endeavor, rhetors make rhetorical choices about the style and content of a rhetorical text. Strategically utilizing the discursive resources available, a rhetor creates a rhetorical form that helps the audience recognize how to understand or engage with the discourse. A rhetorical form is comprised of verbal and nonverbal discourse that, when combined, conveys a particular meaning (K.G. Campbell, 1988). The substantive and stylistic choices shape the rhetorical form, which is "*evidence* of the implementation of a rhetorical strategy" (emphasis in original, Campbell, 1988, p.13). The discursive strategies constituting the form are the means by which rhetors attempt to achieve their rhetorical purpose. Stylistic choices also point to who the text is intended to persuade.

If rhetorical agency involves the ability to be heeded by the community in which one's rhetoric is presented, the discursive choices constituting rhetorical forms are integral to this effort. A rhetorical form enables audiences to participate in the translation of rhetoric. This translation is "central to an audience's ability to take up, categorize, and understand any symbolic act" (Rand, 2014, p. 20). The rhetorical choices constituting the form of a discursive text are a rhetor's attempt to guide the audience in how to receive the message conveyed. In this

regard, rhetorical forms function as a medium that helps facilitate the audience's understanding of the choices made and invites them to evaluate the discourse.

One way in which rhetorical forms serve as a medium is by reflecting an intended auditor, which is, according to Black (1970), representative of a "second persona" (p. 112). That is, the stylistic design of a message implies who the discourse is intended to persuade and what ideologies the rhetor hopes the implied auditor will adopt. This constructed persona is key because "actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending to for cues that tell them how they are to view the world, even beyond the expressed concerns, the overt propositional senses, of the discourse" (p. 113). In other words, the stylistic and substantive choices a rhetor makes regarding the way in which s/he conveys the message point to the corresponding beliefs and characteristics the rhetor perceives is most appropriate for the audience to support and represent. An audience uses the stylistic cues to identify the meaning of the discourse, to evaluate the truth of that meaning, and to understand how to use that meaning in their own rhetorical performances. Thus, as K.G. Campbell (1988a) explains, rhetorical forms, "from the standpoint of auditors," may function "*as a way of experiencing* the rhetoric in which it is found" (emphasis in original, p.17). Burke (1968) also speaks about the role rhetorical forms play in discursive performances when he states, "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (p. 124). The use of forms involves the "psychology of an audience." Therefore, a rhetor uses rhetorical forms to arouse "an appetite in the mind of the auditor," and to successfully fulfill those expectations (p. 31).

Consider the rhetorical situation of a wedding. When a maid of honor gives a speech at a wedding reception, her rhetoric is often characterized by certain discursive markers (e.g., stories about her relationship to the bride, humor about the bride's personality, hope for the bride and

groom's future). Adherence to these rhetorical expectations guides the audience in their

response. Upon identifying the rhetorical conventions constituting a traditional wedding toast,

the audience is likely to receive the message sympathetically and respond in a way that illustrates

support of that message (e.g., applause, laughter, verbal declarations of sentimentality). A

funeral, however, calls for a different response. Oftentimes, attendees of the funeral expect

eulogies to provide a brief biography of the deceased person's identity, to celebrate his/her mark

on the world, and to offer condolences to the surviving members of the family. Both situations

involved expectations about the communicating within each particular context. While these

situations are fairly common, sometimes situations exist in which the rhetorical expectations are

unclear or a readily accessible response is unavailable.

As seen in the IGBP, when there is not an existing response that can be modeled to

address a particular situation, enacting rhetorical agency requires the rhetor use his/her best

judgement in deciding how to approach the context. In 2010, Savage and Miller believed that

bullied LGBT youth were killing themselves because they lacked the support and hope they

needed to endure their present situation. Since there was not an existing formula or script as to

how to respond to this type of situation, Savage and Miller had to exercise their best effort to

identify the needs of the situation and the audience without any guarantee that their effort would

be successful.

When a rhetor is successful in responding effectively to a situation and meeting an

audience's expectations, a rhetorical space emerges that enables people to come to voice with a

"reasonable expectation of uptake and 'choral support'; expectation of being heard, understood,

taken seriously" (Code, 1995, pp. ix-x). Rhetorical agency manifests within this space as the

discursive possibility to broach a particular subject, the symbolic opportunity to construct

knowledge, and the availability of rhetorical resources to persuade an audience. However, even when marginalized populations are able to enact rhetorical agency, their choices have specific implications for rhetorical practices.

Given the complex interplay between a rhetor's objective, the audience's expectations, and the rhetorical conditions defining a situation, any examination of how rhetorical agency is enacted within particular situations must consider the impact of these factors in enabling or limiting the degree to which rhetorical agency can be achieved within particular rhetorical contexts. Therefore, when identifying possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency, it is important to recognize that "rhetorical agency emerges through the deployment of the particular resources at one's disposal, even when those resources also function as constraints" (Rand, 2014, p. 13). Possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency emerge within the choices a rhetor makes about how s/he will address a situation.

Every rhetorical response will "create effects through their particular formal and stylistic conventions" (Rand, 2014, p. 13). For instance, in her study of breastfeeding as an act of resistance, Koerber (2006) identified the binds that rhetors face as a result of external forces. Interviewing breastfeeding advocates, Koerber aims to understand how the interviewees respond to medical discourse that seeks to discipline the act of breastfeeding. Drawing upon Foucault's notion of "disciplinary rhetoric," Koerber concludes that mothers and advocates who oppose the guidelines of appropriate breastfeeding practices as defined by medical discourse must engage in a "negotiation among competing alternative discourses" (p. 94). Their efforts to enact rhetorical agency are characterized by a need to navigate the external forces that influence the rhetorical options available to them. New mothers tend to receive conflicting messages about the appropriateness of breastfeeding; therefore, women use "discursive and bodily actions" to upset

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expectations of what is deemed acceptable behavior of mothers (p. 87). By performing

breastfeeding practices that reject the guidelines set forth by the medical community, they create

a rhetorical space in which new possibilities emerge for enacting rhetorical agency within the

subject position of motherhood. Furthermore, enacting a form of resistance by engaging in

similar rhetorical acts creates a shared understanding of what it means to be a mother.

While these acts resist the disciplinary rhetoric surrounding breastfeeding, the rhetorical

choices for rhetorically acting in this way are constrained or enabled by the institutional

discourses the women seek to oppose. In this regard, they are participating within an important

cultural conversation, yet are constituted by the rhetorical conditions defining it. After all,

Koerber (2006) writes, "One could argue that the women are not really subverting disciplinary

power but rather are choosing amongst several preexisting subject positions made available to

them within its framework" (p. 95). The choices available to them offer a means for opposing the

disciplinary rhetoric; however, the choices also confine who, how, and where they might engage

in an act of resistance.

As scholarship about rhetorical agency demonstrates, while rhetorical agency involves a

person's ability to navigate the external forces influencing his/her rhetorical choices, the

exercising of these rhetorical choices can also reinforce or serve as rhetorical constraints. That is,

rhetorical agency is a complex process that offers possibilities as well as implications. According

to Campbell (2005), rhetorical agency is "promiscuous and protean" (p. 14). Exercising

rhetorical agency is never a static endeavor, but rather a fluid and changeable activity. For this

reason, when critically analyzing rhetorical practices of rhetorical agency, it is important to

identify the helpful and problematic effects of the rhetorical choices available and employed

(Rand, 2014).

Scholarship that focuses on how marginalized people enact rhetorical agency gives particular attention to "what rhetorical agency, in *fact*, is and what it, in *value*, should be" (emphasis in original, Geisler, 2004, p. 9). To accomplish this task, contemporary theoretical understandings about rhetorical agency direct attention to how marginalized individuals, such as the LGBT population, enhance their listenability despite the external forces that constrain the discursive options available to them. Research about rhetorical agency considers both the constraints a rhetor can face when trying to enact rhetorical agency as well as the inventive ways in which s/he attempts to circumvent these constraints (see Campbell, 2005; Enck-Wanzer, 2006; Greene, 2004; Holling, 2000; Lundberg & Gunn, 2004; Rand, 2014; Sowards, 2010). This research also seeks to understand the rhetorical consequences that emerge as a result of the rhetor's discursive choices to address the contextual circumstances.

Rhetorical invention is particularly important in instances in which subordinated voices are attempting to enact public resistance (Campbell, 1989). In order to adjust the status quo and redistribute power relations, it is sometimes necessary for marginalized individuals to engage in public action whereby existing social inequities are exposed and resisted. The result of this action can be social movement rhetoric. In these cases, a group of people attempt to collaboratively construct a shared narrative about their identity and the struggles associated with this identity (Cox & Foust, 2009). They work together to create meaning in the hopes of disrupting the existing power structure (McGee, 1980). The common understanding that can emerge helps mobilize them toward a particular rhetorical goal. That being said, creating this collective discourse can be difficult since marginalization often results in a limitation of rhetorical resources. As a result of their subordinated social status, disenfranchised groups must find a way to circumvent the constraints that influence if and how they attempt to encourage

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social change. Thus, social movement rhetoric can necessitate the creative and strategic use of available rhetorical resources in order to come to voice and be heard about a particular issue (Campbell, 1989). Rhetorical agency, then, is imperative to the efficacy of this effort, as exemplified in the IGBP.

Using the IGBP as a case study, this project extends understandings about how rhetorical actions are influenced by the rhetorical conditions defining a context and how these conditions impact the rhetorical choices available. Emerging from the public's response to Savage and Miller's effort to address the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides is a social movement campaign that calls for a unified rhetorical message. Specifically, my project illustrates the way in which the LGBT population attempts to create a shared understanding about experiences, interests, and needs relating to the LGBT identity. The actualization of this common narrative requires that the marginalized population navigate an obstacle of accessibility and address a need for discursive eloquence. I conclude that the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP provide the LGBT population a means for circumventing these impasses while creating rhetorical possibilities and implications for rhetorical practices of rhetorical agency. In the next section, I discuss the technological and rhetorical factors of YouTube that enable it to be used as a possible resource for addressing an issue of accessibility, followed by an explanation of the concept of eloquence as it relates to rhetorical agency.

The Internet as a Resource for Rhetorical Agency

While Internet-based mediums can certainly be used for ill (see Bostdorff, 2004), mediums like YouTube also can serve as a valuable resource for marginalized individuals to understand and develop rhetorical agency. Since the Internet has been available for mainstream use, research about the possibilities it offers for communicative practices has flourished.

Scholarship about the world-wide web recognizes it as a potential portal for identity performances (e.g., Turkle, 1984; Turkle, 1995), community-building (e.g., Watson, 1997), and social change (e.g., Mitra & Watts, 2002; Mitra, 2004). The digital sphere offers a space in which individuals can find and communicate with similar others, experiment with their identity, and add their voice to a collective (see Turkle, 1995; Poster, 1998; Bostdorff, 2004).

The Internet's allowance of anonymity, the possibility for active or passive participation, and its ease of use make it a potentially powerful tool for marginalized populations. For people who are limited in their ability to speak or act offline, a digital space can offer them a forum for coming to voice (Mitra & Watts, 2002; Mitra, 2004). This possibility exists because the Internet is neither as confined nor defined by the power hierarchies that shape offline interactions. Rather, the Internet helps collapse the conventional rules of discourse that make it difficult for people existing on the fringes of society to represent their voice. Mitra (2004) explains, "In the discursive space of the Internet, the power of a voice is not necessarily dependent upon the traditional determinants of power, such as economic wealth, military prowess, or industrial development, although having all of these powers is certainly not a disadvantage" (p.496). Cyberspace enables individuals with minimal technological expertise and limited financial means a potential platform to represent their experiences and identities with the possibility of being heard.

Internet users are granted a space to gain social knowledge about and experiment with their identity. This allowance is especially beneficial for people whose identity, when revealed, can engender serious social ramifications (Turkle, 1995; McKenna & Bargh, 1998). According to Mitra (2004), "The Internet has transformed popular culture by providing a virtual forum in which different communities and groups can produce a 'presence' that might have been denied to

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them in the 'real world'" (p.492). Yet, performing this presence is not without its challenges. Because the Internet allows for anonymous participation and is seemingly accessible to almost everyone, issues of trust prevail.

Debates about what constitutes authenticity, trust, and reality online continue to influence the ways in which people communicate in cyberspace. Because the Internet is a globally based "uncontrolled space of expression," cyberspace grants a certain degree of control over what constitutes a person's virtual presence; therefore, it is possible that who a person claims to be online has little correlation with his/her offline identity (Strangelove, 2011, p. 77). One of the issues relating to the Internet and authenticity is it seemingly "prevents the interpersonal identification and judgment processes by which we normally evaluate each other in face-to-face interactions," giving way to feelings of uncertainty and doubt (Watson, 1997, p. 107).

Cues used offline to judge a person's "true" identity are typically absent within cyberspace. Take, for example, the following situation. Offline, a man says to his friend, "I am going on a diet. I'm overweight." The friend can simply evaluate the likelihood of this comment by using the man's body as an "assessment signal," or a visual indicator to determine the validity of his comment (Donath, 1999, p. 32). However, if the same man joins an online chat group offering a similar claim, the visual cue would be unavailable to those he interacts with online. Instead, the man would most likely try and offer a "conventional signal," or a cue that corresponds "with a trait by custom or convention" in order to help prove the "truth" of his self-identification (Donath, 1999, p. 32). For instance, the screen name "Big Eater300" might offer some sense of a characteristic associated with the man's claim of weight challenges, yet, in some instances, the screen name does not hold the same degree of authority as physical appearance.

Since the opportunity to visually verify the man's identity is unavailable within a chat room, the possibility of deception is likely.

A chance of deception online is further complicated given the difficulty in deciphering between assessment signals and conventional signals. As Jordan (2005) explains, "A conventional signal can be given the appearance of an assessment signal by faking the appropriate signifiers, and the malleability of signifiers in digital environments like the Web makes it difficult to establish one signifier as more authentic than another" (p. 203-204). Further problematizing the issues of authenticity is the concealability of some identities in which visual markers of identity cannot be used to judge the believability of identity declaration unless accompanied by verbal identification. As a result, it becomes far more difficult to decipher what counts as "truth" online, causing many Internet users to evaluate the authenticity of identity performances based upon rhetorical practices specific to the medium's expectations and possibilities. This, in turn, can affect the audience's willingness to listen and engage with the content.

Unless a person is a celebrity who has an already established public presence, the difficulty of "proving" one's authenticity online is particularly problematic for individuals whose goal necessitates that an audience believes in the truth of the message. In the case of the IGBP, at the time of the original IGB video's release, Savage was well known because of his public persona as a syndicated sex columnist and LGBT activist. Yet, not all LGBT adults have Savage's popularity and credibility for speaking about LGBT issues, which may make it difficult for their public messages to be heard authentically. For these people, being viewed as credible is paramount to being received as rhetorically competent by the audience and the discursive community. The challenge of establishing credibility is further exacerbated when the available

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means of communication is to engage with the audience online. In these cases, the skepticism about authentic discourse online can prove to be a powerful constraint. For rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency that are characterized by a limitation of accessibility, validating one's character to speak to the audience about a particular subject and proving the truth of the claim being advanced are integral to being received as rhetorically competent. However, despite skepticisms of authenticity online, through the "appropriate use of one's voice," individuals can engage in cultural conversations about their experiences and identity as a means of accepting, negotiating, and resisting hegemonic conceptions about their community (Mitra, 2004, p. 492). Especially when rhetors are seemingly strangers to the audience, establishing one's credibility is critical to creating a rhetorical space whereby the audience participates in the rhetoric.

On the Internet, what constitutes an "appropriate use of one's voice" is, in part, dependent upon the rhetorical choices of the user. The evaluation of the "appropriateness" of these choices is also determined by the audience's willingness to listen and the constraints of the medium. While the decisions a rhetor makes about the style and content of his/her discourse will influence the believability of his/her message and character, the effectiveness of the choices requires the audience engages with the message. The rhetorical choices at one's disposal as well as the audience's ability and willingness to listen to the message are influenced by the parameters of the medium. According to Mitra (2004), "[T]he power of voice is often implicated by the ability to mobilize the representational strategies - the 'bells and whistles' of technology - available to the speaker" (p. 496). In other words, the audience's evaluation of trustworthiness is influenced by how well a rhetorical performance both utilizes the technological allowances available to him/her and adheres to the expected discursive conventions of the digital forum, which include the rhetorical purpose of the interaction and the rules of participation. For rhetors

facing an obstacle of rhetorical accessibility, strategically employing the rhetorical affordances of a digital space is integral to the message's persuasiveness. As will be discussed later in this dissertation, the IGBP's reliance on social media to circulate video messages of hope enable certain possibilities for a rhetor and a member of the audience to interact. In particular, the apparent success of Dan Savage and Terry Miller's initial video seemingly added a new rhetorical resource for those who followed, which was for other advocates to use the rhetorical style of the original video to tell their own stories. At the same time, particular implications for rhetorical agency emerge as a result of the medium's allowances.

The Internet is particularly advantageous for marginalized populations whose entry into public conversations or ability to interact is limited as a result of proximity or accessibility. As a "free for all" and open-access space, it offers a possible forum for coming to voice about a particular message that would be difficult to address offline as a result of ideological boundaries and power inequities. Additionally, when rhetorical situations are characterized by an inherent skepticism regarding the authenticity of a rhetor and his/her message, cyberspace provides possibilities for circumventing this issue. For these reasons, the Internet can serve as a helpful resource in rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency (Mitra & Watts, 2002). In the case of the IGBP, for the LGBT population one particular digital space, YouTube, operates as an available resource for attempting to come to voice and be heard with support about a subject that has previously gone unspoken. It also produces interesting consequences for rhetorical performances.

YouTube's Technological Allowances

Since emerging in cyberspace in 2005, YouTube has been a place where users can express the "everydayness" of their lives, represent the self in ways difficult to do offline, and communicate with a diverse audience. Originally created as a space in which "ordinary" people

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could upload and watch personal videos, the medium, known as "Your Digital Video Depository," was primarily intended to house user-generated content (Burgess & Greene, 2011, p. 4). Yet, as its popularity grew, so did its purpose.

Changing the moniker to "Broadcast Yourself," the website's present-day purpose is to provide "everyone a voice" and "evolve video" by creating "a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe" (YouTube, 2011). Instead of simply being a host site for videos, YouTube has become a "cultural phenomenon" that is shaped by the desires and needs of its participants (Lee, 2006, A1). Burgess & Green (2011) argue, "This shift from the idea of the website as a personal storage facility for video content to a platform for public self-expression matches YouTube to the ideas about a user-led revolution that characterizes rhetoric around Web 2.0" (p. 4). The various ways in which users can publicly share and interact with videos makes it a "high-volume website, a broadcast platform, a media archive, and a social network" (Burgess & Greene, 2011, p. 5). While the original intention might have been for YouTube to serve solely as a portal in which to share personal videos, it is now more broadly used as a public resource for broadcasting, interacting, and connecting.

As a medium, YouTube is a "social space" in which sharing and receiving information is not only easy, but encouraged (Strangelove, 2011, p. 6). Its culture relies upon user participation and, as a result, offers the possibility for redefining power inequities and crafting disparate discursive parameters about who and what gets to be represented through the lens of media. This open access format, however, also enables a variety of content to be shared while simultaneously making it difficult to manage who and how one gets to participate within the medium.

From cat videos to political parodies to corporately produced music videos, the medium can often seem more like a site for entertainment than a potential platform of empowerment. In

fact, while research about the Internet as a tactic for social change is plentiful, scholarship about YouTube as a platform for advocacy work is limited.[3] Rather, the majority of existing research is primarily focused on the various ways in which users engage with the medium and focuses on the large-scale uses of the technology, such as social networking (e.g., Lange, 2008), education (e.g., Lin & Polaniecki, 2009), and politics (e.g., English, Sweester, Ancu, 2011; Aparaschivei, 2011).

Research that gives attention to YouTube's rhetorical possibilities as a possible space for resistant purposes often declares that the structure hinders social change. For example, Hess (2009) argues, "YouTube, while effective in disseminating messages through video blogs, may not offer the means to create an organized community. The discourses exist and are resistant, but may not offer a coherent message behind which to rally" (p. 431). Other studies imagine YouTube as simply a means in which to disseminate a message (e.g., Vivienne, 2011) or gives analytical precedence to a rhetor's verbal strategies, minimizing how the technological allowances strengthen, detract, or influence those strategies (e.g., Alexander & Losh, 2010). In other words, YouTube is often framed as a channel of circulation rather than a product of discursive construction. While these studies are helpful in identifying various ways YouTube has been used for communicative purposes, the existing research limits understandings about the medium as a possible resource for social change. This dissertation seeks to fill this void.

In the next section, I discuss that while YouTube enables users to peruse and choose from a variety of videos, it is also a social space. The medium allows users to participate in a variety of ways, such as creating their own video responses or commenting on a video creator's page.

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[3] For scholarship examining the Internet as a tool for advocacy purpose, see Earl and Kimport′s (2011) book *Digitally enabled social change: Activism in the Internet Age.* Another helpful source is the edited book by Lin & Atkin (2014), *Communication technology and social change: Theories and implications.*

The various ways in which users can interact with one another within the site offer interesting possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency. Understanding the discursive features of YouTube is important to rhetorical scholarship about rhetorical agency. After all, as Marshal McLuhan (1964) argues, studies directed about media should recognize that the medium used to convey a message is just as important as the message being conveyed. In fact, McLuhan believed the role media plays within society is not determined by its content but by the characteristics of the medium. McLuhan wrote, "The medium is the message" because it is the "medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (p. 23). From his perspective, media contain structures and conventions that guide participants in how they receive and respond to the content. In this regard, technologies can be used as more than avenues of dissemination.

The role technology plays within a rhetorical process recognizes that its power and efficacy depend upon how it is being used within specific social contexts. The meanings and purpose of a technology will differ for different people; therefore, how media "helps to endow our world with meaning" depends upon the situation in which it is used (Pacey, 1999, p. 18). For this reason, it is important that studies relating to the ways in which technologies shape and are shaped by users' rhetorical practices recognize the influence mediums like YouTube play in situations where rhetorical agency requires creativity, inventiveness, and adaptation. Using the IGBP as an example, this project analyzes the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that result from using YouTube as a technological and rhetorical resource.

I argue in this project that Savage and Miller, as well as subsequent participants of the IGBP, utilize YouTube in a novel way, with the hope of coming to voice about LGBT youth suicides and anti-gay bullying. That is, YouTube is perceived as an available rhetorical resource

for circumventing an obstacle of accessibility. Accessibility as it is conceived in this dissertation is not merely a limited physicality. Instead, it involves the complex process of authenticating one's message despite powerful evidence to the contrary. It also includes the need to invite the audience to participate within the rhetorical action and the difficulties of doing so as a result of the situational context. In conjunction with particular rhetorical strategies that privilege lived experiences, YouTube's open structure, encouragement of participation, privileging of self-reflexivity, simulation of intimacy, and portrayal of authenticity offer the LGBT population a means for circumventing the external forces that have historically prevented them from coming to voice about anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides.

An Open and Participatory Space

In 2006, featuring an image of a YouTube video, *Time* magazine announced "You" as the person of the year (Grossman, 2006). In the cover story, Grossman (2006) argues that Western society is utilizing the increasing possibilities of the Internet to redefine power relations about whom and what gets to be represented through media. He states: "It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes" (p. 3). While in traditional forms of mass media (e.g., blockbuster movies) an elite group of people can send a widespread message to an audience who are without viable avenues for responding to the message, Internet-based technologies enable the role of users to transform from spectators to active participants through the construction and distribution of content.

The reliance upon "original" material is reflective of a culture in which the continued existence of a technology is dependent upon a user's ability and willingness to participate within the medium. Jenkins (2008) argues that electronic technology encourages and privileges a

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"participatory culture" whereby "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (p. 331). This cultural environment offers a platform that is easily accessible to users, encouraging "some kind of shift in the power relations between medium industries and their consumers" (Burgess & Greene, 2011, p. 10). As a result, users are given the opportunity to adopt the role as both producer and consumer.

Many Internet-based mediums invite individuals to exemplify a kind of do-it-yourself attitude (Jenkins, 2011). In this regard, cyberspace represents "a global do-it-yourself newsroom and cultural salon where individuals simultaneously create and consume news and information, blurring the distinction between publisher, reporter, and reader" (Branwyn, 1997, p. 14). A participatory medium relies upon bottom-up communicative practices rather than top-down control. As a result, who is considered an expert depends less on conventional forms of credibility (e.g., a college degree in a particular subject area, an official title as movie producer). Instead, expertise is determined by a person's ability to tap into a niche market and publicly illustrate his/her personal knowledge about that particular area of content (Burgess & Greene, 2011). The implication is a culture in which uniqueness is celebrated, casualness is expected, and creativity is encouraged.

The attention and control offered to users in participatory mediums enable certain technologies to be utilized as potentially powerful resources for individuals whose rhetorical agency is limited in offline spaces. On the Internet, "the reader takes on a particularly active role because the reader can become the author very easily" (Mitra, 2004, p. 495). Similarly, on YouTube, the viewer is offered an opportunity to transform into a participant in the discourse. The ability to be directly involved in the creation of discourse is potentially empowering since it

allows an individual to adopt the role of active agent and contribute to the chorus of voices

permeating the medium.

If rhetorical agency is a person's ability to act in a way that is heeded by one's audience,

exercising rhetorical agency is dependent upon an individual having a space in which to

participate, especially since external forces can limit one's ability to engage in important cultural

conversations offline (Campbell, 2005). Thus, individuals often must find an alternative means

"to produce a specific voice for him-or herself" that will also be heeded by the community in

which s/he speaks (Mitra, 2004, p.493). Mediums like YouTube provide them the opportunity to

exercise their public voice in a way that offers the potential to "link itself with other voices and

in combination garner power" (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 489). In short, the enactment of

rhetorical agency depends upon the existence of a forum in which one can actualize as a

speaking subject by voicing themselves into the material and symbolic space.

YouTube, in particular, is a medium that exemplifies the increasing trend and desire for

spaces dedicated to participatory culture. The majority of YouTube's content is comprised of

user-generated content. The parameters of who is and what is permitted to participate within

YouTube are loosely defined and ambiguously explained (YouTube, 2011). In line with the

Web 2.0 attitude, the website contains an accessible and useable structure further promoting the

inclusivity that helps to make the medium popular amongst individuals who may not have an

earned credibility outside the technology. A YouTuber does not have to be technologically savvy

in order to participate on the website. Instead, the only requirement for users is a basic

understanding of how to engage with and navigate between content in an online format.[4] The

all-embracing environment ensures that a diverse range of content is made available within the

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[4] Certainly, YouTube does provide tools for more technologically advanced users, but technological expertise is not required to participate in the most basic sense within the medium.

medium. As a result, YouTube videos range from the mundane to the astonishing, the private to the public, and the spontaneous to the planned, making the YouTube experience a personal and communal construction by each and every user (YouTube, 2011). To understand how this fluidity of content and participation can be a powerful tool for overcoming communicative impasses hindering one's rhetorical agency, it is important to examine the disparate ways in which users can participate within the medium.

Dependent upon user-generated content, the atmosphere is one in which users are potentially choosing amongst the roles of viewer, video creator, and commenter. The degree in which users participate within the medium differs for each user. Yet, each user constitutes part of the audience for content shared within the medium. Passive participants, who are sometimes referred to as "tourists," simply visit a user's channel or a watch a specific video and only minimally engage with the medium (Rotman & Preece, 2010, p. 325). Some viewers do not interact with the video creator at all. Typically, these individuals incidentally visit YouTube and rarely engage other YouTubers. In this sense, "tourists" represent a traditional understanding of the audience whereby they receive a message and make an internal evaluation as to the efficacy of the rhetoric.

On the other hand, active users known as "residents," are perceived as "permanent fixtures on YouTube" (p. 325). These individuals tend to visit the website daily, post their own videos, and communicate with other residents. For the more active YouTuber, there are two primary ways of interacting: video-sharing and responding.[5] To participate in video-sharing, registered account holders create, upload, and then choose who can view the user-created

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[5] People with registered accounts can also send private messages to others and write on a channel's "wall" if allowed by the account holder. However, the most popular form of communication is through video-sharing and responding; therefore, for the purposes of this paper, I focus on these modes of communication.

product.[6] In Rotman and Preece's (2010) study, one resident explained the difference between the roles of YouTube users: "A tourist comes to YouTube only when sent a link…For residents, YouTube has become town hall, local park; the place where you share yourself with others" (p. 325). In other words, these YouTubers perceive the medium as a central site for rhetorical performances. More than others, these individuals directly engage with the medium and the other people involved in the medium. They are more likely to view YouTube as not just a space within a vast network of "interconnected computers" comprised of "wires and chips," but, instead, as a "real" and "tangible place" in which meaningful social interaction occurs. Despite the degree to which one participates within YouTube, every participant constitutes the audience and helps create a cultural web of relationships (Waskul & Douglass, 1997, p. 378). The linking together of discourse is also encouraged by the ability to group similar messages.

