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COMING OUT OF THE CONFESSIONAL:  
JAMES E. MCGREEVEY AND THE “GAY AMERICAN” CONSTRUCT

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Coming Out of the Confessional:

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On August 12, 2004 former Governor of New Jersey James E. McGreevey held a nationally televised press conference in which he announced his resignation and labeled himself a “Gay American.” In this project, I examine the discourses of McGreevey’s speech, the newspaper coverage of his resignation announcement, and McGreevey’s 2006 memoir in order to explicate the construction of the event. The analysis centers on two specific discursive contexts: the coming out script and the confession, in understanding the language of the “Gay American.” I examine how these two discourses were used throughout the construction of the McGreevey event to create both a memory of McGreevey as well as the Gay American construct itself. Lisa Duggan’s work on homonormativity and Jasbir Puar’s concept homonationalism provide a springboard for examining the Gay American construct as a new homonormative subject. Overall, this thesis seeks to explain how narratives of the media event surrounding McGreevey’s

resignation were constructed and what implications these narratives hold for homonormativity in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States.

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## Introduction

On August 11, 2004 James E. McGreevey had been the rather unremarkable governor of New Jersey for almost two years; admired by some in the state, questioned and disliked by others, and generally un-noticed by anyone outside of New Jersey and its bordering states. On August 12, however, he became a nation-wide media icon and the object of sympathy, admiration, scorn, and accusations, from many, including those who did not know of him previously. This project focuses on the event which caused this sudden shift and the implications that the event holds for wider social and theoretical movements.

On August 12, 2004 Governor McGreevey held a nationally televised press conference announcing his intent to resign, and disclosing some of the circumstances behind his decision. Leading into the announcement of his resignation, McGreevey revealed that he had struggled with his identity for most of his life, but recently had come to acknowledge his “truth” as “A Gay American.” (McGreevey 2004) He also admitted having an “adult consensual affair with another man” despite his marriage to his wife Dina Matos McGreevey. Within the speech, McGreevey stated that he did not think his sexuality should affect his ability to govern and indeed, that this disclosure may have been able to make him a stronger governor. Nevertheless, he explained that he felt the need to resign “given the circumstances surrounding the