The ability to categorize videos is helpful for populations that face an obstacle of accessibility. For collectives that wish to generate around a shared message as a means of coming to voice about a subject, finding a way in which to organize that message so it is easily accessible to intended auditors is key. YouTube's inclusion of channels makes this task a possibility. Most YouTubers choose to upload their video to a particular channel. Channels allow videos to be housed, aggregated, and organized, which in turn makes videos easier for users to locate and view using the search tools provided by YouTube (YouTube, 2011). Content creators provide the content of the videos, while YouTube helps facilitate making those videos accessible to site visitors.

If a user knows the title of a video or a channel, s/he can easily search for it. For videos that focus on a particular message, the channel can serve as a virtual portal into a discursive

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[6] To be a registered account holder, a user has to provide an email address, a possible screen name, and an original password.

community. Moreover, the channel enables related videos to be grouped together so that a user can peruse various videos in one setting. In this regard, the categorized videos have the potential to act like an ongoing conversation. For rhetorical campaigns that need a sense of authentication, this simulated conversation and grouping might offer a solution.

Take the rhetorical problem faced by the LGBT population at the time of the 2010 LGBT youth suicides. The LGBT population wished to offer hope to bullied LGBT youth, particularly those who resided in rural areas where gay-positive resources were difficult to access. Yet, receiving permission or being invited to speak to LGBT youth has historically been a challenge. Thus, the LGBT population needed the means to offer a message of hope without having to receive authorization from people in traditional positions of power. Both then and now, YouTube offers a helpful resource for addressing this need because it is a seeker's medium. In other words, the audience is able to seek and find the IGBP. With a simple search, a bullied LGBT youth can find videos that allow LGBT adults to offer him/her a message of hope. By aggregating similar videos within one channel, the LGBT population can create a unified message that has a widespread reach. After finding the videos, LGBT youth can engage in the ongoing conversation by making their own video or commenting on the video pages.

The accessible and participatory nature of YouTube creates a space in which conversation is invited and expected. While some people have argued that YouTube is merely a place for entertainment than a space in which dialogue can emerge (see Hess, 2009), others recognize that meaningful interaction can take place within the site (see Strangelove, 2011). The ability to communicate continuously with other YouTubers can manifest within comments left on video pages, in private messages, and in videos. It is common to find a body of videos

discussing a particular issue, lending rhetorical authority to the messages and inviting audience participation.

The conversational character of YouTube is also exemplified in the videos that are responses to commentary made by viewers. That is, a video creator can respond to his/her audience by "replying to comments" via another video. Strangelove (2011) explains, "In these videos amateur videographers are often seen to justify their use of YouTube and defend their ideas and values...thus we see videos with titles such as MsDiscord's *Response to a response to a video :D*" (p. 47). The ability to engage in an ongoing conversation with other YouTubers makes the medium particularly popular.

Perhaps one of the reasons that YouTube's ability to stimulate dialogue is doubted by some researchers is because videos are often studied in isolation. Rather, as argued by Strangelove (2011), "An amateur video on YouTube should be analysed not merely as a text but as a process" (p. 47). After all, resulting from the participatory nature of the medium is a webbed network of communication that engenders a sense of community whereby the users' behavior within the medium shapes and reinforces the rules and expectations of participation (YouTube, 2011). Given the disparate ways in which participation is constrained and allowed, the participation of YouTubers plays a significant role in defining, maintaining, and rejecting what it means not only to be a YouTuber but also to be a YouTuber engaged in that particular body of videos. Thus, the practices exhibited within the website influence the possibilities and implications of how the medium can be used, as well as how that use shapes the rhetoric within it and, in turn, the identity of those rhetors using it. For instance, a YouTuber might create a video intended for the IGBP YouTube channel. However, if the video does not adhere to the expectations of the campaign, the video can be rejected. While the video might still utilize the

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catchphrase "it gets better," the channel owners can deny the video as part of the IGB

conversation.

For rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency, the accessible and participatory allowances of

YouTube make it a potentially powerful resource for circumventing obstacles relating to

accessibility, yet these features do not guarantee that a video or a comment will be received by

viewers as authentic. Therefore, when the success of rhetorical project is dependent, in part, on

whether or not the message and the conveyors of that message are recognized as credible, it is

imperative that rhetors strategically use "representational strategies" to enhance the likelihood

that they will be perceived as authentic (Mitra, 2004, p. 496).

Simulation of Authenticity and Intimacy

YouTube is a medium that privileges self-reflexive practices. While YouTube certainly

hosts professional videos (e.g., commercials and music videos), it is typical to find videos that

are confessional, personal, and intimate (Burgess & Greene, 2011). Known by different names

(e.g., vlogs, video diaries), this type of video "serve(s) both as an audiovisual life documentary,

and as a vehicle for communication and interaction on the Internet" (Biel & Gatica-Perez, 2010,

p. 211). As a public practice of self-expression, the content is based upon an individual narrator's

revelation of intimate details about his/her identity to an unseen audience. It is a form of

communication that suggests a cultural "appetite for the personal, the intimate" (Dovey, 2000, p.

23). In her scholarship about the changing perspectives of eloquence in public address, Jamieson

(1988) argues that, as a result of electronic technology, audiences typically believe that "causal,

conversational remarks reveal where formal public address conceals" (p. 179). She further

explains that electronic technologies "invite a personal, self-disclosing style that draws public

discourse out of a private self and comfortably reduces the complex world to personal narratives"

(p. 84). Stylistically and substantively, YouTube videos privilege the rhetor's efforts of self-discovery, reflect an amateur quality, and represent both emotional depth and experimental breadth (Burgess, 2006).

While it is common for participation within Internet platforms (e.g., chat rooms) to involve private content that is shared publicly, YouTube is a unique medium in that the majority of its content includes an interdependent relationship between verbal and visual communication. The prevalence given to the use of a camera when interacting within the medium assists rhetors in simulating an ongoing conversation. In addition, the role of the camera assists in enhancing the believability of his/her discourse. In particular, cameras collapse the distance between the audience and videographer, which, in turn, increases the likelihood that a rhetor and message will be perceived as authentic. Lev Manovich (2001) explains that videos allow for "telepresence" or the sense of being physically and emotionally present despite the asynchronous timing, the actual proximity, and the lack of a tangible body (p. 164). He argues that a sense of authenticity is possible because "by looking at the [computer] screen...the user experiences the illusion of navigating through virtual spaces, of being physically present somewhere else or being hailed by the computer itself" (p. 166). Camera technology creates a feeling of "realness" by providing a "transparent correspondence between what is in front of the camera lens and its taped representation" (Dovey, 2000, p. 55). Walker (2012) explains that on YouTube, the way people physically experience these videos must matter, too. On a computer or other device, the image is 18 inches away, not across the room" (p. 5). In this regard, cameras can be an extension of the viewer's capability to see and interpret what is in front of him/her.

Particularly when a YouTuber chooses to use a close-up shot, the camera works to link speaker and audience by simulating "close personal distance…at which 'one can hold or grasp

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the other person'" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 130). Despite the number of people who

might have viewed the video previously, the camera technology simulates a sense of physical

immediacy. According to one YouTuber, the use of camera technology "really does make the

world feel smaller and even more accessible" (Tolson, 2010, p.7). This discursive feature may

help marginalized populations that hope to issue a widespread message while simultaneously

creating a sense of identification. As the camera technology collapses the physical distance

between audience and rhetor, the audience can feel as if they are involved in a synchronous,

personal conversation. As a result, a potentially safe discursive space is established that offers a

way in which interactions and relationships can develop despite physical geography

(Strangelove, 2011).

YouTube's reliance of camera technology further enhances the content's sense of

authenticity when videographers seemingly lack media savviness. In fact, research indicates that

the more a YouTuber utilizes simplistic audiovisual techniques, the more authentic his/her video

will typically be perceived. In his research on vlogs, Tolson (2010) explains that the

"authenticity of vlogging" is a result of "its excessive direct address, in its transparent

amateurishness and in the sheer volume and immediacy of 'conversation' responses" (p. 286).

On YouTube, amateur production techniques equate to a perceived realism. Despite the time and

effort actually devoted to a video's construction, "off the cuff" videos are often heeded as a more

"genuine" representation of the rhetor than videos featuring a higher caliber of editing

techniques.

Perhaps the perceived authenticity that results from a video that seems more

conversational than formal is because of its apparent spontaneity. The amateurish qualities help

the videos appear as if its creation was made in the moment, even when the strategies used to

create an "off the cuff" feeling were strategically planned. For example, in his analysis of

YouTube videos geared toward the 2008 presidential election, Hess (2011) explains that the

videos using techniques simulating a "rough or raw" sense created a feeling of "immediacy" and,

in turn, authenticity (p. 114). These techniques enable "appearances of authenticity" to "elide the

often sophisticated editing processes used to create a coherent narrative or argument" (p. 114). In

fact, the perceived spontaneous quality of a video is typically an intentional and conscious

decision whereby a videographer envisions himself/herself engaged in an intimate and personal

conversation with a YouTube viewer "as a virtual partner, an imagined friend" (Strangelove,

2011, p. 72). The strategy enhances the likelihood that s/he will be perceived as authentic and

familiar rather than a stranger performing on a virtual stage.

For rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency characterized by an obstacle of accessibility,

the ability to use camera technology to produce and share content with the YouTube community

helps facilitate a sense of intimacy and authenticity. This allowance is particularly helpful for

marginalized populations whose message relies upon a sense of intimacy and whose rhetorical

effectiveness depends upon the audience perceiving and receiving them as credible. Especially if

the aim of a message is to persuade viewers into adopting a revised sense of self and to re-

imagine their personal experiences and identity, creating a sense of trust and authenticity is vital

to the success of that endeavor. Moreover, for groups, such as the LGBT population, who wish to

give control to the audience, mediums that invite users to seek out content potentially provide an

empowering resource.

In this section, I have examined the possibilities YouTube offers as a rhetorical resource

for efforts of rhetorical agency that require rhetors circumvent an obstacle of accessibility and

establish discursive credibility. If rhetorical agency is conceived as the capacity to act in a way

that is acknowledged by an audience, it is important to recognize that the manner in which a message is circulated as well as the role a technology plays in the creation of that message cannot be ignored. After all, any type of technology being used to produce the text will affect the rhetorical process and, thus, how the text is received. While a rhetor can never guarantee that an audience will receive his/her rhetorical text in the way that is intended, s/he can strategically utilize the rhetorical resources available in an attempt to respond appropriately to the situation. The affordances YouTube provides are important for understanding its potential as a means for rhetorical agency, yet the medium by itself does not guarantee that a message will be listened to and supported. Rather, it is the interdependent relationship between rhetorical and technological choices that produces possibilities for rhetorical agency. In the case of the IGBP, the rhetorical situation encompassing the IGBP requires the LGBT population circumvent not only an obstacle of accessibility, but also address a need for rhetorical eloquence.

Rhetorical Strategies of Eloquence

Eloquence has typically referred to a speaker's ability to use language in an "exceptional" manner (Bullard, 2013). A speaker demonstrates eloquence when s/he utilizes language to move an audience toward a particular position, point of view, or ideology. Rhetorical scholars have criticized the traditional conceptualization of eloquence, citing that it privileges a rhetorical practice more readily available to people with power while simultaneously encouraging the idea that rhetoric is coercive (Foss & Foss, 1991; Condit, 1997). Given these criticisms, rhetorical scholarship calls for a re-evaluation of eloquence by extending its meaning beyond the ability to speak exceptionally and, instead, considers how alternative forms of eloquence might emerge in non-traditional acts (Foss & Foss, 1991; Jamieson, 1988; Condit, 1997; Crick, 2014).

Reconsidering eloquence allows critics to examine and identify the ways in which people without taken-for-granted access to public forms are able to achieve rhetorical agency. The IGBP provides a case study in which to engage in this opportunity. For the purpose of this dissertation, eloquence refers to rhetoric that encourages audiences to re-envision their experiences and identities as a means for creating a shared vocabulary, which assists them in collaborating toward a common goal. To achieve eloquence, a rhetor or rhetors must accomplish two objectives. First, rhetorically eloquent discourse occurs when rhetors choose and implement rhetorical strategies that appropriately respond to situational requirements (Jasinksi, 2001; Crick, 2014). In this manner, eloquence includes the ability to address the exigency in a manner that meets the expectations of the audience while also circumventing any rhetorical restrictions threatening the intelligibility of his/her voice. Thus, eloquence involves a notion of rhetorical style.

Style refers to the decisions a rhetor makes about the particular language and actions s/he uses to convey the message. These choices are a matter of rhetorical invention that helps ideas to be translated and customized to fit the rhetorical situation. As a result, rhetorical eloquence "resides in the process of adjustment and is visible in the discursive elements in which that process is inscribed" (Jasinski, 2001, p. 199). Burke (1968) explains that eloquence is "the result of that desire in the artist to make a work perfect by adapting it in every minute detail to the racial appetites" of those to whom the discourse is addressed (p. 41). Eloquence is a process of fusion; eloquent performances blend style and substance in a manner that effectively responds to the situational requirements defining the context in which the rhetoric is presented (Jasinski, 2001). Using the rhetorical resources available, the eloquent rhetor aspires to create meaning and translate that meaning in a way that makes sense to the audience within the particular time and space it is presented (Rand, 2014).

The audience's willingness to listen to a message is influenced by the discursive choices constituting a message and the manner in which the message is conveyed. Thus, eloquence "is not showiness" (Burke, 1968, p. 41). Its "primary purpose…is to convert life into its most thorough verbal equivalent" (p. 167). To achieve eloquence, a rhetor is "guided by the rules of the appropriate language game" (Freeman, Littlejohn, and Pearce, 1992, p. 317). The rhetor recognizes the rhetorical conventions characterizing a space and utilizes the available resources to adhere to these expectations while circulating meaning. Rhetorical eloquence, therefore, "is not simply a well-crafted speech; it involves the proper arrangement and understanding of topical material" (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 490). When successful, eloquent rhetoric enables the production of shared understandings and the translation of individual voices into a collective vocabulary (Condit, 1997; Dubriwny, 2005).

A second dimension of eloquence is a rhetor's capacity to create meaning in a way that encourages an audience to re-envision prior perceptions. In adapting to a situational context and strategically utilizing the rhetorical resources available, a community can come to voice about a subject that historically has been a challenge. Eloquence, then, serves as the "principal means by which people and institutions voice themselves in [a discursive] space" (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 480). With eloquence, the rhetors and audience garner a representative presence by cognitively and emotionally transporting themselves and others from the specificities of a situation or subject toward a larger understanding about that subject and the associated experiences. Rhetorical eloquence enhances the likelihood that a message will be heard, understood, and met with a choral of support (Code, 1995). As a result, eloquent rhetoric invites audiences not only to see their individual experiences and identities as those relate to a specific context but also to understand these specificities as indicative of a more universal perspective (Farrell, 1993;

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Condit, 1997; Crick, 2014). This common vocabulary enables a group of people to coordinate their behavior and work toward a communal goal.

When a rhetor adapts to a situation and is received sympathetically by the audience, his/her eloquent performance creates a discursive space that provides the audience a forum and process to come to voice about their identities and beliefs in ways yet considered. Condit (1997) explains that "eloquent spokespersons" facilitate the need and ability for "others to give voice to their own interests by showing ways in which those interests might be re-articulated" (p. 107). In other words, the rhetorical choices constituting a text offer an alternative way of naming and giving meaning to experiences (Condit, 1997). By employing certain rhetorical practices, a rhetor models for the audience possibilities about how their perspectives, experiences, and identities might be represented within a particular context and generate action toward a particular aim.

In her analysis of abortion rhetoric, Condit (1997) explains the power of eloquence to transform the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of an audience. She argues that the way in which women understood their own experiences with abortion changed as a result of other women's rhetorical performances. Based on a feminist philosophy, the women who publicly spoke about abortion offered an alternative way for conceptualizing and framing understandings of the issue. Condit writes:

> [B]efore public rhetoric about the subject, women's private accounts of their own abortions were tentative struggles to explain why it was that they would do a thing so apparently abhorrent to social values; but after rhetors had articulated a public rationale for abortion, the women spoke more freely, with a more vehement sense of their right to make the choice they did. (p. 107)

Following the public articulation of a revised understanding about abortion, women who were not necessarily skilled orators added their voices to the discourse through consciousness-raising activities (e.g., speak outs). They transformed from individuals with isolated experiences to members of a collective who shared a common understanding about womanhood and abortion. Rhetorical eloquence facilitated the manifestation of a model or representation of how one might come to voice about that particular subject despite discursive obstacles. This model helped the audience to link their individual stories to a shared discourse. As a result, they were persuaded to re-envision their identity and experiences. This re-envisioning served as a means for people to link themselves to a common discourse.

The translation from the isolated to the common enables rhetorical agency to be enacted whereby both rhetors and audience work toward a common cause. In encouraging alternative understandings of the past, present, and future, eloquence creates "possibilities of new levels of constructive dialogue, new contexts in which to understand differences, and new ways to compare and weigh alternative choices" (Freeman, Littlejohn, & Pearce, 1992, p. 317). Eloquence helps audiences see the particulars of a situation while also facilitating the translation of those specificities into a shared discourse. The result is a rhetorical space whereby rhetors and audiences can recognize a common condition and cultivate a sense of empowerment by offering a revised consciousness in which to identify (Campbell, 1989). In so doing, a rhetorical space is established that allows for an empowered consciousness to emerge, which is defined by alternative ways of viewing reality, the self, and one's engagement within society (Dicochea, 2004).

For rhetorical efforts that rely upon collaboration from the audience, rhetorical identification is imperative to that endeavor. That is, to adopt a revised understanding of

experiences and identity requires a sense of sameness. Burke (1950) explains that effective

rhetors use rhetorical means to create common links with the audience and it is with rhetoric that

people coordinate their behaviors. Condit (1997) argues that coordination is an integral outcome

to eloquent rhetoric. She explains that coordination "is the active creation of options and choice

among options. The ability to cooperate entails the ability to share visions of the good, to meet

on some plane of consubstantiality, identifying in part with others" (p. 105-106). While the use

of rhetoric by humans is universal, the ability to encourage cooperation does not come easily to

everyone.

Working together toward a shared goal can be difficult because people are also separate

from one another (Burke, 1950). To have identification requires a sense of division. In a desire to

collapse the separateness accompanying individuality, humans seek to "be identified in terms of

some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctiveness"

(p. 21). Identification, then, is a process of transcending the distinctiveness of individuality for a

moment in time by recognizing "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes" or

"properties" (p. 21). Rather than "winning over" an audience and provoking them to fulfill the

intended goal, effective rhetors use language to create common links with the audience. With

language, people are motivated to act. By identifying a shared condition between rhetor and

audience, both parties are offered an opportunity to become "consubstantial" with the other while

still maintaining individual autonomy (p.21).

To encourage the re-envisioning of lived experiences requires strategic and intentional

rhetorical action. Thus, it is the skill and effort of the rhetorically eloquent that assist in

encouraging and achieving cooperation. Fostering identification is especially pertinent to the

success of a rhetor addressing an audience who might not recognize their personal rhetorical

agency as a result of rhetorical constraints. For those individuals who, as a result of their identity, exist on the periphery of society, they are likely to be separated (symbolically and physically) from others who have similar experiences and understandings, rendering the process of identification particularly difficult (Campbell, 1973).

A lack of resources that supports or gives meaning to personal experiences can evoke feelings of isolation and render invisible the power a person possesses to act in the name of his/her own interests and desires. Yet, when audiences experience a sense of identification with a rhetor and his/her message, a "consubstantial space" can emerge whereby rhetors can "interact with their audiences, and establish within those audiences mutual interests - from which the clarification of continuities and discontinuities of beliefs and viewpoints might begin, meaning might be created, and communication might take place" (Royster, 2000, p. 55). In other words, eloquent rhetoric can help discursive efforts of rhetorical agency by facilitating the production of a symbolic and material forum of possibility in which divisions are transcended, commonalities emerge, and sense-making is created.

Daughton's (1995) analysis of Angelina Grimke's Pennsylvania Hall Address illustrates the role eloquence plays in generating a sense of identification and coordination. Daughton concludes that Grimke achieves a sort of rhetorical eloquence by "encouraging other women to express their voices" (p. 19). Despite the societal belief that women were incapable of displaying rhetorical power, with specific stylistic strategies, Grimke modeled for the audience how they could re-envision their ability to evoke social change. That is, Grimke's rhetorical performance invited the audience to see themselves within her discourse and the embodiment of that discourse. The act of speaking publicly and arguing for the rights of women helped the female members of the audience re-envision possibilities of being and understanding.

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It is important to note that eloquence is not synonymous with force or coercion (Condit, 1997). An audience is not tricked into believing in the truth of what is being said. Rather, like rhetorical agency, eloquence is a matter of discursive artistry and *techne*. According to Crick (2014), "Eloquence does not spring ready made from the mind of genius. It is produced through hard work and a dedication to craft" (p. 172). The eloquent rhetor demonstrates a unique ability to use rhetoric skillfully, intentionally, and wisely. S/he invites the audience to critically evaluate the validity of his/her discourse, recognizing that audiences are capable of dismissing or resisting performances that oppose their own perspectives. Rhetorical eloquence is an invitation for the audience to judge the rhetor's actions in an effort to demonstrate alternative ways of understanding experiences and identities. Thus, rhetorical eloquence is imperative to discursive projects that require the audience's collaboration, affirmation, and validation of a particular message or action.

Central to analyzing the possibilities and implications that result from the rhetorical choices comprising the IGBP is to understand the meaning of eloquence and its relationship to rhetorical agency. After all, the rhetorical campaign relies upon the creation and circulation of a shared narrative. Savage and Miller believe that to help LGBT youth understand how one transforms from bullied adolescent to happy adult, LGBT adults need to share their personal stories from victimization to triumph as examples of what is possible. However, if a person wishes to contribute to this particular response, s/he needs to know how to participate in a way that encourages LGBT youth to identify with and believe in the message being delivered. To enact rhetorical agency, the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP must encourage one subset of the audience - potential contributors - to understand how to translate their lived experiences as a productive resource of support and hope.

Additionally, the rhetorical objective of the IGBP asks another subset of the audience -

LGBT youth desperate for social support - to believe in the plausibility of the message. While

YouTube's technological allowances aid in this aim, the medium's possibilities for rhetorical

agency are influenced by the style and content of the message. Given the subject matter, the IGB

message needs to invite and convince the audience to re-envision what is possible for them. The

IGBP relies upon the ability for rhetors to adapt to the situation in a way that encourages the

intended auditors to adopt an alternative lens in which to view their past, present, and future

experiences. This understanding is based in a perspective of hope and support versus a

perspective of despair and isolation. Given these rhetorical tasks, rhetorical agency relies upon

the ability of contributors to achieve a form of rhetorical eloquence. I conclude that the IGBP

attempts to address this need by employing a rhetorical strategy of enactment.

First introduced by Campbell and Jamieson (1978), enactment is both a rhetorical form

and a rhetorical strategy. As a rhetorical form, enactment occurs when a "speaker incarnates the

argument; *is* the proof of the truth of what is said" (emphasis in original, p. 5). When used as a

strategy, it assists a rhetor in achieving a particular rhetorical aim (Campbell, 1988a). The

function of enactment is to help a rhetor establish his/her authority as a speaking subject. It is "to

make visible to auditors" a rhetor's "right by reason of character and/or practice to make a

particular argument" and, as a result, "prove to auditors the truth of that argument" (Campbell,

1988, p. 18). In other words, rhetors use themselves to validate their authority as speaking

subjects while also validating the claims they advance.

How enactment is used is dependent upon the rhetorical act and artifact chosen by the

rhetor (Campbell, 1988a). It can manifest as either an explicit or implicit assertion of his/her

rhetorical authority. Explicit enactment occurs when a rhetor directly self-references his/her

credentials for speaking about a particular subject. For example, in her analysis of Sojourner Truth's public address at the 1851 Woman's Rights Convention, Campbell (2005) argues that Truth justifies her ability and authority to speak about racial and gendered issues by citing her lived experiences with these issues. For example, Truth tells her audience: "I have borne thirteen children and seen 'em mos' all sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jeasus heard" (p. 10). She continues, "Dat man ober der say dat woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches…Nobody eber help me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best place and ar'nt I a woman?" (p. 11). Given that at the time of Truth's speeches, women, especially those who were also considered a racial minority, were limited in their ability to engage in public discourse, the burden of proof rested with Truth herself.

As exemplified in Sojourner Truth's statements, a strategy of enactment is often accomplished by drawing upon experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge uses lived experiences to prove the truth of an argument. This tactic is quite different from traditional argumentation, which privileges "logic, reasoning and rationality as objective forms which limit the use of subjective experience" (Pickering, 2003, p. 2). An assertion based in experience, however, favors the subjective perspective of the rhetor and the audience over generalizable and objective approaches. For instance, a rhetor might use a personal testimony to legitimize his/her rhetoric, which involves the telling of first-hand experiences, a privileging of inductive reasoning, and an establishment of universal claims (Campbell, 1989; Dow & Tonn, 1993; Pickering, 2003).

With experiential knowledge, individual experiences are used as a means for the audience to infer a more universal claim. The telling of these lived experiences serves as a strategy for

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establishing one's right to speak about a subject and to make a particular argument. Experiential knowledge "suggests, 'I experience, therefore I know." This rhetorical approach is different than arguing, "'I think, therefore I am" (Hayden, 1997, p. 141). Therefore, when engaging in a strategy of enactment, direct references to lived experiences functions as a way for a rhetor to "*explicitly point out* to auditors he [*sic*] practices what he preaches" (emphasis in original, Campbell, 1988a, p. 7-8). By openly sharing his/her knowledge about the subject, a rhetor is attempting to establish his/her rhetorical authority, enhance the listenability of his/her rhetoric, and validate the truth of his/her claim. When the discursive goal of a campaign is to encourage individual people to adopt and circulate a collective message, establishing oneself and the message as credible are particularly important to the success of that aim.

Using enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies are especially helpful strategies for rhetorical projects of rhetorical agency. In order to enact rhetorical agency, a rhetor must identify both a rhetorical opportunity to speak and the resources available that will enhance the listenability and intelligibility of his/her rhetoric. As a result, establishing ethos is of utmost importance. Herndl & Licona (2007) explain, "Ethos implies the authority to speak and act with consequences," and it serves in a "legitimating function for a rhetor or subject" (p. 3). For some rhetors, however, the situational environment presents challenges for his/her credibility. External forces might limit the rhetorical resources at his/her disposal or include evidence that contradicts the main argument (Campbell, 2005). Yet, by utilizing lived experiences, a rhetor can share his/her personal story as proof of the validity of his/her argument or rhetorically perform the claim s/he intends for the audience to adopt. If successful, a rhetor can also encourage the audience to identify with the message and recognize alternative ways of understanding their experiences.

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While some rhetors attempt to prove their credibility directly or to create a sense of identification by drawing on lived experiences, others make implicit references. After all, for some rhetors, explicitly claiming one's authority to speak on a particular subject or connecting one's experiences to the audience's experiences can be difficult. Perhaps a rhetor does not possess the experiential knowledge about the issue or the sole reference of personal experiences is not powerful enough to address counterarguments. In these instances, implicitly enacting one's authority and connectedness to the audience is a possibility.

Implicit enactment occurs when the actual rhetorical practice helps validate the argument. As K.G. Campbell (1988a) notes, "It may require the auditors to consider such things as the rhetor's choices and use of substance, form and colors, as well as other nondiscursive cues, in order for auditors to recognize the rhetor's argument" (p. 33). A key aspect of implicit enactment is that a rhetorical act itself is just as important as the language being used. The rhetorical text's content and style help a rhetor establish his/her rhetorically competency. When successful, a rhetor's rhetorical choices relating to content and style enable the audience to believe in the truth of the rhetoric. The evidence, then, emerges in how something is said instead of - or in conjunction with - what is being said.

Since rhetors, especially those who occupy a marginalized social position, sometimes have a limited amount of rhetorical resources, implicit enactment can be a helpful means for enhancing their credibility. The manner in which implicit enactment is used by marginalized populations is of particular interest to rhetorical studies. For example, analyzing one of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's public speeches, Goodwin and Innocenti (2015) conclude that the persuasiveness of Stanton's public discourse is, in part, due to her use of implicit enactment. They argue that Stanton's claims about the rights of women are "supported by the *activity* of making the claim"

(emphasis in original, p. 452). In an effort to convince her audience that females are capable of delivering effective speeches and arguments, Stanton proves the truth of her claim through the very act of public oratory. Goodwin and Innocenti explain, "By making reasons apparent, Stanton accomplished something; she showed to her audiences that she, a woman, was a person capable of making arguments" (p. 453). Implicitly, Stanton validates herself as a speaking subject through the personal demonstration of sound reasoning and effective argumentation. This rhetorical performance allows the audience to see for themselves that she personifies the claim she is trying to make and assists in proving the truth of that claim.

Similarly, in their analysis of France Wright's rhetoric, Kendall and Fisher (1974) assert that the use of implicit enactment helped prove Wright's rhetorical authority as a female activist. Kendall and Fisher state that as the "first orator among women to appear before the American public," Wright embodied the argument she presented within her public lectures. They conclude, "By her own *action* of appearing repeatedly on the lecture platform, Wright demonstrated her conviction that women deserved equal rights with men, for the lecture platform was a male domain" (emphasis in original, p. 60). Advocating for the ability of women to participate publicly, Wright served as the proof of her claim by demonstrating her capacity to speak eloquently.

While scholarship on enactment does not directly refer to rhetorical agency, studies about rhetorical strategies of resistance provide a lens from which to understand how the act of sharing personal experiences might be particularly helpful in rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency that call for eloquent discourse. For instance, in her study about the consciousness-raising activities of female rhetors during the suffragist, temperance, and abolitionist periods, Campbell (1989) recognizes that disenfranchised rhetors often utilize personal testimonies as a means for

legitimating an argument, validating one's self as a speaking subject, empowering the audience, and creating a collective vision of experiences. She concludes that the act of sharing personal testimonies proved to be an especially strategic and helpful means for circumventing discursive impasses. With experiential knowledge and a personal tone, female rhetors encouraged their audiences to identify with the message, invited them to see themselves as change agents, and promoted an alternative way of understanding and speaking about individual experiences.

By voluntarily revealing private experiences and knowledge relating to a particular identity, rhetors who self-disclose personal information establish a feeling of familiarity with the audience. This familiarity can help legitimate the rhetor as well as the argument by helping the audience see themselves within the discourse. Using a personal tone with concrete evidence assists the rhetor in guiding the audience from specific personalized discourse to general arguments. Campbell (1994) explains that relying upon situated and subjective knowledge promotes rhetoric that "proceeds inductively, moving from personal experiences toward generalizations," ushering the audience into recognizing their own understandings of reality within the rhetor's claims (Campbell, 1994, p. xix). In so doing, the audience is called to translate their individualized experiences as indicative of a shared understanding with the rhetor. This identification is paramount to empowerment and action (Burke, 1950).

For rhetors whose aim is to convince their audience to re-envision their experiences and identity, their effort requires that they advance arguments based in shared values and knowledge so that the rhetoric is recognizable and accessible to the audience (Campbell, 1989; Foss, 2006). Fostering a sense of identification between rhetor and audience as well as audience and rhetoric is imperative to the revelation of personal empowerment because it encourages the audience to act toward the goal advanced by the rhetor (Campbell, 1989). When successful, there is a

"potential to form or re-form attitudes and influence action" (Royster, 2000, p. 56). In her

analysis of African American women's rhetorical efforts for an empowered voice, Royster

(2000) argues marginalized people, with unique strategies, create spaces of consubstantiality that

enable them to explore alternative realities, collaboratively identify shared problems and

solutions, and recognize their capacity to enact change. She argues:

> The writers use language to name, filter, interpret, negotiate, mediate, amplify, and so on.
>
> They identify stakeholders or audiences for which they construct a sense of sameness,
>
> that is, they engage in an act of identification. They draw for these stakeholders a
>
> consubstantial space and then use their rhetorical abilities within that space to construct
>
> new, more enabling points of view by which the world can make better sense. (p. 60)

To create such spaces requires that rhetors establish a trusting relationship with the audience in a

manner that invites them to publicly articulate their once perceived-to-be private experiences.

The sharing of personal accounts of lived experiences is one strategy rhetors can use to assist

them in addressing a need of eloquence and expressing an alternative way of framing and

understanding reality. Thus, a rhetor's testimony can serve not only as a mirror that reflects the

audience's own experiences but also as a revised lens through which to see those experiences.

During the practice of telling lived experiences, listeners and speakers recognize

similarities among their stories and create a rhetorical space founded upon identification. A sense

of identification enables a site for the possibility of consubstantiality to emerge. It is with

consubstantiality that individuals coalesce into collectives, bridging their differences and

working toward a shared purpose, ideology, or understanding of reality. For oppressed

collectives seeking to find and express their rhetorical agency, the principles of identification and

consubstantiation are key to their success because both assist in overcoming the seemingly

insurmountable discursive impasses accompanying a disempowered subjectivity and constituting a platform in which shared experiences are met with empathy and reciprocity.

Fostering identification is especially pertinent to the success of a rhetor addressing an oppressed audience, given that when existing on the periphery of society, one is likely to be separated from others who have similar experiences, rendering the process of identification particularly difficult (Campbell, 1973). With rhetoric, identification and consubstantiality are forged as a tentative bridge in which to create a shared language as well as to consider alternative realities and possibilities for acting. Burke (1950) argues, "Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man [*sic*] only in so far as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your way with his" (p. 55). Using strategies of identification assists rhetors addressing oppressed collectives to create a consubstantial space, thereby rendering private issues as public problems and, thus, a site for collaborative problem-solving.

Consubstantial spaces enable the oppressed to participate in identity work. Such platforms "makes possible both conversation (the exchange of viewpoints) and action (both individual and mutual)" (Royster, 2000, p. 67). The collaborative act of creating and participating within a collective rhetoric is empowering for oppressed collectives in that it validates the experiences and knowledge of not only the storytellers but also the audiences who see themselves within the narratives. After all, "[T]he primary means through which oppressed audiences are empowered and persuaded is the validation of their lived experiences" (Dubriwny, 2005, p. 400). Therefore, the knowledge gained in the co-construction and collaborative articulation of collective rhetoric is based not in intellectual expertise but, instead, on experiential authority. As such, through a process of identification, experiences originally

believed to be private and isolated are seen as political (Campbell, 1973; Dubriwny, 2005). Accordingly, a rhetorical space is provided that offers the possibility for each participant to be received sympathetically, to obtain emotional support, and to voice the desire for empowerment.

Creating a space for the affirmation and validation of the marginalized collective's mutual lived experiences provides an opportunity for reframing private and public understandings of their absence of rhetorical agency as symptomatic of a political, systemic issue. By articulating, sharing, and listening to personal experiences of oppression, subjugated voices carve out "a consubstantial space that permits multiple opportunities for ears, hearts, and minds to be inclined in their direction" (Royster, 2000, p. 65). The process of creating and circulating a shared understanding based on lived experiences makes it possible for oppressed collectives to view themselves as capable of generating "truth" about their identities, resisting harmful dominant ideologies, and acting within the world independent of permission from those in authority.

While the strategies of enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies are potentially helpful rhetorical resources for populations who face discursive impasses hindering their rhetorical agency and for discursive efforts that call for rhetorical eloquence, the use of these strategies does not guarantee that they will be received as intended by the author. There are several components that seem imperative to the effectiveness of rhetorical approaches using these strategies.

Any rhetorical approach requires that the audience recognize and understand the rhetorical strategies being used and the argument being presented. Effectiveness of this strategy is dependent upon the degree to which the rhetoric adheres in some manner to the audience's beliefs and values about the subject, and their expectations of how a situation should be

addressed (Campbell, 1988a; 1988b). In the case of enactment, simply acting as proof of one's argument might be insufficient for establishing personal credibility, especially if the rhetor is facing significant skepticism from the audience or must counter powerful evidence contrary to his/her argument. This is particularly true for implicit performances of enactment. As Campbell (1988) argues, "Auditors may find themselves reluctant perhaps unable to look for and recognize these rhetors' implicit arguments, much less recognize their enactments of them" (p. 39). Implicitly enacting an argument depends upon how well the rhetorical choices fulfill the audience's expectations about how someone should respond and what type of response is warranted.

Sometimes a rhetor can fail in his/her attempt to validate the argument because his/her available options for rhetorical activity are limited. That is to say, a rhetor must exercise the capacity to use the rhetorical tools s/he has at his/her disposable. K.G. Campbell (1988a) explains, "Some apparent failures to enact may be a result of a rhetor's lack of expertise – his inability to express his argument competently with the materials available to him" (p. 51). Strategies like enactment are solely tools to help a rhetor enhance his/her credibility and the listenability of the message. How the rhetor utilizes those tools is integral to the intelligibility of his/her rhetoric. K.G. Campbell (1988a) argues, "Auditors must make judgements of a rhetor's credibility based upon whatever information is available to them, putting their faith in Quintillian's dictum that 'insincerity will always betray itself'" (p. 52). Using enactment as a rhetorical mechanism, then, is an open invitation to the audience to evaluate critically the truth of the rhetoric and to measure the degree to which a rhetor is deemed discursively competent. As is exemplified in the IGBP, knowing how to use the resources at one's disposal is critical to rhetorical effectiveness.

Rhetorical practices require that to be acknowledged as a contributor to a conversation and situation requires coherency between the style and content of a message. K.G. Campbell (1988a) explains that it is possible for "the rhetorical strategies chosen and the rhetorical choices made to express that argument" unintentionally "serve to obscure or contradict it rather than advance it" (p. 48-49). Likewise, Johnstone explains, "If the form of the discourse asks things of the audience that its arguments implicitly repudiates, then the audience is confronted with the dilemma of choosing between contradictory responses to the discourse" (cited in Campbell, 1988a, p. 49). The success of enactment necessitates that the rhetorical choices made about what is said and how it is said appears synergistic.

Though the possibility of failure exists, enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies offer potentially helpful resources for efforts of rhetorical agency that require eloquence (Crenshaw, 1997; Campbell, 1988a; Palczweski, 2002; Hammers, 2006). Serving as proof of the argument being made and legitimizing one's self as a speaking subject can facilitate alternative understandings about experiences and identities, especially when the effectiveness of those efforts relies upon the audience's collaboration (Condit, 1997). This re-envisioning creates an opportunity for audiences to express their voices and work toward a common goal because it offers possibilities for identification, translation, and empowerment.

As rhetorical scholarship continues to critically analyze unconventional rhetorical performances, the ways in which the sharing of lived experiences rhetorically functions will continue to evolve. Thus far, researchers have identified the use of enactment, experiential knowledge, and/or personal testimonies in the nondiscursive elements of the film *A Year of Living Dangerously* (Campbell, 1988b), as iconcity in Angelina Grimke's Pennsylvania Hall Address (Daughton, 1995), as an argumentative strategy in the U.S. Senate political debates

(Crenshaw, 1997), as a strategy of labor resistance (Triece, 2003), as body rhetoric for social change (Palcweski, 2002), and as a public performance in *The Vagina Monologues* (Hammers, 2006). By exploring the various ways in which enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies can be used, these analyses provide a better understanding about the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that emerge when such strategies are employed.

This dissertation adds to the growing body of scholarship about rhetorical agency by critically analyzing how, in conjunction with a novel use of YouTube, the strategies of enactment, personal testimonies, and experiential knowledge assist in addressing a rhetorical situation that seemed in need of an urgent response. As discussed in the next three chapters, the IGBP demonstrates how using one's lived experiences as a rhetorical resource can be helpful in overcoming particular obstacles and producing a rhetorically eloquent message. The rhetorical approach, however, can also produce implications that threaten to undermine the rhetorical efficacy of the response. Before analyzing the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP, it is important to discuss the methodological decisions that comprise an analysis of the rhetorical campaign.

Methodology

Rhetorical criticism is a method of interpretation. It involves the careful selection of material, the navigation of rhetorical conditions, and the strategic use of language to translate one's interpretation in a manner that will be accessible to the reader. Thus, rhetorical criticism is a rhetorical process itself. Critical analysis is a critic's invitation to his/her audience to adopt a particular understanding of the artifacts being studied. Foss (2006) argues that rhetorical criticism "serves for me as a synecdoche for rhetorical agency in general" and is an attempt to "exert 'influence through symbolic action'" (p. 376). In this regard, rhetorical criticism

recognizes that an objective or definitive understanding of a discursive text is impossible despite the specific techniques of analysis that are employed.

Rhetorical criticism requires a form of strategic and creative invention. To engage in the process necessitates that a critic make a series of choices, ranging from the selection of an artifact to how the interpretation of the artifact is shared. Foss (2006) argues, "Rhetorical criticism is not simply a process of explicating artifacts and contributing to rhetorical theory. It functions as a synecdoche for rhetorical agency that reminds me that I always have choices and am always choosing as I move through my day" (p. 378). When making these choices, a critic brings his/her personal perspective and experiences to the endeavor. S/he is influenced by the structural conditions that define the exigency calling his/her analysis into being.

In order to contribute to the conversation of rhetorical criticism, I identify the rhetorical elements of the IGBP. I analyze the rhetorical campaign via several texts that help define its rhetorical presence. Hunt (2003) argues, "Anything that influences the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the public, anything within the purview of modern persuasion, can be the object or subject of criticism" (p. 378). Studying the IGBP as a case study for understanding rhetorical agency is a worthwhile objective because the text assists in identifying ways in which marginalized populations attempt to exercise rhetorical agency with the strategic use of rhetorical and technological resources despite discursive impasses.

My project is focused on two facets of the IGBP. First, my aim of this dissertation is to identify the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that emerge from the interdependent relationship between the technological and rhetorical resources utilized in the IGBP. Thus, I analyze the rhetorical strategies constituting the IGB message. To do so, I perform a critical analysis of three types of digital texts: the IGB videos, the responses to the videos, and

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the public discourse about the IGBP. After analyzing the Savage-Miller video, I examine the ways in which Savage talked about the campaign, the public's arguments in support of the campaign, and the public's claims that contest the campaign.

Second, I study the possibilities and implications of YouTube as it relates to efforts of rhetorical agency. The medium's accessibility, participatory culture, simulation of intimacy, and possibility of authentication make it a potential resource for addressing issues like LGBT youth suicides and anti-gay bullying. As an Internet-based technology, YouTube provides a valuable site for criticism because its dynamic nature continues to shape the social and cultural conditions of everyday life. Remarking on the future of Internet studies, Jones (2005) argues that critics should use research to "describe and intervene in the life and values of the people who use the Internet" (p. 237). Thus, "through close observation and analysis of specific people and technologies, in specific places and times," critics can better understand the influences of technology on efforts of rhetorical agency (p. 237). The purpose of this project is to offer a critical analysis of how YouTube offers the LGBT population a possible resource for enacting rhetorical agency as they address a perceived crisis.

To analyze the IGBP, I collect a variety of discourse related to the campaign; however, because of its popularity and its ongoing presence within YouTube, each day new videos are added to the YouTube channel. The result is a vast array of videos and other forms of discourse. For this dissertation, the IGB "text" is a series of related but dissimilar texts. I analyze Savage and Miller's video, the IGBP videos that build from the original IGB video, the viewer comments to the videos on the YouTube video pages, the news articles that discuss the IGBP, the responses to the news articles, blogs that criticize the IGBP, comments in response to criticisms, and discourse about YouTube as a medium. Similar to many paths leading to the same

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destination, from these multiple forms of discourse, the constant in each is the IGBP, specifically in how, in some way, all pieces relate to the campaign and how all pieces examined offer arguments as to its rhetorical efficacy.

Analyzing an ongoing social movement campaign can be a difficult endeavor in that various texts are likely to emerge as the campaign gains popularity. This is particularly true for a rhetoric that utilizes the Internet as a way of creating and circulating the message. To help narrow my analysis, I have delineated several characteristics for the texts that I analyze. When analyzing the IGBP, I direct attention primarily to public discourse (e.g., news articles, blogs), videos, and YouTube posts within the first year (2010-2011) of the IGBP. This restriction is important since a contemporary rhetorical campaign like the IGBP is an ongoing rhetorical endeavor that has not met its completion. As such, it is necessary to establish one's parameters in order for the intricacies of the rhetorical strategies to be identified.

It is my contention that analyzing the first year of the IGBP is sufficient for understanding the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that result from the rhetorical and technological choices utilized to create the campaign. As a result of the rhetorical and technological strategies, the campaign's purpose is altered after the first year of the campaign's launch. While the overarching aim is to prevent LGBT youth suicides as a result of anti-gay harassment, the malleability of the IGB message's rhetorical form as well as the accessibility of YouTube enables the objective to be extended. As the IGBP progresses, the focus centers more on bullying in general rather than anti-gay bullying specifically. Thus, the way in which rhetorical agency is exercised by IGB rhetors changes to fit the broader intentions of the audience.

Furthermore, while I believe that all the videos are important to the IGBP, I am more interested in how everyday people, those who might typically be met with social ramifications when socially interacting with LGBT youth offline, use their lived experiences and the technology of YouTube to respond to a perceived crisis. Therefore, beyond the Savage-Miller video, I choose not to analyze celebrity videos since the celebrities may enter the cultural conversation with an existing credibility as a result of their public persona and popularity. The rhetorical status of gay celebrities like fashion designer Tim Gunn or American Idol runner-up Adam Lambert differs from that of "ordinary" individuals in that LGBT celebrities do not necessarily have to adhere to the same measures for establishing their ethos and consubstantiality with the viewers. Instead, for the purpose of this project, it is more important to understand how the IGB videos produced by non-celebrities use their experiential knowledge to enact the rhetorical authority of the message as well as to establish themselves as credible speakers.

In addition, I only analyze videos that are adopted as part of the official YouTube IGB channel. As the campaign grew, so did the ability to locate IGB videos. In other words, IGB videos can emerge in various Internet forums (e.g., Facebook). I am most interested in how the videos that were officially branded as part of the campaign spoke to the same themes and messages as exemplified in the beginning of the IGBP. I discuss in chapter four how Savage adopted the role of gatekeeper in an effort to try and control the message of the campaign.

Finally, I concentrate on videos that include audience commentary beneath the videos. Audience commentary that responds to the IGB videos and message helps illuminate the possibilities and implications of rhetorical agency that emerge as a result of the rhetorical choices constituting the campaign. Therefore, my project focuses on videos that allow and solicit textual audience engagement. Given the extent to which the IGBP continues to expand, I believe these

parameters are reasonable because they provide a representative sampling that allows my study to characterize the nature and dynamics of a rhetoric that emerges from the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP. In order to understand the possibilities of implications of rhetorical agency that emerge as a result of the discursive decisions made, it is critical that the Savage-Miller video is analyzed. In the next chapter, I take an in-depth look at the rhetorical form of the video and how the stylistic design functions as an urgent response to a perceived crisis.

Chapter Three: The Rhetorical Form of the First IGB Video

In response to a perceived spate of LGBT youth suicides as a result of anti-gay bullying, in 2010, Dan Savage and Terry Miller produced, filmed, and then uploaded a video to YouTube. The video features Savage and Miller sharing their individual testimonies about enduring anti-gay bullying, hoping for a better future, and attaining happiness as adults. Utilizing their lived experiences as evidence, their hope was to serve as "living proof" that happiness is possible for LGBT youth that have the patience, strength, and hope to continue living (Savage, 2010d). These personal testimonies are employed as a resource for validating the believability of their message and for establishing their rhetorical authority to speak about the subject of anti-gay bullying. The effectiveness of their message is dependent upon their capacity to enact rhetorical agency.

In this chapter, I analyze the rhetoric of Savage and Miller's video. My aim is to identify how the rhetors perceive their situation and their message. Specifically, I critically examine the discursive choices constituting the video as both rhetors attempt to enact rhetorical agency, or the ability to be heard and received as rhetorically competent by the community they are addressing (Campbell, 2005; Rand, 2014). The analysis of the video is organized as three rhetorical parts. Each part employs the rhetorical strategies of enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies. The three parts are categorized as: enacting an experienced victimization, enacting a revised possibility, and enacting a state of happiness. When combined, these parts create a powerful rhetorical form.

The rhetorical choices constituting the video assist the rhetors in overcoming an impasse of accessibility and addressing a need for eloquence as Savage and Miller attempt to illuminate for bullied LGBT youth a revised understanding of their future. In chapters four and five, I address the audience's reception of the message, particularly their agreement or disagreement

with the rhetorical form. Before embarking on that analysis, it is necessary to first identify the specific stylistic and substantive characteristics that constitute the message's rhetorical form.

Part 1: Enacting an Experienced Victimization

The style of the original video resembles an interview. Seated within a bar, Savage and Miller are asked questions from an unknown and unseen videographer. For the majority of the video, the chosen camera angle is a close-up shot whereby both Savage and Miller are featured in the camera lens. While the video appears conversational, some preparation, albeit arguably limited, is evident. There is a microphone and a person behind the camera. Additionally, there are signs of video editing. For example, the video contains title cards that display the speaker's name or indicate a change in topic. Thus, the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the video indicate that the video is not entirely spontaneous. There was some planning in regards to the video's stylistic design. These choices are important to the Savage and Miller's effort to enact rhetorical agency. I now analyze the various rhetorical features of the video.

The opening of the video features a title card; one word in white, lowercase letters appears on the screen: "dan." Looking directly into the camera with Miller sitting beside him, Savage's face appears. He addresses viewers with a brief statement:

> High school was bad. I was Catholic, went to Catholic high schools, Catholic boy school, my dad was a Catholic deacon, my mom was a Catholic lay minister, and my family was very Catholic. There were no gay people in my family and no openly gay people at my school, but I was picked on because I liked musicals and I was...obviously gay.
>
> (It Gets Better: Dan and Terry, 2010)

For approximately ten seconds of the one-minute introduction, by highlighting his family and town's religious background and his apparent difference, Savage uses a personal tone to

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introduce himself to the audience and to frame the rest of the video. The personal tone serves as a way for Savage to invite the viewer into the conversation.

Following Savage's statement, the camera directs the viewer's attention to Miller. Similar to the audiovisual techniques illustrated by Savage, Miller's narrative is signified by a black screen with the name "terry" scrawled in white letters. The opening segment of Miller's testimony focuses on the misery and victimization he experienced in high school. Unlike the duration of Savage's contribution, Miller offers a more extensive narration of his past experiences with bullying. The beginning of his life story focuses on the "small town mentality," the anti-gay attitude, and the helplessness he felt as a gay adolescent. In one example, Miller, with a somber tone, stares directly into the camera and explains that he was "picked on mercilessly in school." He was "beat up, thrown against walls, and lockers, and windows, ya know, stuffed into bathroom stalls. People shit on my car, scratched my car, broke my windows" (It Gets Better: Dan and Terry, 2010). Similar to Savage, Miller uses his lived experiences with anti-gay bullying to introduce himself to the audience and invite them into the discourse. He continues to share his experiential knowledge as a means for expanding the discussion.

During the first part of the video, Miller explains to the viewer that he was "blamed" for the anti-gay bullying he experienced. He states:

> My parents went in once to talk to the school administrators about the harassment I was getting at school and they basically said, "If you look that way, talk that way, walk that way, act that way, then there is nothing we can do to help your son." (It Gets Better: Dan and Terry, 2010)

Highlighting the lack of control he had over his environment because he acted "that way," Miller represents the tendency for LGBT youth to feel despair and isolation as a result of being deemed

different and unworthy. His testimony indicates how common it is for the lives and interactions of LGBT youth to be shaped by people in traditional positions of authority (e.g., school administrators). This rhetorical move is important because it recognizes that LGBT youth are not only physically bullied, but, as a result of their sexual orientation, they are also emotionally and psychologically bullied. Even when an adult does try to step in and remedy the problem, there are other people who have more power and authority to diminish the effect of this attempt.

The first part of the Savage-Miller video serves as the foundation for the remaining part of the message; therefore, it is integral to the rhetorical form. Savage and Miller's rhetoric seems to anticipate that youth who need a message of hope are desperate for social support; they feel isolated in their struggles. Miller, for instance, talks about various ways in which he was bullied and Savage indicates his feeling of being an outsider in a highly religious town. Both men imply that their experiences as youth were characterized by feelings of loneliness, deviance, and a lack of belonging. Using a strategy of explicit enactment, the personal testimonies and experiential knowledge help the rhetors prove their authority to speak on the subject of anti-gay bullying, which is essential to the persuasiveness of the video's message. By sharing their personal accounts with oppressive ideologies and practices, Savage and Miller seek to illustrate to the audience that they experienced what the audience is experiencing. In so doing, the rhetors suggest that their message is valid.

With a strategy of implicit enactment, the rhetors further attempt to increase the likelihood that they will be heard by the target audience. Their ability to address the target audience validates the message to come; the rhetors are proof that surviving anti-gay bullying is possible. The very act of speaking validates the idea that endurance and survival are possible for every LGBT individual. The choice to serve as proof of the message's believability while using a

personal tone is critical to their message, given their premise that bullied LGBT youth might find it difficult to perceive themselves as capable of overcoming the obstacles they face as a result of their sexual orientation. To help overcome this challenge, the audience needs to identify with the rhetors and the discourse.

Enacting an experienced victimization creates a sense of identification with the audience. While the individual details of victimization vary, a similar claim is made by each rhetor. Sharing their personal testimonies about anti-gay bullying, Savage and Miller both validate the experiences of the other by identifying with and building upon one another's stories. Each rhetor's testimony implies and substantiates the claim that experiences with anti-gay bullying are not isolated instances. Being a victim of anti-gay bullying is not the fault of the individual. Rather, it is an experience that is, unfortunately, common to the LGBT identity. With this rhetorical choice, the rhetors attempt to help the audience see themselves within the discourse.

While the rhetors focus on their own experiences, they do not dwell on the nuances of their past. Although some details are provided in their stories about their victimization, each testimony features more generalities than specificities. If the rhetors were to highlight too many details about their experiences, it could direct attention away from the viewer. Rhetoric that is too personal might diminish LGBT youth's ability to see their individual experiences reflected in the message. By finding a balance between sharing enough information to try and establish credibility but not enough information that causes the audience's attention to center on the idiosyncrasies of each rhetor, the personal testimonies serve as an invitation for consubstantiality. Using experiential knowledge and personal testimonies, the rhetors aspire to create a sense of "we" rather than a sense of "me." That is, the rhetors are not the subjects of the

video. Instead, they are representations of a shared experience that is indicative of the LGBT identity.

While the rhetorical strategies used in the first part of the video are strategic, the possibilities for rhetorical agency are further enhanced by the way in which YouTube is utilized. The style of the video appears conversational and intimate. As communication research has indicated, an audience is likely to perceive rhetoric that is shared via electronic technologies as more revealing rather than concealing (see Jamieson, 1988; Strangelove, 2011). YouTube invites video creators and viewers to feel as if they are participating in a reciprocal conversation. It encourages a self-disclosing style of speaking that can help spark public conversation from previously isolated selves (Jamieson, 1988). In addition, the use of title cards and the close-up camera shots may strengthen a sense of authenticity with the viewer by collapsing the distance between the viewer and the rhetors (Dovey, 2000; Manovich, 2001). These technological choices can help facilitate a mood of intimacy in a way that a more sophisticated style of production may not.

For LGBT youth to believe in a message of hope necessitates that they are able to recognize that they also can survive their present-day suffering; therefore, instilling a sense of familiarity with the target audience is pivotal to the rest of the message. Savage and Miller seem to believe that a personalized approach is needed to address the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. Savage and Miller address this need by using themselves as proof of the universal suffering that LGBT people can experience as a result of problematic ideologies. Employing a strategy of enactment, the audience is invited to see the rhetors' past experiences as reflective of their own current situation. This mirroring effect works to establish a consubstantial space whereby the individual experiences of rhetors and audience contain different details yet

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share the same outcome, which is helpful when attempting to persuade an audience to have faith in the truth of a message that is based on a rhetoric of possibility.

Part 2: Enacting a Revised Possibility

In the second part of the video, the message transitions from a narrative of suffering to a rhetoric of possibility. After sharing their lived experiences with anti-gay bullying, Savage and Miller invite their audience to envision the possibility of a "better" future. According to Kirkwood (1992), "A rhetoric of possibility must explain how rhetors can evoke possibilities that exist beyond the context in which they first arise, and it must show how rhetors can convince people that these possibilities are within their grasp" (p. 33). The crux of the Savage-Miller message is founded upon the idea of hope for a better future. The rhetors attempt to persuade bullied LGBT youth that they can obtain a happier existence. They try to accomplish this aim by continuing to employ their individual experiences as a resource for constructing a shared understanding about what is possible for LGBT-identifying people. Thus, they try to create a sense of identification by using their experiential knowledge to enact the truth of the message. The rhetorical effectiveness of a message of possibility often depends upon a rhetor's capacity to persuade his/her audience that they can or do possess the states of mind needed in order to attain the possibility that is being touted.

Following the revelation of his personal experience with anti-gay bullying, Miller implies that enduring the abuse that accompanies homophobia is possible. Alone in the camera's frame and staring directly into the camera, Miller states, "Honestly, things got better the day I left high school. I didn't see the bullies every day; I didn't see the people who harassed me every day. I didn't have to see the school administrators who would do nothing about it every day, life instantly got better" (It gets better: Dan and Terry, 2010). By reminding the audience of the

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bullies who tormented him daily and the authority figures who had the power to rectify the situation yet chose to ignore it, Miller further uses his lived experiences to prove the credibility of his character and message. In so doing, he continues to invite the audience to identify with the discourse.

The second part of Miller's participation in the video shifts slightly. Although Miller directly references his ability to escape the bullying, he implies that this is a result of his ability to leave high school. Whether he left high school before or after he graduated is unknown. Rather, the point of Miller's statement is for the audience to recognize that ending their suffering does not require suicide. As he also demonstrates in the first part of the video, Miller's testament to his post-high school life serves as a form of implicit enactment. He demonstrates the truth of the message through the rhetorical act of speaking.

While Miller does not explicitly mention a state of mind, he implies that bullied LGBT youth must be patient and endure the harassment they receive if they want to experience a happier future. The act of sharing his personal testimony about his lived experiences with bullying serves as evidence for the believability of the message. Miller was bullied for being gay, yet he lived to tell the tale. After the launch of the video, critics actually condemn the responsibility that the message places on LGBT youth to "save" themselves. However, before understanding their response, it is important to further explore how this choice works in the first video.

Following Miller's implicit reference to his capacity to endure anti-gay bullying, Savage offers the audience the heart of the IGB message. A rhetoric of possibility materializes in the signature catchphrase. On a blacked out screen, the words "it gets better" appear. Savage looks directly at the camera and says:

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If there are 14, 15, 16 year olds...13 year olds, 12 year olds out there watching this video what I would love for you to take away from it really is that life gets better. However bad it is now - it gets better. And, it can get great and it can get awesome. Your life can be amazing, but you have to tough this period of it out and you have to live your life so you are around for it to get amazing. And it can and it will. (It gets better: Dan and Terry, 2010)

It is at this point in the message that the rhetors directly state the purpose of the video. There is a different way of being, yet one has to "tough it out" and "live" in order to experience it. When rhetors are offering a message that is based in a rhetoric of possibility, they often use testimonies that reveal personal states of mind. These testimonies function to "reduce the ambiguity of performance" and to "clearly communicate particular possibilities" of how the state of mind might manifest (Kirkwood, 1992, p. 34). This rhetorical choice can help the audience see that certain cognitive orientations enable the possibility of intended outcomes.

Offering and enacting a message of possibility is important to the believability of Savage and Miller's video since the intended audience is likely to internalize their oppression. People who internalize their oppression often need to witness in a similarly identifying person the state of mind that is needed in order to achieve the desired result. Experiences of oppression, silencing, self-shaming, and same-sex intimacy most likely will impact a marginalized person's understanding of reality. It is possible that the material and ideological forces characterizing his/her immediate environment will limit opportunities to employ traditional, discursive instruments of power needed to critically advance and evaluate representations of his/her identity (Bowers, Ochs, & Jensen, 1993). As a consequence, the marginalized individual is likely to suffer a dissonance between her subjective knowledge and the universal claims presented within

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mainstream society, bringing about an internalized inferiority into the oppressed individual's consciousness (Pheterson, 1986).

Given these consequences of internalized oppression, providing LGBT youth with a revised vision of their future is critical to instilling a sense of hope. In public discourse about the video, Savage responds to criticisms about his choice to place responsibility on LGBT youth by explaining, "We [LGBT adults] can't help them" (cited in Parker-Pope, 2011). He argues that because of the institutional forces that prevent LGBT adults from speaking to youth directly at their schools or in their homes, the only way to support them is to persuade them to have hope and to reach them via social media. Since Savage cannot gain access to this audience through traditional channels, creating the video produces a new possibility. The audience can look for the IGB message without having to gain permission from those in traditional positions of authority (e.g., their parents). Thus, it removes the obstacle of access and inverts the responsibility for communication in part from the rhetor to the audience. In this way, the IGB message attempts to enact a revised possibility for the life stories of LGBT-identifying people. During an interview about the video, Savage further explains that part of the problem is LGBT youth lack visible examples of non-heterosexual people who have survived bullying and are not celebrities. Savage argues:

> What people need to understand, a lot of these gay kids, you know, they see Ellen [a celebrity], and think, well, what are my chances of becoming Ellen. One in 300 million…literally. And if that is what it takes to be safe and happy, to be a rich and famous celebrity, what are my chances. (cited in NPR, 2010)

In explaining to viewers that life "can get great" and "awesome," Savage and Miller's message encourages the audience to come to understand a new sense of reality. Yet, this revised reality is

dependent upon the choices a youth makes about how s/he will respond to anti-gay bullying. As such, offering a rhetoric of possibility is a strategic rhetorical move. Poulakos (1984) suggests that a rhetoric of possibility helps acknowledge the listener's "capacity to become what they are not" and "brings to their attention the things they do not already feel, know, or understand. Further it invites them to abandon their familiar modes of thought by challenging their current values and beliefs" (p. 223-224). Using himself as evidence, Miller shows the audience that endurance is possible. Savage builds upon this validation by explicitly inviting the audience to perceive of themselves as capable of exhibiting the necessary state of mind to embody this possibility.

In conjunction with the first part of the video in which the rhetors talk about their victimization, Savage and Miller offer a discourse of possibility in which the audience "can see themselves what permits the heroic performance - states of mind not unique to the hero. Thus, these accounts imply the audience's own capacity or virtue, and this in turn creates a need for moral decision-making" (Kirkwood, 1992, p. 37). The rhetorical decision to follow personal stories of victimization with tales of endurance enable Savage and Miller a rhetorical space to "reveal a virtue to which [the audience] can aspire" by illustrating how the decisions of their pasts allow them to be addressing the audience (Kirkwood, 1992, p. 37). That is, a strategy of implicit enactment assists them in continuing to establish their credibility, validate the truth of the message, and create a sense of identification with the intended viewer.

Had Savage and Miller not taken the time in the beginning of the video to reveal their personal experiences with victimization and endurance, it probably would be difficult for the audience to have faith in a reality that is not only invisible but seemingly farfetched, especially if a viewer is on the brink of suicide. By explicitly and implicitly serving as "living proof" that

endurance is possible, Savage and Miller try and create a space of identification, trust, and familiarity so that they can advance a claim that might otherwise be interpreted as implausible.

Part 3: Enacting a State of Happiness

Proceeding Savage and Miller's rhetoric of possibility, the rhetors legitimize their argument and themselves by providing evidence of the happiness they experience. To persuade viewers that life will get better if they choose to live, the rhetors symbolically represent the value of "better." Following their revelation of the endurance that is needed to survive anti-gay bullying, and by offering details of their present lives, such as gaining acceptance from extended family, falling in love, adopting a son, and becoming a family, Savage and Miller demonstrate to their audience a life based in acceptance. For instance, Savage explains that while at one period in his life his mother refused to accept his sexuality by refusing to meet any of his boyfriends, she eventually accepted Terry. Around the time of her death, Savage explains, "[S]he told me to let Terry know that I loved him like a daughter. And she did!" (It gets better: Dan and Terry, 2010). Using this story as an example is strategic given that, as a result of the rhetorical choices made in the first part of the video, the audience is already familiar with the difficulties Savage experienced because of his family's religion.

As both rhetors explain the acceptance they eventually received from relatives, the images of their families appear on the screen. Viewers see Miller being accepted within Savage's family and Savage being accepted by Miller's family. The viewer also sees images of Savage and Miller with their son. Pictures include events where it seems as if they are all enjoying a life filled with happiness and love. Clearly, these photos were not picked on a whim. Instead, they are strategically chosen representations of acceptance and happiness, symbolizing the "better" life that a viewer can have if s/he endures the present-day suffering. These pieces of evidence

further represent the editing and production process that is a part of the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP. The rhetors took time to choose the photographs that illustrate the possibility of a revised life story. Thus, using visual evidence is strategic in that the images reduce the ambiguity of the message. The rhetoric of possibility that surfaces in the second part of the video is now substantiated; a rhetoric of possibility is revealed as a rhetoric of actuality.

The rhetorical strategy of enactment continues to prevail in the third part of Savage and Miller's video. The discursive decision to accompany the telling of their lived experiences with visual rhetoric is powerful in that it implicitly references the truth of their rhetoric and assists the rhetors in trying to persuade the audience that achieving happiness is also possible for them. Discussing the rhetorical strategy of enactment, Palczewski (2002) argues that implicit enactment is effective because the "power of the (presentational) proof exceeds the (discursive words)" (p. 7). YouTube, in particular, is a helpful resource because the audience can see for themselves the proof of the message. The visibility of the evidence increases the likelihood that the audience will understand that a "better" life is within their reach. Once again, Savage and Miller's rhetorical choices help reduce any ambiguity that might accompany the revised understanding of the LGBT identity that they promote.

After sharing the pictures of their families, Savage and Miller further illustrate the meaning of a "better" existence for LGBT individuals by offering a story about their first encounter. Appearing on the screen are the words "How we met" (It gets better: Dan and Terry, 2010). During this portion of the narrative, both speakers try to strengthen the degree of intimacy and casualness that they hope exists between the viewer and them. They attempt to accomplish this goal by sharing a personal story about their relationship. Savage explains that he met Miller at a bar. After watching Miller from across the room, Savage decided to approach

him. "And what did I say to you," Savage playfully asks Miller. "You said," Miller responds hesitantly. Savage responds with a laugh and says, "Tell them!" Miller embarrassingly responds, "You said, 'You've got a pretty mouth.'" Both men look at one another, share a laugh, and make jokes about the sexual innuendo that transpired during their initial interaction.

Sharing their "origin" story, Savage and Miller reinforce the personal tone that earlier parts of the video tried to establish. Miller's initial hesitancy and Savage's reference to a sexual innuendo signify the privacy of the information that is being shared. Savage's declaration to "Tell them!" is a direct reference to the viewer and solidifies the invitation for the viewer to be a part of the intimate memory (It Gets Better: Dan and Terry, 2010). The audience is provided an "insider's view" of Savage and Miller's relationship. The viewers are allowed to virtually engage in the love, warmth, and acceptance that the message communicates. As such, the rhetors hope for the audience to re-envision their future selves in a similar situation.

By representing the experiences that can result if the audience believes in the truth of the message, Savage and Miller insinuate that the target audience can also find acceptance and love. If viewers endure the present-day struggles and believe in a rhetoric of possibility, they can discover other people who are like them, who love like them, and who look like them. At this point in the video, the message is aspirational. The viewer is invited to believe in a world that is counter to the one s/he is currently experiencing. This alternative community is accepting, warm, encouraging, and desirable. It is a world that does not deny a person love or acceptance because of his/her sexual orientation, but, rather, offers love and acceptance as a result of it. Savage and Miller's experiences prove this claim.

Additionally, the third part of the video is important to the mood of the video. Both men exhibit attitudes of positivity, ease, and contentment. This transition from a serious to

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lighthearted tone helps the rhetors offer the audience evidence that life gets better with time. No longer does the message feature tales of victimization or focus on a message of what *can* happen. Now, the narrative shows what *does* happen. If the IGB message is intended to persuade the target audience that a happy future is possible for them if they endure their present-day victimization, the rhetors need to depict the actualization of that possibility. In public discourse about the campaign, Savage speaks to the importance of showing LGBT youth that a "better life" is possible even if you identify as a sexual minority:

> When a 14 year old gay kid kills herself/himself what that kid is saying is 2 things. One, they can't picture a future with enough joy to compensate for the pain they are in now, and, two, they may know there are happy successful content queer kids out there, but they don't know how you get from being a bullied 14 year old gay kid to that gay adult.
>
> (TalksatGoogle, 2011)

In another interview, Savage (2010f) states, "I felt it was really important that, as gay adults, we show them that our lives are good and happy and healthy and that there's a life worth sticking around for after high school." In conjunction with the preceding two parts of the video, Savage and Miller invite the audience to re-envision their identity from victim to agent. That is, they encourage bullied LGBT youth to see themselves within the speakers' rhetorical performances and, thus, to recognize the very possibility of their empowerment. It is up to the target audience to attain the life they desire to live. The rhetorical and technological choices characterizing the third part of the IGB video are strategic in that each decision functions to mimic the revised understanding of the lived experiences for people identifying as LGBT. The adolescence of LGBT youth might be characterized by victimization and isolation, but adulthood is comprised of happiness and belongingness.

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Conclusion

The rhetorical choices Savage and Miller make about the style and substance of the video are a matter of rhetorical invention. These decisions are strategic in that they are intended to help the rhetors adjust to the perceived situation in a way that is likely to be heard by the intended audience. To help combat and overcome the challenges they faced, Savage and Miller create a message that attempts to offer a revised understanding of what is possible for LGBT youth who endure anti-gay harassment. The message is founded upon a rhetoric of possibility. Kirkwood (1992) argues that narratives are the primary rhetorical means in which possibilities are conveyed. This type of discourse helps rhetors promote a revised sense of being and a rearticulated understanding about one's experiences. In so doing, a rhetoric of possibility conveys a moral responsibility for the target audience. Kirkwood writes, "Such stories can expand an audience's moral responsibility by showing them they are freer and more capable than previously imagined and inviting them to decide how they will exercise their newly realized freedom" (p. 32). Exemplified in the Savage-Miller video is an invitation for the target audience to re-envision their experiences of victimization as shared and to understand their future as hopeful. The rhetors call upon LGBT youth to understand that they have a choice beyond suicide. Using their lived experiences as proof of the message's validity, the rhetorical form encourages the audience to participate in the discourse. The rhetors invite the viewer to cognitively engage in the content of the message, to recognize previously unknown possibilities for their life, and to recognize some control over their life stories.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, while the video made by Savage and Miller was intended to address a crisis that seemed in need of an urgent response, they did not intend nor imagine that the video would go viral or gain the following that it did. Yet, the video struck a

chord. Their video is a strategic response that morphs into a social movement campaign. Thus, as the video gained in popularity and became used as a rhetorical model for other people's videos, a need arose for Savage and Miller to justify the rhetorical decisions of the video. A narrative and a history about the emergent campaign are necessary for protecting the original intention of Savage and Miller's response. The video's rhetorical efficacy depends, in part, upon the ability to create a shared rhetoric that subsequent participants can adopt. In this regard, upon release of the Savage-Miller video, a second rhetoric of possibility is created. This message is directed toward the desired IGBP contributor. Public discourse indicates that the Savage-Miller video, as well as Savage's responses to inquiries about the IGBP, guides the participation of those who are interested in contributing their own video to the campaign.

Following the introduction of the Savage-Miller video, additional video contributions and public discourse about the videos indicate that, for some people, the video solved a problem. It provided a rhetorical model to help translate what were once viewed as individual experiences into a shared understanding. It provided a model for how to communicate a deeply personal message to a public audience, with the purpose of seeking to provide inspiration and/or empathy. In so doing, participants accept and reinforce an invitation to re-articulate their personal stories in a way that seeks to empower LGBT youth while simultaneously empowering themselves.

Chapter Four: Sympathetic Reception and Possibilities

Once uploaded to the YouTube channel and publicized on Savage's blog, the original IGB video was met with public support and marked the launch of a rhetorical campaign. The amount of interest in the campaign far exceeded Savage and Miller's expectations. In an article about the campaign's success, Savage (2011) explains that the initial aim was to receive 100 videos. After five days, the IGB channel hosted 600 video contributions (Wharton: University of Pennsylvania, 2012). In fact, the interest in the IGBP required that the technological parameters of YouTube were revised to allow more videos to be housed within the channel (TalksatGoogle, 2011). Six months after the introduction of the first video, 10,000 videos were available for viewing on the official IGBP YouTube channel (Alexander, 2011).

The number of videos submitted to the IGBP within the first year is indicative of its popularity, yet this number does not explain the reasons the campaign was met with such widespread support. If enacting rhetorical agency requires an audience to heed the rhetoric being presented, the manner in which a rhetorical text is received and perceived by the audience is paramount for understanding the possibilities and implications of the rhetorical choices comprising that effort (Rand, 2014). The purpose of this chapter is to understand how the audience's sympathetic response points to the discursive possibilities of rhetorical agency for a marginalized population who must circumvent rhetorical obstacles to address a perceived crisis. For the purposes of this dissertation, sympathetic receivers are defined as members of the audience who demonstrated some form of support for the original iteration of the IGB message as reflected in Savage and Miller's video.

As is typical of any social movement, the IGB message also received criticism. Chapter Five will address the rhetoric that detractors issue in regards to the IGBP. However, before

discussing criticisms, it is important to understand the audience's sympathetic reception to and perception of the IGB message. The means by which I assess if and how the audience received the text sympathetically is by analyzing the audience-produced discourse that emerges in response to the campaign. This discourse is represented in IGB videos, comments on the YouTube pages of the videos, news articles about the campaign, and blogs that discuss the IGBP.

Through my analysis, I conclude that one way the audience demonstrates support for the IGBP is by using Savage and Miller's video as a rhetorical model to transform from viewers into rhetors. Many of the video submissions employ stylistic and substantive characteristics that are exhibited within the original IGB video. I argue that the reproduction of the rhetorical form is indicative of the audience's support of the message and the rhetorical choices constituting that message. Additionally, it suggests that LGBT-identified people had the experiential knowledge they needed to offer a message of hope, but were uncertain as to how to use their stories to help LGBT youth. Thus, access to Savage and Miller's video offered sympathetic receivers the opportunity and rhetorical means to participate within the cultural conversation.

Support for the campaign is also indicated in public discourse about the IGBP. While the voices of supporters are not identical, there are similarities that are interwoven in the various claims. Therefore, I organize the supportive discourse into two key arguments. First, sympathetic receivers claim that the IGB message resonates with their own experiences. IGBP participants indicate that they felt compelled to participate in the campaign as a result of this identification. Second, the audience supports the IGBP because it offers a means of resistance to counter the problematic ideologies that are believed to cause bullying. Each argument indicates that supporters sympathized with the message and the message's rhetorical form. The audience's justification for supporting the IGBP further illustrates the possibilities that emerge as a result of

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using YouTube to enhance and circulate a message that employs the rhetorical strategies of enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies.

I argue that emanating from the rhetorical and technological choices shaping the IGB message is a collective rhetoric that counters hegemonic ideologies about the LGBT identity, empowers a group of marginalized people, and enables an audience to re-envision and re-articulate their identities and individual experiences. Without the linking of individual voices to a shared message, it would be difficult to address the need for a re-understanding of what is possible for LGBT people. However, in order for a collective rhetoric to emerge, the audience must first recognize the opportunity to participate within the discourse and must recognize how to participate in a way that is likely to be listened to by the discursive community. Understanding what is expected of participants and identifying with those expectations is particularly helpful for encouraging collaboration. In public discourse about the campaign, Savage assists in outlining these expectations by implying the intended persona of the IGB rhetor (Black, 1970), which I will address next.

The Implied Persona of the IGB Rhetor

Although there is limited evidence as to if and how submitted videos were screened to determine the degree to which they "fit" the intentions of the IGBP, in the year following the release of the Savage-Miller video, Savage turns to various media outlets to discuss the campaign. An examination of his public discourse illuminates discursive cues that suggest a desired persona for the IGB rhetor (Black, 1970). Additionally, as part of the official IGBP, guidelines were established to help interested participants understand what type of video was appropriate for the campaign.

A detailed process of how IGB videos are selected is not provided; however, especially as the campaign grew, gatekeeping seemed to be an important component of the IGBP. For example, the document that outlines the "safe messaging guidelines" contains the following disclaimer:

> The It Gets Better Project reserves the right to determine, in its sole discretion, whether any particular item submitted to it may be inappropriate for sharing with the public, and with youth in particular, and to thus discontinue or decline to share that item through its website, social media channels, or otherwise. (It Gets Better Project, 2010c)[7]

The guidelines further indicate that each video is "screened internally to determine, in the sole opinion of the It Gets Better Project, whether the item includes 'unsafe' messaging." These statements, along with Savage's public discourse about the campaign, reveal that while it is difficult to find specific examples of videos being rejected or flagged as inappropriate, policing of video submissions is taking place as a way of protecting the intention of the campaign. As a result, it also seems that there is a desire for the IGBP to present a specific persona through the videos that are affiliated with it.

First, the intended IGB rhetor is not just any person who wants to support bullied LGBT youth. Instead, the participant is one who identifies as LGBT specifically. In his first blog post, Savage clearly indicates this expectation for the desired IGB participant when he wrote, "I'd like to add submissions from other gay and lesbian adults—singles and couples, with kids or without, established in careers or just starting out, urban and rural, of all races and religious backgrounds" (Savage, 2010b). While Savage seemingly welcomes diversity in regards to other identity

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[7] An attempt was made to contact the IGBP to learn the exact time when each document was posted, but the dissertation's author did not receive a response. The date of the IGBP's creation is used for these documents. Although the date in which the documents were created cannot be definitely determined, the texts demonstrate a general desire for the IGBP to present a specific persona through the videos affiliated with it.

markers, he specifies that the intention of the IGBP is to feature those people who identify with an alternative sexual orientation. This expectation is reinforced later in the blog when he stated, "If you're gay or lesbian or bi or trans and you've ever read about a kid like Billy Lucas and thought, 'Fuck, I wish I could've told him that *it gets better*,' this is your chance." This statement characterizes the persona of the potential IGB rhetor as someone who is LGBT and has a desire to help LGBT youth.

Given the challenge of credibility the rhetors face, it is understandable that Savage expects IGB participants to openly identify as LGBT. Seeing that bullied LGBT youth are surrounded by evidence that contradicts a positive and supportive message, for an IGB participant, persuading LGBT youth that a better future is possible is no small feat. After all, the campaign came into being after five LGBT youth took their own lives because it was believed that they had difficulty imagining a possibility of happiness. Therefore, Savage and Miller thought that LGBT adults who understood the struggles faced by LGBT youth could address the problem by reaching out and offering support.

While Savage's discourse indicates that the original expectation for the IGBP was to have LGBT-identifying people participate, as the campaign progresses, non-LGBT people were permitted to participate in the campaign. Savage explained that as "videos starting coming in from straight people" LGBT-identifying individuals "really felt ownership over the campaign" and contested the inclusion of anyone who did not identify with a non-heterosexual identity (cited in NPR, 2011). Despite the opposition, Savage and Miller decided to "leave those videos up because that's part of what it is about: One of the ways it gets better is that straight people get better." Thus, although Savage and Miller initially intended "for LGBT adults to speak to LGBT

youth," as the campaign grew, the initial implied persona of the IGB participant was modified to account for the unexpected desire that LGBT allies also wanted to help LGBT youth.

Second, the persona of the intended IGB participant is not only someone who seeks to support bullied LGBT youth, but one who also experienced victimization as a result of their sexuality. In this regard, experiential knowledge plays a significant role. The importance for identifying as a former victim is especially evident when Savage discussed the content of the video he made with Miller. He explained that YouTube provides Miller and him a space in which they "could talk about having survived bullying and our lives now and offer these kids hope" (cited in Parker-Pope, 2011). In talking about survival, the idea is that the IGB rhetor can identify with the campaign's target audience because s/he experienced bullying herself/himself.

The role of experiential knowledge in constructing the IGB persona is important because the IGB rhetors are expected to serve as role models and mentors for LGBT youth who are lacking a support system. For Savage, bullied LGBT youth face unique challenges in comparison to non-LGBT kids who are bullied. He wrote:

> A kid that is bullied at school who is bullied because of their race, class, religion they go home to family members, adults to the same race, same class same religion, who just by existing are proof that you can get through this, that you can survive this, they probably experience it themselves and if you are being bullied for the same reasons that your parents were being bullied, you can open up to them and what you are being put through and you can ask for their help. (TalksatGoogle, 2011)

Yet, LGBT youth often lack the necessary support system to help overcome the negative consequences of being abused because of one's sexual identity. Savage spoke to this perceived reality: "The bullied queer kid goes home to straight parents all too often and really tragically to

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straight parents who are all too often participating in the bullying and the harm that it does"

(TalksatGoogle, 2011). Therefore, to help prevent LGBT youth suicides, bullied LGBT youth

need similarly identifying adults to fill the void left by absent parents and administrators; they

need to hear from and see people like themselves leading happy lives despite experiences of

suffering. That is, a rhetorical strategy of implicit enactment is needed whereby LGBT youth can

visibly recognize that survival and happiness are possible. This need requires that IGBP

contributors have past experiences of victimization to draw upon.

Third, Savage indicates that the IGB rhetor is expected to articulate their experiences and

identity in a way that focuses mostly on the happiness they experience. A few days after

introducing the original IGB video in his blog, Savage wrote another blog post that outlined the

particular stylistic and substantive characteristics that were expected of IGB videos. Savage

(2010d) told his readers:

> And if you're thinking of making a video…And we have lots of videos from folks who
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> are focusing on what they suffered – which absolutely should be touched on. But it would
>
> be great to see some more videos that give young gay kids a picture of the lives they
>
> could make for themselves if they just hang in there. It can be hard sometimes to talk
>
> about the good in our lives, what gives us pleasure and joy, because it seems braggy and
>
> jinxy. And knowing that not everyone finds pleasure and joy in the same things can make
>
> us self conscious. But I think it would really help for LGBT kids who don't know any
>
> LGBT adults to see - with their own eyes - that we are leading happy and rewarding lives.
>
> So if you decide to make a video…don't just share your pain. Share your joy too.

This quote indicates that, as public support for the IGBP grew, Savage felt it necessary to serve

as a sort of gatekeeper. As he implied in his blog post, video contributions were being submitted

in an attempt of becoming part of the campaign. Yet, "a lot of videos" offered a message of pain rather than hope. Thus, he believed it was necessary to offer suggestions as to what contributions were appropriate for the campaign. In fact, on the official IGBP website, there are two documents that potential rhetors can use to guide the creation of their video.

One document offers a list of suggestions and the other provides "safe messaging guidelines." Recommendations are provided as well as restrictions. Both documents indicate videos should primarily offer a positive perspective. For instance, video creators are told to "be positive! Remind LGBT youth that they are unique, that they should be proud of who they are, and that if they are struggling, there is a community available that is there to support them" (It Gets Better, 2010b). Additionally, potential participants are informed that any video that might "lead a viewer to experience anxiety, depression, or feelings of isolation and despair" will not be added to the YouTube channel (It Gets Better, 2010c.). According to these documents, providing a positive outlook to LGBT youth is paramount to a video's inclusion within the campaign.

Fourth, the desired persona of an IGB rhetor is a person who, in the past, has wanted to help LGBT youth but was uncertain how to do so. Savage (2010e) asserted:

> The It Gets Better Project had struck a chord. LGBT adults have long felt helpless as we watched LGBT youth be bullied in schools. We knew that while bullied straight kids go home to sympathetic parents and a shoulder to cry on, bullied gay kids all too often go home to more bullying from their parents and their churches. We despaired as we read about gay teens taking their own lives, and didn't know how to reach out to these kids — fearing our motives would [be] questioned if we did. All of that has changed with the IGBP.

Savage's statement outlines whom the campaign is meant to address and the problems that participants of the campaign faced before the IGBP. That is, the campaign is not directed toward bullies, parents, or policymakers. Rather, the IGBP is intended to reach LGBT youth who have a difficult time realizing that life can improve. Ideally, the desired IGB participant is a person who shares Savage and Miller's concern for bullied youth, yet has been unable to offer support because of external constraints. According to Savage, the IGBP provides them a means for responding to the perceived community crisis.

As Savage's rhetoric about the IGBP reveals, the intended persona of the IGB rhetor is one that sympathetically identifies with the campaign's intentions as discerned from the various guidelines and statements associated with the project. Ideally, s/he is person who identifies as LGBT, knows what it means to suffer at the hands of homophobic bullies, desires to help support LGBT youth yet feels powerless in doing so, and can offer evidence of a happy life. In so doing, aspiring rhetors are given some guidance in how they should address LGBT youth. They are offered suggestions for what to say and what to do, as well as cautioned about what not to say or do. The degree to which participants adopt the implied persona indicates that Savage's discourse, as well as guidelines for video creators, is rhetorically effective in strengthening the possibility that participants will adhere to the expectations of the campaign.

Interestingly, although Savage and Miller's video is not overtly promoted as the "right" way to address youth, many of the subsequent video submissions reproduce its rhetorical form. Next, I analyze the manner in which these videos follow the stylistic and substantive characteristics of the first video. I argue that the reproduction of the rhetorical form exemplified within the Savage-Miller video indicates that the original video served as a rhetorical template to help people come to voice about anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides.

Reproducing the Rhetorical Form

Within the first year following the launch of Savage and Miller's IGB video, many of the subsequent video contributions employed a similar rhetorical form. The reproduction of the rhetorical form indicates that the rhetors adopt the desired persona of the IGBP participant and rhetorical expectations for the campaign. Many contributors are LGBT-identifying people who resonate with the message. Rhetors present themselves as past victims and current mentors. They briefly offer personal stories of victimization, communicate a rhetoric of possibility that invites the audience to envision a happier future, provide evidence of a "better" life, and utilize some rendition of the phrase "it gets better."

The emulation of the original video's rhetorical form produces interesting possibilities for a marginalized population's effort to exercise rhetorical agency as they address a perceived crisis. To understand the possibilities for rhetorical agency that emerge from the rhetorical practice of modeling a discursive form, I utilize several video contributions as examples.

Many of the IGB videos begin their videos with the rhetor declaring his/her alternative sexual orientation.[8] For instance, tackytramp (2010) revealed to her audience, "I came out as bisexual in junior high school." Calvin Stowell (2010) stated, "All my life I knew I was gay. It was never a question." In some videos, rhetors follow the revelation of their sexual identity with a story about when they realized they were "different" from everyone else. Calvin Stowell (2010), for instance, shared a story about being in kindergarten and hiding on the playground because he "knew he liked other boys in my class in a way that I wasn't supposed to like them." Explaining to the audience the moment he acknowledges his same-sex attraction is significant because it conjures an image of a young boy who is scared, isolated, and confused. This image

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[8] As discussed in the methodology chapter, the videos used in this portion of analysis were selected according to their fit for the dissertation focus.

functions as a way for the rhetor to create a sense of identification and establish his/her

credibility for speaking about the subject of anti-gay bullying. The story implies a particular state

of mind that is shared between the audience and him. It is a way for the rhetor to say, "I know

your pain because I've experienced it."

As the videos continue, rhetors use experiential knowledge to communicate what it

means and feels like to suffer because of one's sexual orientation. Following their identification

with a non-heterosexual identity, rhetors choose a particular story to represent their experiences

with anti-gay bullying. For example, after revealing her bisexual identity, tackytramp (2010)

stated:

> I remember I was in a school play…maybe seventh grade, maybe eighth grade…I must
>
> have been 12 or 13 years old…as part of the play we actually came off the stage and ran
>
> down the aisles…someone stuck their foot out to try and trip me and whispered "dyke."

Similar to the Savage-Miller video, the rhetor invites the viewer into her discourse by revealing a

particular time in the past in which she was victimized for identifying as LGBT. With specific

details and emotionally-based language, IGB rhetors convey a personal tone. The familiarity

with which the rhetors discuss the perils of being LGBT works to reinforce a sense of

identification.

Choosing a particular story to represent the rhetor's personal identification as an anti-gay

bullying victim supports the rhetorical form used by Savage and Miller. For example, Calvin

Stowell (2010) told his viewers about a particularly painful and memorable moment when he felt

bullied after transferring middle schools:

> I'll never forget the first conversation that I had. A girl came up to me in the cafeteria and
>
> I was sitting alone. And I saw this girl approach me and was so excited because I thought

to myself, "I'm going to have a friend. Someone wants to talk to me." I suddenly felt so

much less alone. And this girl comes up to me and she goes, "Can I ask you a question?"

And, I am so excited to talk to anyone at this point. I go, "Of course, of course." She says

to me, "Are you a faggot? No offense." It felt like someone had taken a knife and just

twisted it in my heart.

While the individual stories range in length and detail, the personal testimonies have a similar

rhetorical function. Telling a traumatic narrative establishes a rhetor's identification with the

experience of being subject to anti-gay bullying as a youth. S/he not only calls the intended

audience into the rhetoric, s/he also explicitly enacts his/her authority to speak about the subject

in an attempt to validate the truth of the IGB message.

 According to K.G. Campbell (1988a; 1988b), a rhetorical strategy of enactment helps a

rhetor establish a sense of character that lends truth to his/her argument. In this regard, self-

references are utilized as a resource for substantiating the message. For the IGBP, this resource is

especially helpful for rhetors who might feel as if their credibility is in question.

Early on in the IGBP, after hearing about and watching other videos, LGBT youth begin

participating in the campaign by making their own videos. While there is limited evidence on

why youth decided to join the campaign, it is likely that they perceived themselves as capable of

being peer mentors. The believability of their videos is dependent upon his/her capacity to

convince the audience that they have the rhetorical authority to offer a rhetoric of possibility

despite not having made it to adulthood themselves. One young contributor, for instance,

recognizes that viewers might question his credibility given his age. Staring at the camera, he

told viewers:

I know you may be thinking, "You're 16, what do you know about it…it getting better." Well, here is my story. When I was in seventh grade, I came out that I was gay. All my life I have been different. As a kindergartener, I was walking to school, gel in my hair, pep in my step, Christina Aguilera cassette tape in my hand and telling the teacher to put it on track one…because that was my jam. (Jake Tuttle, 2010)

Following the rhetor's identification as "different" from his peers, the rhetor explained to the viewers how he was continuously bullied for being non-heterosexual. Although he might not be the type of rhetor intended for the IGBP, using the strategies of enactment, experiential knowledge, and personal testimonies the rhetor asserts his capacity to speak and to be listened to within the context in which he is participating. The rhetor's comment indicates that one of the most rhetorically significant aspects of the Savage-Miller video is that other people identified with the way in which Savage and Miller spoke. They saw their own selves reflected within Savage and Miller's rhetorical performance and felt as if by embodying that performance they finally could speak about their experiences in a way that would be heard.

After sharing stories of victimization, IGB contributors shift the topic from victimization to hope. The objective is to avoid dwelling in a past characterized by pain and, instead, focus on future possibilities. In an attempt to accomplish this goal, the rhetors address the audience and call upon them to endure present-day pains in order to attain a "better" life. This invitation is often accompanied by the rhetor offering general advice on how to find the strength needed to survive and includes some variation of the phrase "it gets better." At this point in the video, the rhetors remark on the viewer's ability to endure. Similar to the stylistic and substantive choices represented in Savage and Miller's video, the rhetors attempt to persuade their audience that they

possess the state of mind necessary to endure the anti-gay bullying they are currently

experiencing.

Providing advice encourages the viewers to envision their identity not as a victim but as a

survivor. By telling the target audience that they possess the necessary state of mind to endure

their present-day experiences, hope for a better future, and achieve happiness, the rhetors seek to

convince viewers that they possess the will and ability to endure and overcome the pains

associated with anti-gay bullying. The tactics that rhetors use to convey this message is different

for each video. For instance, untitledsymphony (2010) followed her testimony of past

experiences with bullying by using a metaphor to directly address the audience's capacity to

endure. Stretching a rubber band, she stated:

> Right now, you are like this…you have this potential energy right here…you are going to
>
> go so far once that potential is unleashed upon the world. And know that sometimes the
>
> stretching hurts and it feels like you are going to break but please just hold on and you
>
> can make it through this.

In making this statement, untitledsymphony asks viewers to recognize their ability to take control

of their lives despite the homophobia they encounter. She promotes a rhetoric of possibility by

arguing that the audience has the freedom to decide his/her fate. Making statements such as, "It

feels like you are going to break but please just hold on and you can make it through this," she

seeks to convince the audience that they are capable of bearing the hardships that accompany the

LGBT identity. Calvin Stowell (2010) offered a similar sentiment: "Hold out…I know that

sounds terrible, but hold out because you are going to be missing out on a world of stuff if you

don't." Although he does not explicitly mention that the viewers possess the necessary qualities

to endure their present-day pains, Calvin Stowell implied that it is possible to withstand the

bullying in order to attain a "better" future. Like Savage and Miller, in their videos, both rhetors utilize a strategy of implicit enactment (Campbell, 1988a; 1988b). The ability to endure anti-gay bullying is proven by the rhetorical practice of making a video and speaking to the target audience despite past experiences with bullying.

Some IGB contributors encourage the audience to behave in a particular way. For these individuals, the best advice they can offer to LGBT youth is to surround themselves with supportive people rather than dealing with the difficulties by themselves. Flying Solo1979 (2010) suggested, "Talk to someone you trust. Make sure you stand up for what you believe in because at the end of the day the only one that really matters is you." Jon Santos (2010) stated, "If it seems too much to bear. Speak to a trusted teacher or counselor. Or, call the Trevor Project."[9] Similarly, Paul Carels (2010) explained, "The best advice I can give is to not do it alone…don't be scared to find people with commonalities. To find someone you can talk to. You are not alone despite what it might feel like." Common to the rhetorical form used in many of the IGB videos is the rhetor's encouragement for viewers to reconsider their understandings of what is possible for them, regardless of the struggles they experience.

Despite the specificities of the audience's suffering and life story, a shared understanding is conveyed within the IGB videos. Most LGBT-identifying people are victims of harassment, yet all LGBT-identifying people can survive. Importantly, the submissions following the Savage-Miller video invite the audience to recognize the control they have over their own lives, even if they feel isolated and defeated. This perceived control manifests as the capacity to find similar others who can support them through the challenges or simply have faith in the possibility of a better future. While the rhetorical choice to place the responsibility of LGBT youth generates

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[9] The Trevor Project is a national organization dedicated to preventing LGBT youth suicides. The organization joined forces with the IGBP after the circulation of Savage and Miller's video (The Trevor Project, 2016).

criticism about the IGBP, IGB rhetors seem to choose this approach as a way to invite the intended viewers to re-envision their personal rhetorical agency.

The IGB videos further reinforce the rhetorical form exemplified in Savage and Miller's video by using their lived experiences to enact the meaning of a "better" life. The success of enactment is dependent upon the rhetors overtly stating or demonstrating how s/he "practices what he [*sic*] preaches" (Campbell, 1988a, p. 5). As a result of this strategy, audiences are more likely to believe in the truth of the message since the rhetor himself/herself is perceived as proof of its validity. In the case of the IGBP, rhetors draw upon their own experiences to symbolize happiness. For example, rhetors show pictures of their same-sex marriage ceremony (e.g., JandJNYC, 2010), include the participation of their spouses and children in the video (e.g., GayFamilyValues, 2010), tell a personal story about achieving success in their career (e.g., BriteDivIGBP, 2010), share experiences about being accepted by their family (e.g., heather rice, 2010), or discuss the sense of belonging they found in friendships (e.g., tackytramp, 2010). Although each rhetor utilizes a symbol that is unique to his/her identity and experiences, the participants share a similar purpose and rhetorical form in that they invite the audience to re-imagine their life story as one characterized by hope and acceptance rather than despair and isolation. That is, they transform a rhetoric of possibility into a rhetoric of actualization. Engaging in a strategy of enactment, the rhetors perform what it means to be happy. In doing so, they validate what is possible for the LGBT population as a collective and what is possible for each viewer as an individual.

Similar to Savage and Miller's video, many of the participants close their videos by repeating the catchphrase "it gets better" or offer a comparable statement about the wonderful life that is possible for individuals who choose to live despite the present-day difficulties they are

experiencing. For example, the video created by JDDiClemnti (2010) ends with the rhetors saying, "You are valued. And we promise you; it does get better." Similarly, heather rice (2010) asked her viewers, "What's the motto? It gets better." At this point in the videos, the screen either goes blank or information for additional resources (e.g., a phone number for the Trevor Project) is displayed on the screen. By finalizing the videos with the "it gets better" phrase, the rhetors focus their attention on the viewer, urging them to recognize their capacity to survive. The rhetors, then, are positioned not as the subjects of the video. Rather, they are representative of the shared understanding that constitutes the LGBT identity. In mentioning the "it gets better" motto, videos build upon one another and resemble a conversation between consubstantial individuals. This rhetorical choice implies an argument that helps to counter a hegemonic assumption. Anti-gay bullying is not an isolated incident; it is an experience shared by those who are marginalized as a result of their sexual orientation.

Moreover, the decision to end the videos with the campaign's catchphrase further solidifies the rhetors' participation within the IGBP. They define their videos as part of the IGBP rhetoric, linking their videos to other videos that adopt a similar rhetorical form. This decision validates other videos that also mimic the rhetorical form. The number of videos that look similarly helps to verify the believability of the message. In fact, public discourse about the IGBP indicates that sympathetic receivers laud the similarity and size of the campaign as indicative of its rhetorical efficacy. In her blog, Hurst (2010) argued:

> It's not about the individual videos themselves – it's that there is so damned *many* of
> them, from everyone from regular middle class gay people to students to older folks to
> the biggest celebrities in the world, all lending a word of encouragement, in their own
> ways, to gay kids. That's the part that's got to be powerful, because the teenage years are

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a self-centered time…and there are now scads of videos specifically directed at our gay

kids. They don't have to parse the message; they don't have to look for the lessons —

they're right there, video after video after video, at the click of a mouse. (emphasis in

original)

A commenter echoed Hurst's claim. S/he wrote, "All the vid may not get watched, but the sheer

volume says much. Some kid will go thru and say 'that person kind of looks like me' and click

on it" (Kathy Baldock, cited in Hurst, 2010). Another reader wrote, "I think that even one video

can save a life. Now we have hundreds… we should just be grateful that thanks to people like

Dan Savage, our allies have a platform to speak out" (Wayne Benson, cited in Hurst, 2010).

While these statements do not explicitly mention the rhetorical form, the rhetors imply that the

number of videos promoting a similar message is powerful. The videos establish a way to voice

and witness experiences, concerns, and support for the LGBT identity. The discursive

similarities between individual videos create a sense of identification, helping to prove the truth

of the message. As a campaign, the IGBP provides a forum and a template for LGBT

individuals, both rhetors and viewers, to exercise their rhetorical agency by engaging in a

conversation about a shared understanding.

Examining how the rhetorical form exemplified in the Savage-Miller video is reproduced

in subsequent IGB videos reinforces conclusions rhetorical scholarship has made about what is

revealed when a rhetor engages in the discursive practice of imitation. When a rhetor models

his/her own discourse after another rhetorical performance, s/he is signifying particular

agreement with and admiration for a rhetor's actions and beliefs (e.g., Hauser, 2006; Saxon,

2012). The reproduction of a rhetorical performance serves as proof of an audience's support and

respect for the process itself as well as the ideologies undergirding that process. The audience

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sympathizes with the message and the structure. By reproducing the discursive form modeled within the original IGB video, members of the audience who participate within the campaign affirm the message that the form delivers.

Additionally, the reproduction of the rhetorical form indicates that the Savage-Miller video helped to solve an existing rhetorical problem. When viewing IGB videos, viewers are positioned as members of the audience. Yet, once people are offered a rhetorical template to help guide them in offering a message of support, many of them transform into rhetors. Thus, the issue is not a lack of experiential knowledge. Rather, the discursive problem is the lack of a rhetorical form. The reproduction of the rhetorical form implies that the audience-turned-rhetors simply did not know how to translate their individual experiences into a shared message that was likely to be heard. Using the Savage-Miller video as a rhetorical model, the solution seems simple: to help LGBT youth, all a person needs to do is use his/her lived experiences as evidence that life will improve.

The ability to create a unified message is important for any situation that seemingly calls for a rhetorically eloquent response. After all, eloquent rhetoric provides a means for others to come to voice about their own interests (Condit, 1995). By transforming from audience to rhetor, the IGB video contributor is shown a way in which to rearticulate their identities and experiences. Their adoption of the rhetorical template serves to validate the rhetorical form. As a result, a consubstantial space emerges whereby participants can identify with the message, validate one another's experiences, and collaboratively construct a shared understanding in which to coordinate their actions. In short, the audience-turned-rhetors are given an opportunity to articulate the experiences that bind them in unison despite their differences. At the same time,

the target audience is offered a body of discourse that affirms the individual texts. The presence

of this shared understanding is further communicated in public discourse about the IGBP.

Identifying with the Message and Validating the Audience

The rhetorical situation characterizing the IGBP is characterized by a need for rhetorical

eloquence. As Condit (1997) has argued, rhetoric is collaborative. Each text comes into being as

a result of an interwoven body of discourse. For rhetorical efforts that require collaboration,

achieving eloquence - the re-naming and re-envisioning of experiences and identities - is

important to that endeavor. In the case of the IGBP, in order to convince the audience as well as

potential contributors to give new meaning to or revise understandings of their experiences as

LGBT people, a message is needed that calls forth the articulation of these experiences. This co-

construction of meaning requires active participation and depends upon the audience's continued

willingness to reinforce and shape the values conveyed. Therefore, the efficacy of the IGBP is

determined by the degree to which the audience identifies with the message and is validated by

the message. Some members of the audience indicate they feel compelled to use their

identification as a means for participating within the campaign.

Emerging within public discourse about the IGBP is the recognition that the message

resonates with the target audience and potential rhetors. One viewer spoke to this identification

in his/her post on a contributor's video page: "Such a great video. Thanks for sharing. Your story

sounds a lot like what I went through as well. So nice to hear such heartfelt words" (keelo1027,

2010). Many viewers, in fact, mimic the rhetor's admission by sharing their own story within

written posts to the rhetor and other viewers. For example, one viewer wrote, "Loved this

video…I too came out at 19, I too moved away to another and bigger city for college…I relate.

I'm 23 now. Still learning. Still young. But it got better. It Is better. (lizrem, 2010). According to

the comments about the videos, the IGB message acts as a mirror, creating a sense of identification between rhetor and viewer. Some viewers offer a general indication of a shared understanding while others offer more in-depth representations of their own lived experiences.

For many members of the audience, the IGBP affirms a feeling they once experienced. The videos indicate the belief that the audience needs to hear words of hope and encouragement as a means for countering feelings of despair and isolation. Supporters of the IGB message explain that, as a result of being LGBT and bullied, youth often have to fight the feeling that they are destined to be lonely and mistreated. For example, one viewer commented on a YouTube video page:

> Thank you for your terrific video, Jason. I am certain it helps young people to hear stories not different from their own. I wish I had heard similar stories when I was your age... about 25 years ago! I would have felt a lot less isolated. (bkentackerson, 2010)

The commenter not only recognizes the importance of identification, but s/he also implies the void s/he felt by not having a similar opportunity. This sentiment is echoed by Matt Baume, founder of Stop8.org and an IGB video contributor. He argued that the IGB message is powerful because it represents "a very familiar feeling. These are words that I think we would have appreciated (hearing) ourselves" (cited in Hartlaub, 2010). Audience-turned-rhetors indicate that the IGB message invites them to recall the characteristics and experiences associated with their past selves.

The act of watching the videos and hearing the stories from other LGBT people goes beyond simply reflecting their lived experiences. Instead, the audience is offered a revised lens in which to view that past. In an interview about the IGBP, Savage remarked on the challenge of speaking about one's victimization. He stated, "It is going to be difficult for a lot of people. You

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can see people revisiting this part of their lives that they wanted to forget about" (cited in Parker-Pope, 2010). Despite the difficulty, however, sympathetic receivers argue that the IGBP fills a void that many of the rhetor's experienced as youth. Jacks (2010), for example, wrote on her blog, "Personally, I wish that I'd had a Dan Savage…that it was perfectly fine for me to think that boyish girls were way more attractive than the farmhands and aspiring baseball players that I was expected to date." Another IGB supporter wrote, "I was so alone growing up and wish I had some responsible gay adults like Dan Savage to help me through difficult times when I was in high school" (ted, cited in Parker-Pope, 2011). These comments indicate that the IGB message serves as an invitation for the audience to reconsider the needs, desires, and perceptions that characterize who they were as their past selves.

Resulting from the invitation to re-envision their identity as well as their present experiences, members of the audience feel compelled to share their own experiences. The identification that is created in watching and hearing other people's stories that are similar to their own calls them to link their voice to the collective discourse. For example, one commenter wrote on an IGB videographer's YouTube page, "Very good video! I wasn't going to make one, but our story is quite similar- so you kinda inspired me to make one" (ofthemonster, 2010). Commenting on an article about the campaign, another individual echoed this statement: "Thanks, Dan, for doing this. Maybe I'll post a video of my own. Life DOES get much better after high school" (Greg, cited in Parker-Pope, 2010). According to these statements, the process of watching or hearing about other LGBT-identifying people share a story that is representative of their lived experiences leads viewers to add their voice to the campaign. In so doing, their experiential knowledge and the enactment of that knowledge provide them a means in which to become a part of a shared understanding.

For other individuals, the IGB message is helpful not because it reflects a former sense of self, but because it speaks to the audience's current experiences and fulfills an existing need as a result of these experiences. Affirmation of what it means to experience anti-gay bullying is seen in many of the comments left on IGB video pages. Evolving from these expressions of identification is an indication that the IGB message achieves its objective. Viewers reveal that after watching an IGB message they experience a different understanding of what is possible for their own lives. For instance, one viewer wrote:

> I've always been made fun of to the point of where my house has been vandalized with spray paint, glass jars filled with urine, several rocks thru windows, many many MANY hate messages from people just because I am bisexual…I still hope for a little light to come my way soon.... I've gone through so many suicide attempts and I really have been searching for SOMETHING to make it better, and this Keith [the video creator] has givin me some hope, I thank you for this and I hope that you continue to succeed. (Hamm, 2010)

According to this particular participant, the IGB message fills a void for him/her. By explaining how s/he has been "searching for SOMETHING to make it better" and then declaring the video has provided the hope s/he seeks, the viewer not only identifies with the message but also believes that the path from victimization to happiness is possible for him/her. Another viewer told the same IGB video creator, "I'm a sophomore in high school…and this video in particular touches me. I've been bullied extensively, too, and it's hard not to lose most days. Just...thank you. It's reassuring to know it will get better" (Sam Mcfishbuttz, 2010). On a different IGB video page, a commenter wrote, "thanks, u've really inspired me. out of all the it gets better videos i can honestly say this one makes me hopeful for my future & gave me a new perspective on my

situation" (Gonzalo del Peon, 2010). In each of these comments, a viewer attests to his/her identification with the rhetor's message. Importantly, emerging from this identification is the viewer's willingness and ability to see the possibility that awaits him/her if s/he adopts the stance of the rhetor and endures his/her present suffering. These comments also confirm what Savage believed, that a group of people existed who wanted and needed to hear a message like the one offered by the IGBP. The problem, however, was that this audience was difficult to access. Even if the viewers do not make a video of their own, their responses to the videos illustrate the presence of a previously unaddressed audience that was waiting to hear a message like the one offered in the IGBP.

The audience's responses also indicate that there were people who were waiting to tell their story but simply did not know how to tell that story in a way that was productive. The IGB message validates their past or current experiences with bullying, isolation, and despair, and mobilizes their belief in the possibility of happiness. Additionally, the IGB message is perceived as rhetorical resource to help the audience transform from passive bystanders to active participants. The identification and validation suggest a common lens in which to understand their past, present, or future experiences. In this regard, the IGB rhetors are heeded by the community to which they present their discourse.

Additionally, members of the audience who contribute to the campaign link their individual voices to a collective articulation of what it means to identify as LGBT. Emerging from the shared understanding is an opportunity of empowerment. The audience can rely upon their experiential knowledge to articulate their truths, utilize the truths of others to re-envision what is possible for them, and shape the revised understanding into a resource of resistance.

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A Means of Resistance

In addition to justifying their support for the IGBP as a result of their identification with the message, support for the campaign emerges because the IGBP is perceived as a means of resistance. Resistance, in the sense it is being used here, refers to the LGBT population's ability to invoke their rhetorical agency in a manner that opposes and counters some experiences of oppression. In this regard, the IGBP serves as a rhetorical space and resource to come to voice about a subject that has previously been ignored, silenced, or denied as a result of external forces. As comments about the IGBP illustrate, many supporters had the experiences to offer a message of hope or had the desire to believe in a message of hope. Yet, they lacked the means for sharing their experiences or for receiving this type of message. Once the rhetorical form of the IGBP is made apparent, the IGB message provides a way for opposing troubling ideologies and practices that push LGBT people to the margins.

The IGB message is founded on a rhetoric of possibility. Given the rhetorical choices constituting the message, IGB contributors attempt to convince their target audience to hope for a better life. The idea is that accompanying this hope is a will and ability to endure present-day suffering until an individual can escape his/her environment and find a happier existence. Supporters of the campaign seem to recognize this intention as a tactic for resisting oppression. For example, one viewer wrote on the video page of an IGB contributor: "You are saving so many lives. To everyone out there dealing with this: I am gay, I have been suicidal, but I am still here. It does get better. Please hold out. Our survival is our resistance" (blowersdaughter, 2010). Interestingly, the commenter identifies the act of staying alive as a resource for activism. In this regard, the participant implicitly enacts her ability to be a change agent by promoting the IGB message. The campaign serves as a catalyst for ensuring and representing that survival.

Another IGB contributor similarly envisions the IGBP as a way to fight against the oppressive practices directed toward LGBT people. Bifella (2010) invited his audience to, "Get on to Google, search for those supports groups." He further instructs them to "search for others like yourself and prove to those bastards on the school yard…that no matter how much hell others put you though you've got what it takes to get you through." From this perspective, the act of resistance rests in every LGBT youth's willingness and ability to survive bullying in order to serve as a visual representation of his/her power. The capacity to endure and survive is represented and reinforced within the IGB message.

The IGBP is perceived not simply as a message of hope, but rather as a resource for change. Although survival is perceived as a means for resisting oppression, the willingness to visually represent that power is important. The IGBP serves as a symbol of that power. For example, using a quote from the singer Adele, one IGB contributor's video page tagline stated, "Shows that we ain't gonna stand shit, shows that we are united, shows that we aint gonna take it." (Ruwel, 2010). Responding to a viewer's comment, the rhetor explains that his desire is for the IGB message to end the "sad reality" of seeing suicides as the only response to experiences of oppression. He followed this statement by writing, "Fight for the right to love." While the video creator does not explicitly indicate what act actually "shows we ain't gonna take it," his response implies that the IGBP plays an integral role in the LGBT population's fight against oppression. Either the message or the fact that people are able to offer a message of hope functions as a way to represent the social power of the marginalized.

Other supporters of the IGBP recognize the endurance of the audience as a strategy of change for future generations. For example, one IGB contributor told her audience:

Please hang in there. We need you to be the role model for our girls but we also need you

to help create and maintain those safe places for our girls, for your kids, for everyone.

That is what makes this a peaceful society. (JDDIClementi, 2010)

As this rhetor insinuates, by choosing not to commit suicide, the target audience can serve, in the

future, as role models to youth who are experiencing difficulties. Bifella (2010) expressed a

similar sentiment. He makes a plea to the audience not to commit suicide because "Don't deny

the world what you have to offer. Our world needs you. The people and humanity you will

encounter in the future need you, need to experience you." Both rhetors offer an intriguing twist

on the campaign's purpose by extending the campaign's efforts as a strategy for advocacy.

If the viewer chooses to live, s/he can use his/her story as a resource to help the LGBT

population in the future. Thus, survival is not the only thing that is possible for the target

audience. What is also possible is the target audience's capacity to continue and extend the help

established within the campaign. Generated from this shared articulation of lived experiences is a

novel public vocabulary that helps both rhetors and audience to re-envision what is possible for

them.

Possibilities for Rhetorical Agency

In the context of the IGBP, rhetorical agency refers to how IGB rhetors can be heard and

taken seriously by the community in which their discourse is presented (Campbell, 2005). Given

the rhetorical obstacle of accessibility and the need for eloquence, the capacity for LGBT-

identifying individuals to be heeded by the audience is difficult. Offering a message of hope to

LGBT youth requires that the IGB rhetors be able to access LGBT youth without having to

receive permission from people in traditionally authoritative positions. Additionally, the context

of the campaign necessitates that the message is powerful enough to counter the daily messages

that oppose a gay-positive perspective. Convincing LGBT youth to believe in a happier future

rests in their willingness and ability to re-envision a possibility for their future that is alternative

to the current-day despair they face. To accomplish this goal, the IGBP asks rhetors to re-

imagine their own lived experiences as a rhetorical resource for evoking social change. Thus,

rhetorical agency, as it relates to the IGBP, depends upon the effectiveness of the stylistic and

substantive choices constituting the message.

Based upon the discourse of sympathetic receivers, I argue that possibilities for rhetorical

agency emerge as a result of the rhetorical and technological decisions that comprise the IGBP.

In particular, a powerful possibility for rhetorical agency is the capacity to create and reinforce a

collective rhetoric. A collective rhetoric is the rhetorical practice of sharing experiential

knowledge with a group (Dubriwny, 2005). It involves a "process of persuasion" involved in the

"collective articulation of multiple, overlapping experiences" (p. 396). Within any collective

rhetoric, there are three interweaving elements that make it a potentially empowering process for

those individuals suffering from internalized oppression: audience participation, experiential

knowledge, and possible transformation of experiences and identity (Dubriwny, 2005). The

outcome is the establishment of a rhetorical space and, as exemplified in the IGBP, a rhetorical

model that invites disparate individuals to come to voice about a particular subject, validates

their experiences, and encourages social change.

Seen within the IGBP is a process of co-construction. IGB rhetors and viewers contribute

to the development of a common vocabulary about the experiences central to the LGBT identity.

With personal testimonies, individuals share with the audience their personal experiences of

victimization as a result of being LGBT and their ability to find happiness despite this

harassment. Produced from the rhetorical act of self-reflexivity is the validation of other people's

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experiences and identities. Dubriwny (2005) explains that since collective rhetoric "takes shape

through the validation of individuals' experiences it necessarily has lived experience as its

epistemic core" (p. 396). The IGBP demonstrates how using personal stories to communicate a

particular message can generate a sense of identification. Within this identification, it is possible

for a shared understanding to materialize, which assists participants in recognizing that their

personal understandings of the self are indicative of a common interpretation of the LGBT

identity. Participating within the rhetorical process of recognizing and circulating a shared vision

can be therapeutic, especially for oppressed individuals.

Telling stories about one's experiences can be a catalyst for change. For rhetorical efforts

of rhetorical agency that call for rhetorical eloquence, the discursive act of communicating

personal and social truths is a helpful tool for achieving the connectivity and collaboration

necessary to coordinate the behavior of disparate individuals. McLeod (1997) argued that telling

an audience "tales of 'who I am,' 'what I want to be,' or 'what troubles me'…is an essential

mechanism through which individual lives become and can remain aligned with collective

realities [and works towards cohesion]" (p. 2). When rhetors and members of the audience

identify with other people's discourse, a rhetoric can emerge that encourages individuals to link

their personal experiences with one another, and, in so doing, help shape the understanding

(Dubriwny, 2005). The outcome produced from this shared understanding is a unique

vocabulary, which can serve as a resource for countering oppressive ideologies and for healing

those individuals that have suffered as a result of the dominant perspectives.

As exemplified in the IGBP, by utilizing their lived experiences as evidence of the

argument they are advancing, audience-turned-rhetors are offered an opportunity to rely upon

their own experiential knowledge as a means for contributing to an important cultural

conversation. The reliance on one's self is potentially therapeutic because it connects him/her to similarly-identified others and opens a rhetorical space for re-interpreting experiences and re-envisioning identities. Especially when people engage in the rhetorical process of publicly coming to voice about what was once considered a private trauma, they are likely to associate less shame around that particular subject or experience than prior to the act of sharing (Tambling, 1990; Cvetkovich, 2003). Either by making a video or commenting about the IGBP, the audience is guided by the rhetoric of other participants. They are invited to envision themselves as capable of speaking about anti-gay bullying in a way that will be heard by the discursive community. Many of them accept this invitation and attempt to help others rearticulate their identity and experiences.

The IGB rhetor's articulation of personal experiences that might be antagonistically received in mainstream society can help to constitute the sense that a safe, communicative space exists. In so doing, the rhetorical act of sharing personal information invites the audience to identify, interpret, and evaluate the meaning embedded within the discourse. That is to say, the audience is actively involved in the sense-making that gives the rhetorical act its potential power. If the experiential knowledge shared by the rhetor resonates with the audience, the audience's own experiential knowledge is validated. As such, the rhetorical process can encourage the audience to perceive of the experiences as indicative of a collective identity rather than isolated instances. In so doing, the audience has the opportunity to view their own experiences with anti-gay bullying as the effect of troubling ideologies rather than as evidence of their own deviance. The collective rhetoric enables them a channel in which to release the internalized oppression that causes them despair. Additionally, in hearing other people share similar experiences, the audience is offered a rhetorical resource in which to enact their own rhetorical agency; the act of

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articulation further reinforces and provides a rhetorical model in which to follow so that the hearers can also come to voice about the subject.

The discursive community that emerges within the IGBP is, in part, because of the amount of videos that rely upon a similar rhetorical form. Each individual's contribution to the collective rhetoric includes unique elements, yet the commonality between contributions is obvious as a result of being exposed to other people's rhetorical performances (Dubriwny, 2005). For example, David Browning (2010a), an IGBP video contributor, told his viewers that "One of the biggest gifts I've have ever had in my life is hearing my story come from other people's lips." Browning explained that the identification he felt with hearing other rhetors' stories compelled him to tell his story. Listening to other people share their lived experiences and identifying with those lived experiences draw IGB contributors to the rhetorical campaign.

By relying upon lived experiences, the rhetorical form of the IGBP enables individuals to express their individual voice while linking to a shared interpretation of their experiences. Repeating the stylistic and substantive choices of others connects participants to the conversation and the collective. In her research on communication and relationships, Tannen (1989) argues, "repetition not only ties parts of discourse to other parts, but it bonds participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation and in relationships" (pp. 51-52). As the audience of the IGBP identifies with the testimonies shared by participants and, as a result, are called to participate themselves, a network of connectivity is produced. In this regard, the IGBP creates a consubstantial space that is reflective of a crowd cheer or an audience's applause. A community of like-minded individuals is established. In fact, a person who primarily criticizes the IGBP implied the positive impact that might be produced from the shared understanding that emerges as a result of the IGBP. S/he wrote:

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Maybe if individual videos amount to little more than the weight of a blog post…perhaps collectively there is something of value there. The need to treat gay people as people is an increasing part of our global discourse and maybe the more we talk, the more others will speak up in situations where it actually matters. Maybe there is something to be said for the subliminal effects of all this chatter. Maybe all these personal accounts basically converge into a simple chant, just like at a rally. (Rich, 2010)

While the comment does not explicitly mention the existence of a collective rhetoric, it does insinuate a possibility that develops from the IGBP is the ability for the videos to be associated with one another. From this association, a "chant…like at a rally" is created. This chant, then, enables isolated experiences to be bonded to a collective understanding.

The connectedness that emerges within the IGBP discourse is not solely defined by the similarities within experiences. Rather, the discursive potential that manifests is a body of discourse connected by personalized rhetoric that highlights a common ideology. The sense of identification that the IGB rhetoric imbues is founded on a shared understanding and philosophy about the LGBT identity, as well as, the larger social world. By reproducing the rhetorical form exemplified within other IGB videos, participants validate the rhetoric of others, help shape the campaign discourse, and support a particular interpretation of reality.

When the IGBP audience identifies with the discourse, they are invited to offer their own voice as part of the collective process. The shared narrative that is produced from the active participation of the audience is helpful for oppressed collectives. The rhetorical power of this possibility rests within the ability to offer a body of discourse that can speak back to the dominant public. In the case of the IGBP, each video supports the credibility of the message that is conveyed in other videos. Anti-gay bullying is not the fault of the individual; harassment is not

an isolated incident. Rather, experiencing anti-gay bullying, as well as happiness, is a communal truth that is continually rendered visible and accurate as more videos are accepted as part of the IGBP.

Additionally, a collective rhetoric is a helpful resource for creating social change because it can help the marginalized population resist the hegemonic ideologies that might threaten the audience's ability to perceive of themselves as agents of change. Dubriwny (2005) explains the collaborative process is powerful because "it is the community that shapes and then confirms the values expressed by the rhetorical performance" (p. 400). In hearing their experiences framed within the individual details of another's life, the audience is called to re-envision their understandings about these experiences and their identity. The result is a vocabulary that encourages them to rely upon their own capacity to know and share their truths despite arguments to the contrary (Dow & Tonn, 1993). The possibility for a collective rhetoric is the result of both the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP.

The novel use of YouTube within the IGBP contributes to the discursive possibility for rhetorical agency that emanates from the reliance on the rhetorical strategy of enactment. Participation within the campaign does not require a high degree of technological skill. Immediately following the viewing of an IGB video, it is possible for a member of the audience to create his/her video contribution or comment on another participant's YouTube page without a significant amount of effort. S/he simply needs access to a few resources: a computer, the Internet, and, depending upon the type of participation, a webcam. The ease in which one's voice can be added to the collective discourse strengthens the idea that collaboration from the audience is not only allowed but desired.

Moreover, YouTube's infrastructure encourages the development of a collective rhetoric because it allows a conversation between the rhetors and the audience to emerge. Rather than producing a video and then immediately sending the video to the IGBP creators, to participate within the campaign requires that every contributor create a YouTube account, upload their video to this account, and then email the link to Savage (Wharton, 2012). Since participants have a personal YouTube account, they are notified when a viewer gives a "thumbs up" to their submission or comments on the discussion thread. Resulting from this technological feature is the opportunity for the rhetor and viewer to interact publicly or privately. Savage speaks to this unintended possibility when he argued that the decision to use YouTube "open (ed) a conversation between LGBT adults and LGBT youth about their lives" (cited in Wharton, 2012).

Many of the IGB contributors use the YouTube page that features their video to offer social support to their viewers. IGB contributor Calvin Stowell, for example, made a video because he understood what it felt like to be bullied and isolated. Upon submitting his video, he received numerous emails and comments from viewers who asked him advice and reached out for support. YouTube's infrastructure enables him to respond directly to these viewers. The ability to have a conversation with a viewer is particularly empowering and integral to the establishment of a collective rhetoric. It gives the rhetor an opportunity to address dissenting voices while simultaneously validating supportive ones. For example, one viewer expressed his doubt in the believability of the IGB message on Stowell's YouTube page. S/he wrote, "Hello, I watched your video today, thinking to myself it may of got better for you but I feel that it just wont happen" (Ayrton Mead, 2010). The viewer continues to explain his struggles and ends the post by asking Stowell to respond to him. Stowell engages in a conversation with the viewer and offers feedback about his/her skepticism. The post also invites other viewers to offer their

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support and advice to the viewer. Other members of the audience engage in conversations with doubtful viewers or denounce homophobic remarks. By utilizing YouTube as the medium for the IGB message, rhetors and viewers are provided a forum and the means in which to further identify with and participate in the creation of a shared understanding about the LGBT identity. Rhetors are offered the opportunity to continue to contributing to a collective rhetoric.

The allowance to engage in mutual conversation with rhetors is not only helpful for empowering the target audience, but it also is a powerful resource for empowering the rhetor. Stowell explained the effect of being able to help LGBT youth by responding to their comments: "Growing up, I never had someone to confide in…Now these teenagers do. I can't even articulate how much this has ended up meaning to me (cited in Stelter, 2010). The rhetorical form as well as the technology used to circulate the message encourages participants to reflect upon and reconsider their past, present, and future experiences. One IGB contributor, Stephen Sprinkle, explained that historically the telling of coming-out narratives has served as "a way to say that we understand each other because we had to come out under fire or because we struggled with it." The IGBP, however, offers a different approach. It is "more public and positive" and provides the audience the ability "to look back on our stories and say, it really has gotten better" (cited in Stelter, 2010). As rhetors share their lived experiences with the audience, they adopt a revised understanding of themselves. They are able to envision themselves not as passive victims of oppression but active agents of change. What also is apparent is that Savage and Miller's original assumption is confirmed: there are other LGBT adults who want to help LGBT youth but are hindered by external forces. This finding points to the significant impact that a message can have when it is adopted as a rhetorical template.

Savage-Miller's response to the perceived crisis of LGBT youth suicides addresses not only a target audience that seems to have been waiting for the message, but it also calls forth the rhetorical agency of potential rhetors who possessed the experiential knowledge needed to offer support yet simply did not have the means, the rhetorical form, to turn this knowledge into a productive rhetorical resource. As the roles of rhetor and audience are redefined and collapsed, a collective rhetoric continues to emerge that is the result of the active participation of all who are involved.

Conclusion

Exemplified within the IGBP, are the discursive possibilities for rhetorical agency that materialize as a result of combining certain rhetorical strategies with YouTube. Indeed, certain social media technologies provide the potential for a public forum that "involves an awareness of group reflection working towards a political goal" while simultaneously enabling a space in which a collective understanding can validate the personal experiences of all those involved (Pullen, 2012, p. 136). When the video-based medium is used to circulate a message based in lived experiences, it can offer a physical and symbolic space for oppressed groups to coalesce around a shared message and circulate that message to the larger world as a means for countering problematic narratives. Thus, the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP illuminate how a single message in response to a perceived crisis can morph into a powerful social movement campaign.

The audience's sympathetic reception of the IGBP points to the effectiveness of the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the LGBT population's response to the 2010 youth suicides. Relying upon an experiential epistemology, a sense of identification is established between rhetor and audience. This identification invites a collaborative relationship

to develop with each participant contributing to the shaping of the resulting discourse. With the novel use of YouTube, a shared understanding is further established and circulated. The outcome is a collective rhetoric that validates the experiences of participants, encourages an alternative lens in which to view those experiences, and enhances the rhetorical power of these lived experiences. Yet, as will be discussed in the next chapter, at the same time that the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP produce possibilities for rhetorical agency, these decisions also yield unique implications for that rhetorical agency.

Chapter Five: Antagonistic Reception and Limitations

While some members of the audience, potential rhetors and bullied LGBT youth, applaud the IGBP, others denounce it. In this chapter, I analyze the antagonistic reception that the IGBP has received from some members of the audience. For the purposes of this dissertation, antagonistic reception refers to responses that criticize the rhetorical choices of the IGBP. The IGBP certainly generated vitriolic and homophobic rhetoric, yet I am not concerned with that type of discourse as it does not advance understandings about rhetorical agency as I mean it in this dissertation. In other words, rhetoric that situates the LGBT-identity as "wrong" or discourse that is homophobic does not enhance understandings about the rhetorical possibilities and implications of rhetorical agency as exemplified within the IGBP. Thus, I focus solely on antagonistic discourse that criticizes the campaign itself. I analyze this rhetoric through the same means as used in the previous chapter. Given that the oppositional discourse does not adhere to the rhetorical expectations of the IGBP and violates a sense of decorum as defined by the IGBP, the majority of criticism emerges outside the official IGBP brand. A limited amount of antagonistic discourse is included in the comments on official IGBP YouTube videos. Much of the criticism directed toward the IGBP rhetorical campaign is found in blogs, commentary responding to the blogs, videos not included as part of the official IGBP YouTube channel, news articles, and responses to critical news articles.

Although not all of the criticisms about the IGBP are issued in the same voice, similar arguments underlie the criticisms. Based on these commonalities, I conclude that the criticisms of the IGBP can be categorized into three primary arguments. First, some opponents argue that the IGB message is invalid because it does not resonate with the audience's personal experiences and is limited in whom the message supports. Second, some argue that the IGB message ignores

what are believed to be the "real" issues undergirding the subject of anti-gay bullying, which encourages passivity among people who are capable of evoking change. Third, the IGBP is criticized because some antagonistic receivers believe it privileges a specific identity, creating a false depiction of an accepting LGBT community. Apparent in each line of argument is that criticisms are generated in response to the rhetoric of the IGBP instead of the IGB rhetors themselves. That is, the rhetorical efficacy of the rhetorical form is called into question, not the motivations or sexual orientation of the rhetors.

Understanding criticisms of the IGB message is critical to identifying the rhetorical possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that can emerge within a social movement campaign. Views that oppose the IGBP campaign extend understandings about the rhetorical practices of marginalized populations who must overcome obstacles in an effort to exercise their individual and collective capacity to act and be heard. After all, if enacting rhetorical agency requires an audience to heed the rhetoric being presented, the manner in which a rhetorical text is received and perceived by the audience is paramount in determining whether or not the rhetorical goal of the text is achieved (Rand, 2014). It seems that for some antagonistic receivers, the purpose of their criticism is to open a space for dialogue about the LGBT identity. Others seek to identify disparate ways to respond to the problem that enables LGBT bullying and youth suicides to exist. Despite their disagreement with the IGBP rhetoric, criticisms illustrate the rhetorical opportunity that emerged as a result of the IGBP. The existence of the IGBP offers critics a public platform to exercise their rhetorical agency, even if the interests, identities, and experiences of LGBT-identifying people are envisioned in a way that diverges from the intention of the campaign.

Additionally, criticism directed toward the IGBP illustrates the presence of a collaborative rhetorical process and the emergence of a rhetorical community. Given that the antagonistic discourse does not adhere to the rhetorical expectations constituting the IGBP, the majority of critical discourse exists outside the official confines of the rhetorical campaign. Yet, the antagonistic discourse indicates a genuine care and concern for the LGBT population, especially LGBT youth who are bullied as a result of their sexual orientation. Thus, expressions of criticism convey a capacity to come to voice about the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides in a way that encourages further conversation. The implication, however, is that this conversation diverges from the rhetorical model defining the IGBP. As such, the dialogue is unlikely to be accepted as part of the official IGBP rhetorical community. In the following sections, I examine the three main arguments underlying the antagonistic reception and the implications for rhetorical agency that this criticism illuminates.

Lack of Identification

Although the IGB message resonates with some LGBT individuals, one of the most oft-cited criticisms toward the suicide prevention campaign is a lack of identification with the message. For example, blogger, Cuntlove (2010), wrote, "I (at the age of 29) can watch the 'It Gets Better Video' and feel touched or moved or even entertained by their story (ies), but I don't know that I would have had the same reaction as a teenager." Drawing upon her own experiential knowledge, she explains that, as a marginalized adolescent, the type of help she needed was different from what is offered within Savage and Miller's video. Cuntlove explained, "When you find yourself in the middle of that turmoil the last thing you want to hear is another person trying to offer you 'perspective' by telling you their problems." This criticism is echoed by other antagonistic receivers. Another blogger, femmephane, explained that what she needed as a

victimized youth was "way more listening" (cited in Cuntlove, 2010).[10] Zoe Melissa (2011) wrote on her blog, "We shouldn't be talking, we should be listening. Telling our own stories from our incredibly privileged positions, overwrites youth experience." Rich (2010) argues on his blog, "I think that when you're young, the last thing you want to do is listen to old people telling you about yourself (or worse: tell you about themselves!)." These criticisms imply that the IGBP is ineffective because it does not adequately address the needs of LGBT youth. The disagreement, then, centers on the rhetorical efficacy of the IGB message.

Critics who do not identify with the message indicate that their inability to be persuaded by the IGB message is because it actually limits whom it is intended to help. For example, Mandelo (2010), a news reporter, stated, "[The videos] are full of platitudes and well-meaning but unhelpful good cheer. They don't connect, especially if you are or were a queer teen who was not just sad but angry." One commenter supported a blogger's criticism of the IGBP when s/he wrote:

> When I was fourteen and had my first [suicide] attempt, I did not want to be told by some adult that "it gets better." At fourteen, my response would have been: "You do not. You don't care about me as a person, you care about me as a statistic. You don't even know me. You don't know what's going on with me, you don't know my circumstances. I'm not you. Fuck off!" (Anon, cited in Rich, 2010)

This critic explains that what s/he needed for loved ones to recognize was the reality of his/her struggles. S/he wrote, "If my parents didn't care about my pain, it wouldn't help that a stranger I would never meet who knew nothing about me claimed to." Criticisms about the IGBP illustrate the disconnect that exists between what some people experience versus what the message tries to

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[10] The original blog article has since been removed and replaced with a response to the controversy generated by the original article (see Femmephane, 2010).

convey. Although the IGBP tries to show LGBT youth that their pain is seen and understood, it is unsuccessful in communicating that recognition. Thus, while the IGB message might provide support to some LGBT youth, the rhetorical choices constituting it fail to fully account for the needs of all LGBT youth who are impacted by anti-gay bullying. In this regard, the audience's lack of identification with the IGB message causes them to doubt the campaign's rhetorical efficacy.

Other critics conclude that the IGBP is unsuccessful in creating a sense of identification with the target audience because LGBT youth do not possess the psychological capacity that the persuasiveness of the message requires. In response to a news article about the IGBP, one reader commented, "Let's not forget that the adolescent brain doesn't have the patience and perspective of an adult; myriad of studies have shown that teens don't really understand the concept of tomorrow the way adults do" (I, cited in Parker-Pope, 2011). S/he continued to argue that it is "unrealistic to just expect [LGBT youth] to grin and bear the pain until a better day comes along. They can't see that far. Like all adolescents, they are wrapped up in the 'right now.' We have to help them immediately." Similarly, in his video, Hal Duncan (2010) explained that the IGBP would not have helped his teenage self because it does not provide practical advice.[11] He stated, "I keep thinking how my 16, 17 year old, gay self would have responded to a video of someone like me coming on and saying, 'Don't worry. It gets better.' I think my answer would have been, 'Yeah, fucking when!'" For these critics, the IGBP is ineffective because it requires the target audience to believe in a rhetoric of possibility. The success of the IGBP necessitates that LGBT

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[11] Hal Duncan's original video was made in 2010 as evidenced by Mandelo's (2010) article that reviews the video. However, Hal Duncan uploaded his IGB video to his own YouTube channel in 2014. Thus, the published date, according to his YouTube channel, is 2014. The reason for the video's move from the IGBP YouTube channel to a personal channel is most likely because Hal Duncan's original IGB video was removed from the IGBP channel to make room for newer videos.

youth have the strength to see beyond their present circumstances and adopt a perspective of hope. Yet, believing in a message of hope is difficult for LGBT youth given that they often suffer from low self-esteem and experience heightened levels of anger as a result of their suffering. This state of mind can potentially compromise their ability to imagine anything but the harassment they experience on a daily basis. As a result, they are likely to reject the invitation to see themselves within the IGB rhetors' discourse.

Critics argue that identifying with the IGB message is a challenge for LGBT youth because of the internalized oppression they are likely to experience as a result of the harmful ideologies and social ramifications that encompass a non-heterosexual identity. Everett Maroon (2010) argued on his blog, "Just knowing others have made it can be read all to easily as 'well, they're stronger than me.' Our minds, when depressed, are able to ready any moment or situation against our own self-confidence." Maroon's argument is reinforced by another critic. On his/her blog, Caron (2010) wrote:

> To this day, I still struggle with a lot of self-hate, and a lot of internalized oppressive attitudes to do with my gender identity/presentation, sexuality, class, and many other facets of my identity (and for the record, i'm privileged by a lot of these systems of oppression). I *constantly* have to work at not spiraling down into serious depression. (emphasis in original)

Both of these comments point to the idea that the approach represented within the IGBP is ineffective because it asks LGBT youth to possess a certain psychological and emotional capacity. Critics indicate that LGBT youth tend to experience significant feelings of self-criticism and, as a result, are likely to not identify with a message that requires them to have faith in what may seem like a radically different tomorrow than their present-day reality. Unlike

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arguments made by sympathetic receivers, a strategy of enactment does not seem to work for critics. Seeing IGB rhetors live to illuminate the path from adolescence to adulthood is not rhetorically effective for transcending the self-doubt that LGBT youth experience.

The first argument made in opposition to the IGBP relates to how well the message resonates with the audience – both LGBT youth and potential rhetors. According to criticisms, the IGBP lacks strategies that will appeal to the audience because it does not account for the myriad of needs, feelings, and interests that LGBT youth experience. As a result, critics are skeptical about the message's ability to help LGBT youth imagine the reality that the IGBP promotes. What is evident from the criticisms is that antagonistic receivers envision the LGBT identity differently from what is represented within the IGB message. They draw upon their past experiences to counter the claims constituting the IGBP. The use of experiential knowledge to validate criticisms is further demonstrated when antagonistic receivers disagree with the problem that the IGBP addresses.

Fails to Address the Problem

Another common criticism centers on disagreement about the issue that the IGBP addresses. Critics imply that the attention given to the subject of anti-gay harassment is shortsighted. Rather, a more productive approach would be to concentrate on the systemic issues that encourage homophobic practices like bullying. Everett Maroon (2010) stated on his blog: "Knowing 'it gets better' is far, far from enough to do anything about the systematic oppression of a group of people." Similarly, reporter Doyle (2010) argued:

> [I]f we keep telling suicidal people that their situation will "get better" without actually taking any steps to improve it…if we don't make sure that the systematic, community-wide abuse of GLBT youth is eliminated - then belief alone can wear thin.

Both of these statements indicate that the IGBP fails to discuss the external forces that enable

anti-gay bullying to exist. Anti-gay bullying is the product of a larger issue rather than the

problem itself. In other words, critics insinuate that by ignoring the macro problems and focusing

on the micro outcomes, the believability of the IGBP is diminished; the campaign attempts to put

a Band-Aid on a situation that requires stitches.

By not focusing on the "real" issue underlying practices of anti-gay bullying, critics

assert that the IGBP allows people to adopt a passive stance toward the situation. For example,

Doyle (2010) claimed that the IGB message offers people an opportunity to ignore their role in

creating the world that "all of us have the responsibility to create." Another critic explained that

if the objective of the IGBP is to prevent LGBT youth suicides, rather than "telling [LGBT

youth] that their lives will get better, as if by magic," more attention should be given to how the

LGBT population can help improve the lives of the target audience (Veldman, 2010). S/he

further argues that the IGB message "merely serves to remove responsibility from the speaker

(and the LGBT community and society as a whole) to do work towards improving the attitudes

of the oppressors and the treatment of the oppressed." On her blog, Nyong'o (2010) asserted that

the IGB message promotes a sort of "queer salvific wish" in which if "we just regulate our own

conduct and affairs properly, we can somehow save our people through the example of our moral

fortitude." In other words, basing the validity of the message on the performances and

experiences of other people's endurance creates a false sense of aspiration whereby LGBT

people are responsible for saving other LGBT people. As a result of this idea, people who do not

share the same experiences are not held accountable for helping to create social change. Another

blogger claimed, "There is actually no path to change in this vision…Promoting the illusion that

things just 'get better,' enables privileged folks to do nothing and just rely on the imaginary

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mechanics of the American Dream to fix the world" (Novak, cited in Doyle, 2010). Critics argue that by absolving people of the responsibility to create change, the IGB message is encouraging people who have social power to deny their capacity to be change agents.

Critics also disagree with the approach represented by the IGBP because it equates "saying" something to "doing" something. According to detractors, the IGB message seemingly supports the idea that change will happen organically without people having to directly address and resist the oppressive ideologies that sustain problematic practices like anti-gay bullying. Laura Dykstra (2010) wrote, "Sharing information is not a substitution for action." Similarly, Nyong'o (2010) concluded that "making a YouTube video, reaching out a hand, each one teaching one, or any of the other individualizing modes of participation which sentimental culture defines as 'doing something,' isn't always going to cut it." A reader of Nyongo's blog supported the criticism. S/he commented on the blogger's wall, "Nothing gets better in the passive voice…there aren't individual solutions except ones where you abandon people to die…that making webvideos is not, in fact, 'doing something to help the youth'" (rozele, 2010). As these statements indicate, opposition toward the IGBP resides within the definition of "action." Unlike sympathetic receivers who applaud the IGBP for creating a means of resistance, critics imply that the rhetorical form of the message is insufficient for addressing the issue of anti-gay bullying. It serves to further problematize the underlying social ideologies that perpetuate oppressive practices. In this regard, the IGBP shifts focus from the "real" problem to a perceived solution that exacerbates the issue of anti-gay bullying.

Several critics specifically argue that the campaign's reliance on social media contributes to the ineffectiveness of the IGBP. One blogger, Rich (2010), wrote, "Dan Savage seems to understand the medium of YouTube well and as a result has devised a campaign for maximum

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involvement...given the medium's insatiable hunger for newness, I worry about what happens

when the meme is dead." A commenter on the blog echoed Rich's statement: "[W]hile viral

campaigns are excellent at attracting attention towards themselves in a snowball effect, they

snowball out of sight just as quickly" (Brian, cited in Rich, 2010). Rob, another commenter,

argues that the "larger issue" is "people confusing participating in an internet meme with some

form of activism or social change." One person argued that the IGBP is an ineffective type of

activism when s/he stated:

> Did you read Gladwell's piece in The New Yorker a few weeks back on the low
>
> impact/low stakes of social networking driven activism? Worth a read and I think it fits
>
> with your thoughts on It Gets Better. "Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating
>
> people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do
>
> when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice." (Ben, cited in Rich, 2010)

As these statements reveal, critics disagree with the efficacy of making a YouTube video as a

form of activism. They recognize the benefit of social media but question its ability for creating

lasting social change that solves the actual problem. In this regard, the use of YouTube is a

problem because its permanence and impact are questionable.

Critics who argue that the IGBP fails to address the "real" issue rarely direct their

criticism toward the rhetors themselves. In fact, many of the criticisms make a point to recognize

the positive aspects of the campaign. Some people identify the "good intentions" of the IGB

rhetors (e.g., Tom Jefferson, cited in Hurst, 2010), while others applaud the global attention that

the IGBP has directed toward LGBT issues (e.g., adam, cited in Rich, 2010). Yet, the critics

insinuate that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. They simply do not believe that the

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rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP are adequate for addressing the rhetorical situation.

Antagonistic receivers assert that the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides requires an approach that more directly addresses the reasons warranting a suicide prevention campaign. A more helpful response would be an approach that goes beyond LGBT adults sharing their personal testimonies of suffering and survival. Critics argue that the LGBT population needs to focus their attention on resisting and eliminating the overarching oppressive ideologies and practices that allow anti-gay bullying to exist. In other words, preventing LGBT youth suicides is too complex of an endeavor to solve solely by sharing personal stories, particularly when only one version of lived experiences is represented.

Privileges One Perspective

The final argument advanced by critics of the IGB message relates to its perceived homogenization of the LGBT identity. Opponents argue that the IGB message promotes a singular perspective about what it means to be LGBT-identified. Caron (2010) demonstrates this perception when she stated, "Making these universal blanket statements that 'it get better for me, it will get better for you,'" the IGB message "denies the multiplicity of experiences and identities that make up our queer communities." Puar (2010) explained that the IGBP focuses solely on anti-gay bullying while ignoring the bullying that youth experience as a result of other identity markers. He stated, "Projects like Savage's risk producing such narrow versions of what it means to be gay, and what it means to bullied, that for those who cannot identify with it but are nevertheless still targeted for 'being different', It Gets Better might actually contribute to Making Things Worse." Discord with the IGB message rests in the belief that it offers an inaccurate

depiction of what it means to be LGBT, rendering invisible the serious issues that prevent LGBT

people from achieving the happiness that the IGB message promises.

Other critics extend the argument of privilege by concluding that the IGB message fails

to recognize the specific implications that arise for LGBT people when they also are

marginalized because of other identity markers (e.g., race or gender). One commenter stated that

while "we're fans" of the IGBP, "we all know it gets better a lot sooner if you are white,

cisgendered, and middle class" (anonymous, 2010). Another individual explained his/her

discontent with the IGB message with the following statement: "People who have privilege and

power tend to be white, gay men" (Nori, cited in Alexander, 2011). Similarly, femmephane

(2010) stated:

> It is relevant that so many people watched the video and were hurt. Our pain doesn't
>
> come from over-sensitivity: it comes from a history of looking at the face of the queer
>
> movements and being told that our priorities as folks who come from multiple minorities,
>
> are less important or not LGB enough for LGB time and money. It comes from run-in
>
> after run-in with invisibly oppressive powers and institutions that leave us injured, but
>
> with no clear culprit to fight against.

Echoing this assertion, Ryan (2010) explained that the IGB message fails to align with his

reality. S/he argued, "Every single day, I face transphobia in this society. And fatphobia. And

classism…Many of us will never have access to the unbelievable privilege that people like Dan

Savage can lay claim to with great ease." The perceived lack of diversity represented by IGB

contributors is problematic for critics because it ignores the fluidity and diversity inherent to the

LGBT identity. In fact, the IGBP seems to counter their experiential knowledge. In so doing,

critics believe the campaign's message glosses over the actual issues that plague non-heterosexuals.

From the perspective of antagonistic receivers, by privileging one facet of the LGBT identity, the IGB message neglects the unique experiences that emerge as a result of being marginalized for identities beyond sexual orientation. The limited representation of experiences among IGB contributors and the reproduction of a common narrative cause the sole concern of the IGBP to be the suffering that LGBT people face at the whim of non-LGBT individuals. The emphasis placed on demonizing non-LGBT people allows other forms of harassment to be disregarded. As a result, emerging from the IGB message is an image of a unified community defined by acceptance and love. This image conveys the idea that every LGBT person will have the opportunity to escape the confines of homophobic environments. Upon this escape, they will find an inclusive community of similarly-minded people who will welcome them with open arms. Yet, according to critics, the IGBP offers an inaccurate reflection of reality.

For many people who criticize the IGBP, one of the most troubling aspects of the IGBP is that the campaign's message ignores the marginalization that actually occurs by LGBT people toward LGBT people. Caron (2010), for example, argued, "There is no truly benevolent queer family, waiting to catch you, ready to sacrifice so you can thrive." Drawing upon his own experiential knowledge as evidence, Jason Tseng (2010) explained the dual marginalization that can occur if you are LGBT-identified. He wrote, "The gay promise failed me. I went from being ostracized by my straight classmates in high school to being ostracized by many white gay men in an urban gay enclave." The blogger argued that oppression exists within the "the gay community" because of "problems surrounding race and gender" in which "queer men of color, especially feminine queer men of color get pushed to the fringes of gay life." As a result, the IGB

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message creates a "seeming meta-narrative" that touts a loving community while simultaneously erasing the oppression that occurs amongst similarly-identified people. According to these criticisms, the IGB message offers and reinforces a false sense of reality and, in so doing, discounts the lived experiences it pledges to represent.

Critics explain that the primary problem emerging from the IGBP's privileged perspective is that the message rhetorically constructs an imagined community and asks a vulnerable target audience to believe in the truth of this construction. The issue, then, is that LGBT youth who are persuaded by the IGBP are likely to escape the confines of their present-day suffering only to be faced with further harassment. Using experiential knowledge to validate his opposition toward the IGBP, Hardy (2010) argued the IGB message is based in the idea that being "wonderful" and "resilient" is the answer to finding happiness. However, Hardy's experiential knowledge causes him to believe that having the psychological capacity to cope and believe in a better future is not enough to erase the pains of daily life. Despite the ability to imagine a better future, people continue to be "emotionally and physically battered" because, for some people, "it doesn't always get better." Instead, "Some wounds bleed for life." The implication of the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP is that LGBT youth might blame themselves for not being able to find the happiness that the campaign message promises. Another critic stated that the IGBP is problematic because it offers "a lot of people false hope, because it doesn't necessarily get better. I had to wade through an awful lot of methed up circuit queens before I found a group of awesome queer friends. I'm sure a lot of queer youth don't make it out of that mess" (Jay, cited in Rich, 2010). Jay insinuates that if LGBT youth are bullied post-high school, especially by other LGBT people, they might think past and present experiences of

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harassment are isolated incidents and the result of their own inadequacies. This perception could reinforce the internalized oppression and despair that the IGBP seeks to eliminate.

The third category of arguments issued by antagonistic receivers indicates that the campaign is not deemed rhetorically effective for helping bullied LGBT youth because it privileges one perspective of the LGBT identity. By seemingly normalizing what it means to occupy a marginalized social position as a result of an alternative sexual orientation, critics insinuate that the IGBP denies the fluidity of all lived experiences and threatens to diminish the rhetorical agency of those individuals who identify as LGBT but are not represented within the message. As a result of this criticism, antagonistic receivers focus their energy toward engaging in a dialogue about the LGBT identity and the ways in which the campaign can be improved, rather than participating within the official campaign.

Implications for Rhetorical Agency

In response to the 2010 LGBT youth suicides, the LGBT population sought to offer social support to a vulnerable target audience. Effectively preventing suicide among bullied LGBT youth required that the population be able to access youth victimized by anti-gay bullying, establish their credibility for speaking about the subject of anti-gay bullying, and persuade the audience to re-envision their experiences and identity. Thus, attending to the situation necessitated that the LGBT population strategically utilize available rhetorical and technological resources in a way that helped them circumvent an obstacle of accessibility and address a need for eloquence. The result of this endeavor is the IGBP, a rhetorical campaign reliant upon a message of hope, delivered through the rhetorical act of LGBT-identifying people sharing their lived experiences via video testimonials.

The success of the campaign calls for an effort of rhetorical agency, or the ability to speak and be heard by the audience the discourse addresses (Campbell, 2005). When studying acts of rhetorical agency, it is important to understand that the audience's reception and perception of the text's rhetorical form will influence how rhetorical agency is enabled and restricted. According to Rand (2014), "rhetorical forms function similarly to subject positions; they are recognizable conventions within which discourse can be intelligible, and they both produce and constrain the force and effects of a text" (p. 21). For the IGBP, exercising rhetorical agency is dependent upon how well the message makes sense to the audience.

The reception and perception of the IGB text varies. While some people receive the IGBP sympathetically, for others, the message fails to meet the standards of intelligibility. Therefore, just as the IGBP serves as an interesting case study for understanding the possibilities of rhetorical agency, it also offers an opportunity to explore the limitations certain rhetorical choices can have on practices of rhetorical agency. While a collective rhetoric emerges from the campaign, resulting from the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP is also the manifestation of a homonormative rhetoric that can potentially undermine any alternative understandings of the LGBT identity and experiences. The implication is a rhetoric that further and perpetually alienates people who are marginalized as a result of their identity.

In rhetorical scholarship, especially queer theory, there are varying definitions of homonormativity.[12] Contemporary adaptations of the term recognize it as an ideology that "does not challenge heterosexist institutions and values, but rather upholds, sustains, and seeks inclusion within them" (Duggan, 2003, p. 145). In short, homonormativity occurs when aspects

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[12] The original meaning emerged in transgendered politics as a way to "name the ways that homosexuality, as a sexual orientation category based on constructions of gender it shared with the dominant culture, sometimes had more in common with the straight world than it did" with a queer culture (Stryker, 2008, p. 146).

of an alternative sexual identity are normalized in a manner that reflects dominant understandings of sexuality rather than marginalized ones. Adapting this definition, homonormative discourse, as I mean it in relation to the IGBP, refers to rhetoric that reflects expected norms of behavior and representation as related to the LGBT identity and experiences. That is, the IGBP advances a ubiquitous picture of the LGBT identity and the experiences associated with that identity. In so doing, the campaign's rhetoric establishes expected discursive parameters of how that identity should be represented and performed. This rhetoric emerges as a result of the discursive and technological choices constituting the rhetorical form of the IGB message.

The IGB message is reflective of homonormative discourse because the efficacy of the campaign is reliant on the continuous reproduction of the style and content of its message. Thus, the reproduction of the IGB message is paramount to the campaign's success. To address the issue of LGBT youth suicides and anti-gay bullying, Savage and Miller issued a response. Unexpectedly the response morphed into a much larger campaign than originally anticipated. As a result, Savage and Miller are called to justify their choices and create a shared message about the campaign. As the IGBP grows, Savage attempts to protect the intention of the campaign by taking charge of how it is portrayed in public discourse. Not only does he justify the rhetorical choices constituting the campaign, but he also insinuates a desired persona for potential contributors. Resulting from this decision is a message that operates similarly to a discursive script. The message is comprised of expected rhetorical conventions that are continually being normalized each time the rhetorical form is recreated.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the rhetorical power of the IGB message is exemplified in the continuous imitation of Savage and Miller's video, which serves as the tacitly agreed-upon

model. At the same time that the rhetorical expectations associated with the campaign is effective for creating a collective rhetoric the stylistic and substantive conventions produce a homonormative discourse. While the IGBP seeks to persuade the audience to re-envision their identity and experiences, it fails to account for the diversity that undergirds subject positions. The prevailing image of the LGBT person is reinforced each time that a participant conforms to the rhetorical prescriptions defining appropriate participation. An IGBP contributor is expected to identify as LGBT-identifying or as an ally, have been a victim of bullying, and possess evidence of present-day happiness. Each video contribution should include personal testimonies that are based in the contributor's lived experiences regarding his/her suffering and happiness. Therefore, the model for the video has an identifiable structure: video contributors introduce themselves by identifying as LGBT, share a tale of victimization, provide advice for the future, tell the viewer "it gets better," and offer evidence of their happiness. Adhering to this rhetorical form increases the likelihood that a rhetor will be received as discursively competent and recognized as part of the rhetorical community; therefore, following the discursive rules is important for being heard and perceived as part of the campaign.

Heeding these discursive rules is not difficult, given the ease in which a person can participate. Employing the rhetorical strategies of enactment, personal testimonies, and experiential knowledge increases the simplicity in which interested contributors can participate within the campaign. For these reasons, while a message that relies upon the sharing of lived experiences can be helpful for empowering oppressed populations, the IGBP demonstrates that a potential implication for rhetorical agency is the normalizing of experiences, or, at least, the rhetorical recounting of the experiences. The dependence on lived experiences as the proof of the truth of the message creates a highly accessible discourse and community. Anyone who

possesses an understanding that similarly reflects the understandings of others can access and participate within the rhetorical performance - as long as s/he acts in accordance with the expected rhetorical model. The difficulty for accessing the audience and identifying how to speak in a way that will be heard is lessened because a rhetorical template exists. For LGBT individuals who wish to help LGBT youth but are unsure how to do so or how to structure their language and their actions in a way that will likely be heard by the target audience, the rhetorical form of the IGB offers a fairly simplistic guide. The biggest task a potential IGB contributor must tackle is deciding what details to include about his/her experiences with anti-gay bullying and happiness. As long as these details align with the purpose of each part of the IGB message, s/he is likely to be viewed as a legitimate contributor to the campaign, enhancing the listenability of his/her video.

All that is required of IGB contributors in order to participate in YouTube is the capacity to access the Internet and to use an email address to establish an account. For video creators, they must also have access to a webcam. Because YouTube does not require a person to possess anything beyond basic technological skills, the opportunity to create a video and comment on a video is available to an array of people. The accessibility of the medium results in a vast number of videos that are linked to one another under a shared message. One critic speaks to the implication of using YouTube. Zoe Melissa (2010) states:

> And for all the awesome power of the online video platform [Savage] uses, the self-replicating-ness of the video testimonial doesn't really do much beyond go in a circle like a dog chasing it's tail—what kind of policy change, structural change, cultural shift is he advocating? How do Dan Savage's friends from similarly privileged backgrounds telling a similar story mobilize and organize the viewers to act.

The degree to which the IGB message is supported is visually represented as a result of YouTube's technological parameters. A person only has to type "It Gets Better" into the search toolbar and s/he will have access to a number of videos that are linked together and indicate a shared understanding. While the visibility of YouTube offers a potentially powerful resource, the aggregation of IGB videos serves to further validate the truth of the IGB message while potentially invalidating dissenting views.

Despite the empowering effects that arise due to the ease in which a person can participate, the implication of the campaign's simplicity is that, as the message gets continually reproduced, the ideologies undergirding it are validated and reinforced. Rhetorical messages that rely upon an existing discursive form can restrict rhetorical agency in that the act of reproduction normalizes the principles that constitute the message. When this occurs, the possibility for a revised understanding is problematized. Foss (2006) argues that scripted responses "illustrate and reinforce existing theories and understandings rather than encourage the development of new ones" (p. 376). Although Foss's argument is made in relation to rhetorical criticism as an act of rhetorical agency, her argument is helpful in understanding the implications that emerge from scripted rhetorical responses. By adhering to an existing rhetorical form, it is difficult to negate the expectations that are innate to it. After all, "Telling a new story using a conventional script…encourages making the same choices that were made in the past" (p. 376). The overarching ideology represented within the IGB message stays the same. The very act of reproduction, then, threatens to reify the ideas, beliefs, and lived experiences of all people the message seeks to represent. Therefore, in regards to the IGBP, while the details of each participant's story about victimization and happiness might differ, the message fails to reflect all aspects of a sexual identity.

Especially in using personal stories to enact the truth of the message, rhetors can actually dilute any knowledge or experience that is alternative to the one produced. Resulting from this choice is a limitation of ideas and beliefs about how to approach and interpret the rhetorical situation, experiential knowledge about what it means to be bullied, the resources one has available to cope with marginalization and oppression, and how to engage (or if one should engage) in collective resistance. Thus, the IGB message offers a dominant perspective that threatens to diminish the validity of any alternative view or directs attention away from troubling problems facing the LGBT population.

According to Jason Tseng (2010), the lack of diversity within the IGBP is problematic since it diverts attention away from the "very real problems and deficiencies the current gay community has in its inability to make that gay promise accessible to everyone who falls under the rainbow banner." Similarly, Hardy (2010) argued that to speak about problems like dual marginalization would render visible "the lies of a queer 'community,' or an African American 'community,' or at least expose the codified ways those very communities eat their own through racism, homophobia, classism, etc." Hardy (2010) claimed that the IGB message is a "script being sold." As these statements indicate, the IGB message does not simply reflect *a* representation of the LGBT identity but is presented as *the* defining representation of the LGBT identity.

Emerging from the perpetuation of the message is a duality: a rhetorical forum and template that honors the voices of those who identify with the message and a dishonoring of those individuals whose experiences are not reflected within the message. According to blogger femmephane (2010), the IGB message is problematic because it "suggests support for queer youth has to stay 'on message' and 'upbeat.' Dissent and diversity does not seem to be

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encouraged." According to this statement, the IGB message is ineffective because it normalizes what it means to be LGBT by only permitting one perspective to be represented and not allowing an alternative cultural conversation to exist. While criticisms challenge the IGB message, as a result, the very people offering a different perspective must exist outside the official IGBP. Their disparate perspective is unlikely to be as valued as sympathetic discourse because it does not meet the standards of intelligibility as defined by the discursive community. In fact, many of the criticisms directed toward the campaign are communicated in blogs and are not included as part of the official IGBP rhetoric. As a result, people must intentionally look for alternative perspectives about the IGBP.

Beyond the implications resulting from the implicitly expected adherence to the rhetorical form, the ideology and image the IGB message promotes is strengthened as a result of YouTube. While antagonistic reception does not explicitly oppose the use of YouTube, the manner in which the medium is used raises interesting questions as to the limitations of rhetorical agency when certain mediums are employed in conjunction with rhetorical strategies based in lived experiences. Although the medium provides a space for those who wish to exercise their rhetorical agency, the implication is that YouTube further reifies the dominant perspective presented within the IGBP by continually recreating and circulating videos that are similar in content and form. This implication stems from the ease in which a member of the audience can participate within the medium and as part of the campaign.

Identifying the implication for rhetorical agency that emerges as a result of using YouTube to circulate a collective message is critical because the majority of research on YouTube has suggested that the medium does not provide a helpful resource for creating and coalescing around a common narrative. For example, in their study of coming-out videos,

Alexander and Losh (2010) argue, "Databases of coming out videos…provide commentary on queer lived experience, although they may lack a coherent narrative that emphasizes sequence and singularity" (p. 47). Yet, their research, as well as most analyses on the technological forum, focuses on videos that address a certain topic rather than videos that are linked as part of a rhetorical campaign (e.g., Manovich, cited in Vesna, 2007). The IGBP, however, exemplifies the possibility that a coherent message can emerge within the medium, enabling the creation of an online archive or reference database for marginalized populations. The consequence is that the shared message threatens to create a dominant narrative that replaces and alienates other representations.

While any content on the Internet cannot be guaranteed to exist for an extended period of time, YouTube's popularity and power as a medium heightens the likelihood that the IGBP videos will have a long-lasting existence within the virtual world. As such, it is possible that the IGBP channel and associated videos might serve as an online archive for LGBT-identifying related causes. As these videos are stored, the IGB videos could be used by future generations as the primary narrative characterizing a non-heterosexual identity. This means that any ideology represented within the IGBP can prevail and influence future LGBT-identifying people.

Savage speaks to the possibility of the IGBP serving as an archival resource for future LGBT generations:

[W]e want to create an archive that lives online forever, for each generation of gay kids coming up, so they can go there and they can see these stories...I'm hearing from mothers of bullied gay teenagers who are sitting down to watch these videos together and taking such hope for their futures, and that's what I want to see. I want to see the people who

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need to see these videos finding their way to them. Not just today or tomorrow, but

whenever. (cited in Montgomery, 2010)

As Savage indicates, the ability for YouTube to house the IGB videos within a single channel

offers the opportunity to establish a virtual library. In her research on the narratives from the

1970's lesbian group, Daughters of Bilitis, Bessette (2013) speaks about the possibilities and

implications that emerge as a result of archival narratives. She explains that "anecdotes...have the

potential to disrupt dominant historical narratives," yet, especially when they are collected and

archived, they can also "create a new grand narrative, one that challenges heteronormative

narratives and, as a result, instantiates a homonormative history in its place" (p. 40). If an online

archive actualizes from the IGBP, the rhetorical meaning and force of the IGB message will have

an impact on future understandings about the LGBT identity.

The most concerning aspect of the normative discourse exemplified by the IGBP is that it

threatens to marginalize those individuals who already exist within the margins. For LGBT-

identifying people who have not found happiness despite enduring anti-gay bullying, the IGB

message excludes their understandings of what it means to be non-heterosexual and bullied. As a

result of privileging certain characteristics of the LGBT identity, the IGB rhetoric is in danger of

undermining or erasing the complexities of identities that do not adhere to the constructed

narrative. For instance, the IGB message implies that anti-gay bullying is an act of oppression,

yet it does not account for the ways in which that oppression might be exacerbated if a victim

also identifies with a racial or religious identity that is marginalized.

While normative discourse can be helpful for structuring a discursive community and

enabling a point of a shared reality, that same discourse also has the consequence of creating a

homogenous portrayal of a particular identity or experience. Emanating from this normalized

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image is the potential for exclusion and further stigmatization. When a text normalizes how an understanding of the self, and how the experiential knowledge that accompanies this understanding is framed, it is likely to discredit people whose experiences fail to align with the particular rhetorical frame. As Motschenbacher (2014) argues, the "side effect" of normative discourse is the "threatening of individuals' positive face (if they do not adhere to such norms)" (p. 52). For rhetorical efforts of rhetorical agency that aim to help audiences re-envision their past, present, and future views of their life story, the overarching consequence is a restriction on who is permitted to participate within a cultural conversation and/or how one's participation is received.

As criticisms about the IGBP indicate, some rhetorical and technological choices have important implications for efforts of rhetorical agency. The rhetorical situation encompassing the IGBP is characterized by a need for eloquence. In order to successfully meet the campaign's rhetorical goal, the audience needs to exhibit the willingness to re-imagine their lived experiences and self-perception as LGBT-identifying people. As the IGBP illustrates, when successful, a group of people with fragmented life stories are able to coalesce around a shared understanding and work toward a common objective (Condit, 1997). If identification with other participants and the message is not achieved, for some of the people it seeks to persuade, there is likely to be a limited capacity for rhetorical agency within that particular cultural conversation.

Despite the homonormative discourse that emerges as a result of the rhetorical choices constituting the IGBP, the IGBP offers the potential for an important cultural conversation to develop amongst detractors and supporters of the IGBP. While to some LGBT-identifying people, the IGBP threatens to diminish experiences that are alternative to the campaign's message, it does offer an opportunity for critics to engage in a discussion, albeit somewhat

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separate from the main conversation, about the LGBT identity. As is indicative of many social movements, when an organized message is communicated, it is very likely that the message will generate disagreement. In these instances, it is important to the efficacy of the campaign that a shared narrative is generated that responds to the disagreement. Savage and others illustrate the importance of this component of social movement campaigns when they address the criticism directed at the IGBP.

Public Responses to Criticisms

As illustrated in this chapter, in the year following the release of Savage and Miller's IGB video, a debate emerged about the campaign's efficacy. Like any social movement, the IGBP was met with mixed reviews. As spokesperson for the campaign, Savage publicly addressed both the support and criticisms. Importantly, rather than solely affirming the positive response to the campaign, he also recognized the rhetorical opportunity to identify some of the public's concerns and used that opportunity to further shape the narrative about the IGBP's intention.

The primary criticism to which Savage responds relates to the campaign's ability to solve the problem of anti-gay bullying. Savage admits that the IGBP will not and is not intended to fix the systemic issues that allow harassment of LGBT youth to exist. Instead, the objective of the campaign is to offer immediate support to LGBT youth. One reporter asked Savage why he is telling youth "to just hang in there" instead of "telling them that you can help them now?" (Parker-Pope, 2010). Savage responded:

> We can't help them. That's what makes gay adults despair and feel so helpless when we
> hear these stories. We can't barge into these schools…I've read these stories for years.
> Because of technology we don't need to wait for an invitation anymore to speak to these
> kids. We can speak to them directly. (cited in Parker-Pope, 2010)

While this statement does not directly answer the question, it does illustrate Savage's perception that the IGBP is an answer to an issue that has plagued the LGBT population. The videos are a way to circumvent an issue that has seemingly prevented LGBT adults from helping LGBT adolescents. In other words, even if the IGBP has opportunities for improvement, the campaign is a better solution than not addressing the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides.

As the campaign progressed, Savage countered the criticism about the campaign's efficacy to address the rhetorical situation encompassing the 2010 youth suicides. For instance, in a blog post on the IGB website, Savage (2010e) wrote:

> These videos on this site do not solve the problem of anti-gay bullying. We need to work on getting safe schools legislation passed in every state; we need to push for anti-gay bullying programs; we need to hold negligent school administrators accountable; and we need to confront the biggots and demagogues who inject hate into the national conversation about LGBT people and given straight children license to abuse and bully LGBT kids. All of that will take years of dedicated activism.

Savage recognizes that solving the issue of anti-gay bullying necessitates more time and a different approach, yet he believes the campaign is helpful because it offers an immediate remedy. According to Savage, the situation calling the IGBP into being was one marked by urgency. It required a quick response rather than a delayed solution. LGBT youth cannot wait for policies to be passed and systemic problems to be addressed. Rather, non-heterosexual adolescents who are in crisis need support immediately. In fact, Savage utilizes the criticism to encourage critics to create other approaches that go beyond the IGBP.

While Savage emerged as the main spokesperson for the IGBP, he is not the only person who addressed the criticisms. Sympathetic receivers argued that while the campaign definitely

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has its shortcomings, it offers positive outcomes that should not be ignored. A common rebuttal is that the campaign's potential to help prevent LGBT youth suicides is far better than not responding to the issue. Supporters recognized that the capacity for the video campaign to "save" all LGBT youth is unlikely; however, they concluded that it does offer the possibility for helping at least one adolescent in crisis. Commenting on a blog post that critiques the IGBP, a reader explained that she created an IGB video "for the same reason that I send e-mails to politicians and others in power…while I understand that the odds of my few words making a difference are a squillion to one, well, there's still that one" (Elena, cited in Rich, 2010). One blogger, Hurst (2010), asserted that while she agrees with critics' skepticism, she does not understand how the videos "could *hurt* in anyway. Hell, it helped me, and I'm neither a teenager nor suicidal." Agreeing with Hurst's comment, a reader claimed that each video "may mean something to someone who needs it" (Eric in Chicago, cited in Hurst, 2010). In fact, supporters asserted that the unintended consequence of the IGBP is that it is actually helping others because it offers a robust amount of evidentiary support and creates a space for conversation. More importantly, even if the IGBP saves only one life, that life is one that might not have been saved without the campaign.

Supporters countered criticisms about the campaign's ability to create social change. In their responses to this criticism, sympathetic receivers recognized that the problem of anti-gay bullying in its entirety cannot be solved by the campaign. They did, however, argue that the IGBP has resulted in some unanticipated positive outcomes that will help rather than exacerbate the problem. For example, one reader of a pro-IGB blog explained that s/he thinks the critiques are well-founded but ignore a crucial possibility that emerges as a result of the campaign. S/he wrote:

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What is really important is not the fact that some kids might see it and change minds over

suicide…this is unlikely…but waht is improtant is that it is getting so much attention in

the US and internationally. It Gets Better becomes part of the zeitgeist and discourse that

moves things forward in ways we can't directly measure. (Paul Mc, cited in Hurst, 2010).

As this comment indicates, a positive effect of the campaign is that it directed public attention to

the issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides. The IGBP established an opportunity to

engage in an important cultural conversation. Another individual indicated his/her agreement

with some of the criticisms while applauding the productive implications. S/he explained that the

"kind of conversation happening amongst normal people that the It Gets Better Project has

generated can only be good for gay teens" (Bears are Fat, cited in Rich, 2010). Additionally, the

commenter stated, "I also think that the fact that the cause of gay kids has become an (ironically)

celebrated one is a huge step forward…We are witnessing a basic cultural shift in our own lives:

homophobia is unacceptable." The response from supporters conveyed the perception that the

IGBP is a step in the right direction for helping to minimize the effect of homophobic practices.

Thus, the campaign's power rests within the ability to spark discussion about a problem that

previously had been overlooked or ignored. Interestingly, the conversation that sympathetic

receivers point to as a positive implication of the campaign is exemplified within the very ability

for criticisms about the IGBP to exist.

Conclusion

As criticisms indicate, an implication of the rhetorical and technological choices

constituting the IGBP is that it threatens to further ostracize some of the individuals it seeks to

persuade. Expecting participants to adhere to a particular rhetorical form further reinforces this

representation and the ideologies reflected within it. Using a medium that allows for easy

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accessibility to the IGBP has the consequence of reifying a dominant narrative and presenting that portrayal as a universal understanding of an identity that is anything but static. As a result of these rhetorical and technological choices, a rhetorical effort of rhetorical agency that seeks to empower its audience is, in all actuality, in threat of strengthening the alienation that some of the audience already experiences. Thus, an implication for rhetorical agency that emerges as a result of the discursive choices constituting the IGBP is that rhetorical agency comes at a cost. A person can participate within the rhetorical campaign, yet s/he has to do so in a manner that fits the rhetorical expectations of the IGB community. Divergence from the rhetorical script as created by Savage and Miller and reinforced by subsequent participants is likely to result in a person being rejected as part of the rhetorical community. Thus, criticisms of the campaign must take place outside the official IGBP, hindering who can speak and who will be heard.

Although critics contest different aspects of the IGBP, the campaign's existence actually provides them a rhetorical space and platform to exercise their rhetorical agency. Despite their disagreement with the IGB message, antagonistic receivers are offered an opportunity to articulate their perspectives about the LGBT identity. The IGBP provides them an opportunity to engage in a conversation relating to issues about non-heterosexuality. Similar to sympathetic receivers, critics draw upon their experiential knowledge to validate their concerns. In so doing, they affirm the concerns of others who hold similar viewpoints and offer a rhetorical space to voice these concerns. The result is a discursive community that exists outside the official IGBP. The participants of this community construct and circulate a vision of the interests, desires, and needs of LGBT-identifying people that are alternative to the rhetorical campaign. They participate in the collaborative creation of an alternative forum, inviting and engaging perspectives that support and criticize a revised vision of the LGBT identity. The result is a body

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of public discourse that responds to and impacts an emergent social movement. In so doing, a better understanding is provided about the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that emerge in certain rhetorical practices when examining the audience's reception and perception of the social movement rhetoric.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

At the center of this dissertation is the concept of rhetorical agency. Using the IGBP as a case study, my goal was to analyze and understand how rhetorical responses to perceived community crises can yield particular implications for exercising the capacity to be heard by the discursive community one seeks to persuade. First, I identified the rhetorical obstacles that the LGBT population faced at the time of the 2010 LGBT youth suicides. Examining the rhetorical situation revealed that responding to the issue of anti-gay bullying required an approach that circumvented the difficulty of accessing LGBT youth. Additionally, Dan Savage and Terry Miller's perception of the context indicated a rhetorically eloquent message was needed, which invited various audiences to re-envision, as well as articulate, their experiences and identity. In an attempt to address a crisis regarding LGBT youth suicides, Savage and Miller issued a message about the existence of anti-gay bullying, the possibility for endurance, and the actualization of happiness. Their ability to respond, how they responded, who could hear their response, and how that response was received are all aspects of the discursive situation that influenced the manifestation of a particular rhetoric. While Savage and Miller did not expect their response to have the impact that it did, the rhetorical and technological choices constituting their message encouraged the establishment of a social media movement. Materializing from this movement are interesting possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency. The purpose of this chapter is to offer concluding remarks about what can be gleaned from analyzing rhetorical agency as it is demonstrated within the IGBP.

This dissertation illustrates that using the rhetorical framework of rhetorical agency highlights the potential for other marginalized groups to respond to crises in a way that can be heard by a particular discursive community. Savage and Miller's response to an urgent situation

that seemed in threat of becoming an epidemic was strategic, complex, and controversial. Using a combination of social media and lived experiences, the rhetors attempted to circumvent rhetorical barriers that had previously hindered the LGBT population from coming to voice about the subject of anti-gay bullying. With these discursive choices, a single message morphed into a social movement that necessitated a more intentional and organized message. As the sympathetic and antagonistic discourse about the IGBP demonstrated, the approach taken by Savage and Miller, as well as others, seemingly polarized the audience it sought to help. While some people applauded the rhetorical efficacy of the message, others denounced it. The result was two-fold. The response not only offered an opportunity for the manifestation of an empowering collective rhetoric, but it also encouraged homonormative discourse. Thus, this dissertation helps illustrate that interesting possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency emerge when a rhetorical community is defined by the adherence to a specific discursive template.

As the IGBP indicates, a rhetorical template can help people be heard about a particular issue and coalesce as part of a rhetorical community. Based upon my analysis of the IGBP, I conclude that it is possible to enact rhetorical agency when following a template. A rhetorical model helps shape content into a message that is listenable for a specific audience within a particular context. After all, it is possible for a person to recognize that something needs to be said about a particular issue, yet feel as if s/he lacks the ability to speak in a way that will be heard by a discursive community. As the audience's reception of the IGBP illuminates, this possibility seems to be the case for many LGBT-identifying people. The issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides was not reflective of a new phenomenon. Yet, in 2010, the seeming rash of LGBT youth suicides offered an opportunity to start a cultural conversation

about an issue that had long gone unrecognized or unaddressed. People who desired to help these vulnerable youth, however, did not know how to address the problem. Savage and Miller provided a solution by creating and distributing a rhetorical template for responding to the rhetorical situation.

The accessibility and ease of the rhetorical form constituting the IGB message allowed potential rhetors to produce a message on their own time and use their own experiences as evidence of their rhetorical authority. Additionally, the sheer number of videos that emulated the Savage-Miller video communicated the rhetorical effectiveness of the template. It helped provide assurance to the unaddressed audience who wished to come to voice about anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides that they would be recognized as rhetorically competent contributors within the discursive community. On the other hand, it provided the target audience with a rhetoric that they could seek out without the permission of people in traditional positions of authority. The campaign created an accessible community that invited a vulnerable audience to join. In short, the rhetorical model and the emergent campaign offered an empowering discourse that helped interested parties navigate the complex and controversial experiences associated with a marginalized identity. The IGBP provided a platform to come to voice about what it means to be LGBT-identified and bullied.

The rhetorical template constituting the IGBP enhances the likelihood that a shared understanding will emerge through the collective reinforcement of the established rhetorical form. Thus, critical analysis of the IGBP illustrates that a rhetorical model is helpful for addressing an issue that has previously been ignored or avoided because of an absence of rhetorical skill or merit. In these instances, a rhetorical template helps potential rhetors find and use their voice to contribute to the ongoing cultural conversation in a way that is likely to be

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heard. The template serves as a type of rhetorical mechanism for speaking or enacting rhetorical agency. Yet, what the IGBP also indicates is that a rhetorical template is not a neutral medium.

Undergirding every piece of rhetoric and rhetorical performance is an ideology, or a way of looking at and acting in a particular rhetorical context. As such, rhetorical texts are constituted by beliefs about what is appropriate, who can speak or act, and who can be included as part of the rhetorical community. Therefore, a potential rhetor can look at an existing rhetorical template and understand what it means to be part of the rhetorical community defining a specific context. Yet, s/he faces a choice. A person who wants to participate in a rhetorical community must decide whether to follow the rhetorical model and be accepted as part of the community or diverge from the rhetorical template and risk rejection. Especially in social movements, this choice defines how his/her empowerment is enacted as a change agent.

In one sense, adhering to the discursive expectations of a rhetorical community increases the possibility of empowerment because a rhetorical template indicates to a potential rhetor what s/he needs to say and do in order to enact rhetorical authority in a cultural conversation. On the other hand, the empowerment that emerges from one's choice about following a rhetorical model is limited. As seen in the IGBP and the criticisms directed toward the campaign, rhetorical agency is possible as long as one's rhetorical performance stays within the established confines of the rhetorical community. If a rhetorical performance diverges from the existing rhetorical model, a rhetor is likely to be pushed to the margins of the conversation. S/he can still speak about the issue at hand but must do so in a separate medium or within the same medium but outside the official rhetorical community. The rejection of the rhetorical model, then, increases the likelihood that a person will not be taken seriously when speaking about a particular subject, especially when a substantive and popular message about the issue already exists.

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As antagonistic discourse about the IGBP revealed, it is possible for alternative rhetorical spaces to be created that enables rhetors to address a similar subject as another rhetorical community. Yet, by not adhering to the rhetorical expectations of the IGB community, potential rhetors are unlikely to receive the rhetorical merit that defines participation and membership within the official social movement. Therefore, when an existing rhetorical template constitutes a social movement, coming to voice about a particular issue is possible – at a cost. What this dissertation helps reveal is that rhetorical agency involves a complex interplay between the constructed notion of decorum and the medium in which it emerges. Rhetorical agency, then, does not refer to unadulterated freedom or autonomy to speak in whatever way one pleases but rather involves a collaboratively constructed agreement about what it means to speak and be seen as rhetorically competent within a particular context.

It is possible for a person to recognize that something needs to be said about a particular issue, yet feel as if s/he lacks the ability to speak in a way that will be heard by a discursive community. As the audience's reception of the IGBP illuminates, this possibility seems to be the case for many LGBT-identifying people. The issue of anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides was not reflective of a new phenomenon. Yet, in 2010, the seeming rash of LGBT youth suicides offered an opportunity to start a cultural conversation about an issue that had long gone unrecognized or unaddressed. People who desired to help these vulnerable youth, however, did not know how to address the problem. Savage and Miller provided a solution by creating and distributing a rhetorical template for responding to the rhetorical situation.

Overall, this dissertation helps to create a better understanding about the various possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that can emerge within social movement campaigns. When a rhetorical situation presents itself that is void of a clear or existing template for addressing it, people who wish to respond must utilize their best judgment as to what type of rhetorical response the situation warrants and what rhetorical resources are at their disposal for issuing that response. In this regard, perhaps the most important lesson learned from the IGBP is that a rhetorical template can wield powerful possibilities for being heard in a rhetorical situation that is perceived as urgent and ambiguous. Yet, in doing so, the rhetorical merit given to those who follow the discursive model means that anyone who violates the communicative expectations are likely to be met with resistance and disapproval. As such, participants adhering to the expectations serve as a barometer for what counts as rhetorically appropriate participation within that particular context, limiting the rhetorical freedom of others to engage in the cultural conversation.

What emerges within the IGBP is an example of a rhetorical approach that is scalable, effective, and representative of activism in the digital age. The campaign illustrates how a shared understanding of identity and experiences can be created and shared to the masses without the need for a collective to gather at the same place or at the same time. The rhetorical and technological choices constituting the campaign enable disparate individuals to contribute their voices and stories asynchronously. Importantly, these decisions produce an empowering rhetorical form because it is replicable and involves low-stakes participation. As a result, the rhetorical and technological choices constituting the IGBP helps strengthen the likelihood that a mass group of people will participate in the production and validation of a collective rhetoric. In

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turn, the amount of people invested within the discursive community assists in validating the message and the people who identify with it.

As is true of any rhetorical campaign, the decisions constituting the IGBP did not guarantee success, nor is the sanctity of the original intention promised. Particularly when utilizing a rhetorical form that is based in experiential knowledge and employs social media as a medium, the accessibility and adaptability of a message are likely to generate unanticipated rhetorical implications. Yet, these implications do not indicate that the campaign was ineffective. What the IGBP does illustrate is that the discursive and technological choices are viable in the particular context in which the campaign emerges. Despite the criticisms and consequences the IGBP generated, I contend that the campaign is rhetorically effective in addressing a seemingly dire circumstance affecting a marginalized population. In analyzing the context of the campaign, it is clear that the choice to stay silent in regards to anti-gay bullying and LGBT youth suicides ceased to be a viable and socially responsible option. While it is understandable that, as a result of external forces, the LGBT population had historically experienced difficulty in responding to the issue of anti-gay bullying, an examination of the rhetorical situation reveals a troubling situation that called for an urgent answer. Thus, what the 2010 suicides drew attention to was a collective cry for help. Two unaddressed audiences existed. LGBT youth needed social support; LGBT adults needed a means to offer that support. The IGBP rendered visible a shared desire to create and engage in a cultural conversation about the LGBT identity. Resulting from this visibility is the development of a shared understanding about the lived experiences of LGBT people, as well as a collective capacity for rhetorical agency.

While the IGBP is of rhetorical interest by itself, studying the campaign illuminates broader understandings about rhetorical practices of rhetorical agency. In particular, this

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dissertation contributes to studies about social movement rhetoric. It illustrates how an unintended social movement can materialize from a single message that is distributed in a time of crisis. As that message is continually reproduced, the initial response is likely to transform to fit the needs and wants of the audience. Oftentimes, in these instances, the originators of the message are called to make a decision: they can relinquish control and allow the message to be altered at the discretion of the audience, or they can utilize the audience's response to establish a point of coalescence for the nascent campaign. The IGBP illustrates the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency that result when the latter option is chosen.

Savage used both the sympathetic and antagonistic receivers' discourse about the IGB message to construct an overarching narrative to define the campaign. The original message, the audience's response to the message, and the response that the response generated caused a division within the LGBT population. Yet, this polarization was necessary and productive. It enabled the establishment of two rhetorical spaces that, at times, were both separated and connected. Experiencing anti-gay bullying and the internalized oppression resulting from the harassment was a subject that warranted attention. The empowering possibility of the IGBP was the ability for the IGB discourse to generate more discourse, and, in so doing, to invite a marginalized population's continued enactment of rhetorical agency, no matter which rhetorical space called forth its actualization.

Rhetorical campaigns directed toward marginalized populations, like the IGBP, require strategies that overcome the rhetorical challenges accompanying non-dominant identities by empowering audience members. To be without rhetorical agency or limited in rhetorical agency requires a rhetor of a rhetorical campaign do triple duty: create a discursive and physical forum to offer a message that counters the mainstream ideology, persuade the marginalized audience

into adopting a new or revised sense of self, and create a rhetorical community whose interests and needs are defined and constituted within the discursive constructions of "truth" specific to the members of that collective. To accomplish such goals, many oppressed populations must rely upon unconventional means and creative rhetorical strategies whereby their voice can be heard by a discursive community while simultaneously speaking back to the dominant public as a form of resistance. As the IGBP illustrates, when the use of experiential knowledge works in tandem with social media, the impact on the rhetorical effectiveness of practices of rhetorical agency can be significant, especially when a rhetorical pattern is provided that other people can follow. While the dissertation attempts to add to the growing body of research about rhetorical agency, more studies are needed to explore the potentially empowering relationship between rhetorical and technological choices in marginalized populations' efforts to enact rhetorical agency.

Future Research

Future studies about rhetorical agency should continue examining the ways in which people without taken-for-granted access to public forms and resources attempt to and manage to enact rhetorical agency. According to Campbell (2005):

> What is needed are synthetic, complex views of authorship as articulation, of the power of form as it emerges in texts of all sorts, of the role of audience in appropriating and reinterpreting texts when they emerge and through time, and of the links of all these to the cultural context, material and symbolic, in which discourse circulates. (p.8)

This dissertation sought to answer this call. As is the case with any discursive activity, enacting rhetorical agency is always an important, yet complicated, endeavor that deserves further scholarly consideration. Only then can better understandings emerge about the influence certain rhetorical practices have on the possibilities and implications for rhetorical agency.

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Resulting from an examination of rhetorical agency in the context of the IGBP are different areas for future research. One of the possible considerations involves questions relating to the role that social media campaigns can play in establishing a rhetorical and public history of a social movement. Because of the novel way in which YouTube is used as part of the IGBP, it is possible that the IGBP YouTube channel will become a site of public memory. Existing rhetorical scholarship about public memory implies that the continued study of this topic is an important endeavor for critical analysis. Hess (2007), for example, explains that "through the examination of various commemorative texts, the rhetorical critic is able to understand the political and ideological nature of history within a culture" (p. 813). Even if the momentum of the IGBP slows down, the videos and the associated discourse could serve as an artifact for understanding an oral history relating to one of the ways in which the LGBT population attempted to negotiate their subjectivity by resisting heteronormative ideologies and exercising collective rhetorical agency. After all, the collection of stories highlights a shared experience by many LGBT-identifying people.

A question that emerges as a result of the IGBP is how might a social media movement of the past influence the possibilities and implications for the LGBT population's rhetorical agency in the future? Moreover, what might be the campaign's role in establishing or influencing a rhetorical space for the collective memory of the LGBT identity at a specific point in time? These questions point to areas of study that are becoming increasingly important as rhetorical performances of rhetorical agency continually materialize within a digital environment. In the ways that rhetorical agency is enabled and constrained as a result of the LGBT population's choices regarding rhetorical as well as technological strategies, the IGBP represents issues relating to the permanence of digital spaces, the establishment of online

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rhetorical spaces, and the emergence of collective vocabularies. While addressing these issues are, in part, dependent upon the passing of time and the continued existence of the medium, it is apparent that more attention should be given to social media activism, marginalized populations, rhetorical history, and discursive rhetorical agency.

Additionally, the reproduction of the IGB rhetorical form enables a shared past of ostracism and discrimination, as well as happiness and acceptance, to be housed within one forum. In addition, the videos are able to be categorized into sub-channels. For instance, videos can be aggregated in a sub-channel that features international rhetors while another sub-channel can center on LGBT people who are public school teachers. Each sub-channel is still part of the official IGBP YouTube channel. Yet, the aggregation of the IGBP videos into "secondary" identity markers offers a possibility for the creation of additional cultural vocabularies. On one hand, the IGBP as a social media movement enables a collective rhetoric about the LGBT identity as a whole to be established. On the other hand, the sub-channels provide the means for creating other vernacular discourses to emerge. In so doing, it is likely there are implications for rhetorical agency that have yet to be addressed. Thus, the ability to group together seemingly similar videos within subcategories provides a potentially interesting critical examination regarding rhetorical agency, collective rhetoric, online archives, database aggregation, and social media movements.

Ultimately, what I hope this dissertation has revealed is that enacting rhetorical agency, especially for a marginalized population, involves a complex interplay between rhetors, the audience, and rhetorical conditions. Yet, when effectively enacted, rhetorical agency enables those populations without taken-for-granted access to public forums a way in which to navigate, negotiate, and negate problematic ideologies. By utilizing the rhetorical resources at one's

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disposal, there is a chance that present-day social hierarchies can be adjusted, if only just for a particular situation, so that the marginalized can come to voice and take ownership over their own life stories. In so doing, what is learned is that rhetorical agency well-performed often exemplifies the power of rhetorical invention and the possibility for change. What cannot be overstated is the critical role that an effective rhetorical template can play in helping people come to voice about their identity and experiences. As exemplified in the IGBP, by providing a strategy and tactic for exercising one's rhetorical agency about a particular issue, social movement campaigns can invite the establishment of a much needed rhetorical forum and template, yet the manner in which this space for rhetorical agency and the rhetorical form is produced and justified is of utmost important as to who hears the rhetoric being produced and how it is heard. Exercising one's public voice matters, but, perhaps, what matters most is how that voice contributes to the empowerment of the present-day collective and the possibility of a future chorus – and to what degree does this contribution influence rhetorical freedom.

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Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Communication, Missouri State University, August 2006-May 2008

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Academic Courses Taught:

LS/CMS 200: Digital Storytelling (AEO; Hybrid)

This course introduces students to the changing world of digital literature and film. Students will learn theories of storytelling from communication theory (such as Walter Fisher's paradigm of narrative rationality) and humanities (such as Vladimir Propp's morphology of the folk tale), and will apply these theoretical frameworks to film and other forms of digital storytelling. Students will build upon their GECM coursework to develop their own pieces of digital storytelling.

PCM 130: Writing: The Editing Process

This course uses communication theories, frameworks and technology to analyze, interpret and create written messages with consideration to audience, purpose and technique. Students identify components of their own writing process and analyze them for effectiveness in creating and revising written materials while also recognizing and applying professional standards of revising and editing.

PCM 320: Advanced Media Studies & Multimedia Production

This course builds on foundational media-related communication learning experiences in previous PCM coursework. PCM 320 merges in-depth critical media studies with a focus on critical media analysis and effective practices of digital literacy.

PCM 477: Public Relations: Theory and Application (Hybrid)

This course is an advanced-level elective course designed to provide an introduction to the purposes and practices of public relations, its role in organizations and society, and its potential as a career. Using case examples and a variety of other learning strategies, students practice a variety of communication tactics/strategies to develop effective communication practices for the purposes of engaging with various publics.

COM 320: Critical Media Studies

This course builds on foundational media-related communication learning experiences in previous PCM coursework. COM 320 merges in-depth critical media studies with a focus on critical media analysis and effective practices of digital literacy. Students learn how to identify the moral and ethical frameworks that are reflective in their media choices, how to effectively facilitate discussions using technology as well as how to script and create a digital story.

COM 330: Emerging Technologies (Mobile Applications, Data Visualization, Open Source)

This three-credit project-based course in Emerging Technologies consists of three independent but related one-credit production labs: Mobile Applications, Data Visualization, and Open Source software. Students will work in multiple platforms to advance their ability to serve as communication professionals.

LDR 150: Women's History and Leadership (AEO; Hybrid)

This course helps students develop an understanding and appreciation for the role of women leaders in American history. Through the study of historic women leaders, students analyze and discuss the ways in which women have been able to effectively lead within their families, communities, organizations, and social movements. Often, these women were "unlikely leaders" who found meaning and fulfillment in addressing the concerns of those around them. Their examples are inspiring. Students learn from the past by applying frameworks of mindfulness and women's leadership to the stories of these women. They have the opportunity to examine your own values and be introduced to mindful leadership theory to enhance their identity as a woman leader and to forward themselves as learners.

COMMUN 105: Business and Professional Communication (Stand Alone)

Analysis and application of communication principles and practices (interpersonal communication, teamwork issues, public speaking, technological communication) fundamental to successful participation in organizational and professional activities

RHMS 100: Introduction to Rhetoric and Media Studies (Stand Alone):

Introduction to the conceptual and philosophical foundations of the discipline, from classical rhetorical theory through contemporary perspectives, including critical theories of human interaction. How humans construct and negotiate meaning in different contexts, including interpersonal relationships, public address, small groups and organizations, mass media.

RHMS 203: Rhetorical Theory (Stand Alone):

History and theory of rhetoric, including major developments in rhetorical theory from antiquity up to the present. Rhetoric's relationship with philosophy, knowledge, and culture. Examination of persuasive messages in various forms, including politics, advertising, film, video.

RHMS 210: Public Discourse (Stand Alone):

Development of basic public speaking skills, listener-critic abilities, and appreciation for the role of public discourse in society. Library research, organization and outlining, language style, presentation skills, rhetorical/communication criticism.

RHMS 321: Argument & Social Justice (Stand Alone; Community-Engaged Scholarship):

Investigation of argumentation and social justice. Exploration and application of scholarship through the community-based Thank You for Arguing, a mentoring program run with local inner-city public schools. Theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the role of argumentation in fostering social justice explored through readings, classes, discussion, and writing assignments.

COMMUN 363: Human Conflict & Interaction (Stand Alone):

The purpose of this course is to investigate interpersonal conflict by defining what this phenomenon is, identifying various styles of conflict and examining potential methods for managing interpersonal conflict.
COMMUN 362: Argumentation & Debate (Stand Alone):

The theory and practice of argumentation with emphasis on critical thinking, argument analysis, and preparation of policy and evaluative arguments.

COMMUN 335: Critical Analysis of Communication (Stand Alone):

Nature, development, and applications of rhetorical criticism, with major emphasis on contemporary communication situations.

COMMUN 103: Introduction to Public Speaking (Stand Alone):

Principles of public address in informative, persuasive and special occasion situations with emphasis on the theory, composition, and presentation of speeches.

PEACEST 201: Peace Studies & Conflict (Stand Alone):

Violent and peaceful strategies of conflict resolution; viability of various plans for permanent world peace.

COMMUN 209: Communication Theory (Lecture-Lab):

A survey of selected theoretical approaches to understanding mediated and non-mediated human communication.

COMMUN 115: Basic Communication Course (Stand Alone):

Instruction and practice in researching, composing, and delivering formal and informal speeches in a variety of public contexts. The course emphasizes informative and persuasive speaking.

COMMUN 150: Research Methodology (Stand Alone)

A study in the principles of experimental, survey, textual and participant observation methodologies. Students learn the process of communication research by writing a research prospectus and conducting several mini research projects.

Related Work Experience:

2014-Present   The National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements (DETA)

> Served as research liaison for the DETA Research Center. Duties included conducting qualitative research in distance education and technological advancements, coordinating grant deliverables, evaluating grants, writing grants, publishing research in the area of distance education, creating research instruments for assessing learning outcomes, ensuring the completion of goals by various research fellows, recording and organizing in-house and community discussions relating to center business, identifying external funding.

2014   eLearning Research and Development, Research Assistant, UW-Milwaukee, 2014

> Duties included conducting research and data analysis for a variety of research initiatives relating to learning technologies and higher education (e.g., social media, eTexts, learner analytics, etc.) to further emerging technology use on campuses and improve educational accessibility, identifying external funding sources to finance pilot eLearning initiatives for the university, aggregating information from a diverse array of stakeholders for strategic planning purposes, assisting with grant writing for local-institutional-and national funding opportunities, compiling case studies relating to best pedagogical practices, serving as faculty liaison for pilot initiatives (i.e., Active Learning Spaces, GinkgoTree), authoring project reports for community stakeholders.

2013   Learning Technology Consultant, Learning Technology Center, UW-Milwaukee, 2012-2013

> Duties included conducting workshops and individual presentations needed by university community to address educational needs, providing one-on-one and group consultation for university teaching staff needing assistance developing online, hybrid, and technology-enhanced courses, developing resource materials including workshop packets, project descriptions, research instruments, academic publications, and marketing materials, serving as project manager for several

university/community sponsored research initiatives, identifying potential academic initiatives and funding opportunities, conducting research and data analysis of a variety of research initiatives (e.g., social media, eTexts, learner analytics, etc.) to further emerging technology use on campuses, reviewing of research grant proposals on the Digital Futures Research Grant committee hosted by the Provost's office, developing and accessing student learning objectives for implemented and emerging academic initiatives, recording and organizing in-house and community discussions relating to center business.

III.   Invited Presentations:

2015   Invited Presenter at Alverno College's Summer Assessment Workshop. Innovative Teaching and Engagement.

2014   Invited Workshop Facilitator at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. LGBT Digital Storytelling, 2014

2013   Invited Presenter for Lewis and Clark College's Politics Club Panel. Gender and Media in the Case for Chelsea Manning

2013   Invited Presenter for LGBT Resource Center at University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.
          Social Media & LGBT Narratives

2013   Invited Presenter for Social Studies of Information Research Group in the School of Information Studies at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. YouTube & Narratives

2012   Invited Presenter for New Teaching Assistants Training Orientation at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Technologies and Teaching at UWM

2012   Invited Presenter for New Resident Assistants Orientation at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Effective Communication Practices

2011   Invited Lecturer for COMMUN 103 at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The Importance of Delivery in Public Speaking

2010   Invited Presenter for New Teaching Assistants Orientation at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Effective Pedagogical Practices

2007   Invited Lecturer for Undergraduate Family and Child Development Department at Missouri State University. Effective Listening Practices

IV.   Recent Research:

Publications:

Harness, L. (Forthcoming)**.** LGBT and Social Media. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*

Harness, L. (2015). Book Review: T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski, & K. Foot (2014). Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society. *Mobile Media & Communication, 3*(2).

Joosten, T., Barth, D., **Harness, L.**, & Weber, N. (Fall 2013). The impact of instructional development and training for blended teaching on course effectiveness. In A.G. Picciano, C.D. Dziuban & C.R. Graham (Eds.). *Research perspectives in blended learning.* Taylor and Francis.

Joosten, T., Pasquini, L. &, **Harness, L.** (2013, Feb 15). Social media considerations for institutions. *Society for College and University Planning, 6.*

Harness, L. (2011). Book Review: Felicia Wu Song. Virtual Communities: Bowling alone, online together. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 97*

Conference Presentations:

Harness, L. (2016, October). Communication issues and perceived bias be health care providers and LGBTQ patients. Panel Presentation at the annual conference for the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language & Gender. Oak Park, Illinois.

Harness, L. (2016, November). Researcher positionality, reflexivity, and self-care: Exploring the meaning of "do no harm."" Presentation at National Communication Association. Philadelphia, PA.

Harness, L. (2016). National Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements. Presentation at Educause Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

Harness, L. (2015). National Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements. Presentation at Educause Conference in Annaheim, California.

Harness, L. (2013). Constructing the media(ted) "better" LGBT citizen: A Critical Rhetorical Analysis of the It Gets Better Project. Paper will be presented as part of the National

Communication Association pre-conference: Situated Discourses of Citizenship, Washington, DC.

Harness, L. (2012). The rhetorical possibilities and limitations of YouTube and the It Gets Better Project. Paper presented as part of the panel Queer and Here at the Wisconsin Women's Studies Conference and LGBTQ Conference. Oshkosh, WI.

Harness, L. (2011). Preserving voice through protest signs: A rhetorical analysis of the Wisconsin debate's visual rhetoric. Paper presented at National Communication Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Harness, L. (2011). Enacting self-help discourse: A rhetorical analysis of the "It Gets Better" empowering narratives. Paper Presented at the Doctoral Honors Seminar for the National Communication Association. Fargo, ND.

Harness, L. (2011). The visual politics of the Black Panther Party. Paper presented at Central States Communication Association Conference. Milwaukee, WI.

Harness, L. (2011). Re-Marginalizing the marginalized: An analysis of the Photovoice rhetoric. Paper presented at Southern Communication Association Conference, Little Rock, AR.

Harness, L. (2011). Reclassifying activism: An analysis of the CharactersUnite community. Paper presented at Southern Communication Association Conference, Little Rock, AR.

Harness, L. (2010). Scapegoating in the park: A Burkeian analysis of the Large Feeding Ban. Paper presented at National Communication Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Harness, L. (2010). America's Sweetheart: A rhetorical analysis of Barbie as a social, cultural, and political leader. Paper presented at the Women's Study Annual Conference, Whitewater, WI.

Harness, L. (2009). The Scrapbook of my life: Analyzing the rhetoric of camera technology. Presented at the National Communication Association Annual Conference. Chicago, IL.

Harness, L. (2009). Gaining a clue in the game we call Life: Analyzing the underlying ideologies of traditional board games. Presented at the Women's Studies Conference, Madison, WI.

Harness, L. (2009). Standing at different social points: A G.I.F.T.S. presentation. Activity presented at the Central States Communication Association Annual Conference, St. Louis, MO.

Harness, L. (2009). Constructing a street family: The importance of relationships on homeless youth's identity. Presented at the Central States Communication Association Annual Conference, St. Louis, MO.

Harness, L. (2008). Exploring the social identity of homeless youth: An uncommon blend of social identity and co-cultural theory. Presented at the National Communication Association Annual Conference, San Diego, CA.

Harness, L. (2007). An analysis of non-homeless individuals perceptions of homeless youth. Recipient of Top Graduate Paper. Presented at the Sooners Conference, Oklahoma

Harness, L. (2007). A symphony of silence: Giving a voice to marginalized populations.Presented as a part of the panel Training Rebels with a Cause: Teaching Activism in the Classroom at the Central States Communication Association Annual Conference, Madison, WI.

Harness, L. (2007) Political issues and campaign content: An analysis of topics in Sunday morning talk shows. Presented at the National Communication Association Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.

University, Department, and Community Service Activities:

Reviewer for academic journal: *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies.* Taylor and Francis Publishing.

Team Leader for Alverno's Community Day (2016)

Member of Alverno's Feminist Education Group. (2015-2016)

Mentor for Business Internship with community project *Guns, Grief and Grace*. (2015-2016)

Creator of Community Social Group for Women (2014-2016)

Reviewer for National Communication Association *LPH Undergraduate Student Journal.* Invited book reviewer for Oxford University Press (2012) *Public Speaking and Democratic Participation: Speaking, Listening, and Deliberating in the Civic Realm.*

Session Leader for Great Ideas for Teaching Speech, CSA

Annual review for Feminist and Women Studies/Women's Caucus, NCA

Annual reviewer for Rhetorical Criticism and Theory Division, NCA

Honors and Awards:

2016 New Course Development for Alverno College's Adult Evening and Online
Program.
2012 UWM Communication Department nominee for Central States Communication
Association Cooper Award Outstanding PhD teaching assistant
2011 NCA Doctoral Honors Seminar Participant, Fargo, ND.

2010-2011 Recipient of grant to co-direct the Public Speaking Showcase.
Awarded by UWM Provost Johannes Britz

2011 Mel Miller Service Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Communication
Department

2010 Mel Miller Service Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Communication
Department

2008 The Char Berquist and John Bourhis Award for Excellence in Engaged Graduate
Scholarship, Missouri State University, Communication Department

2007-2008 University Nominee for Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant, Missouri State
University

2007 Top Graduate Paper, Sooner Conference, Oklahoma

2005 National Speakers Association's Cavett Robert Public Speaking Scholarship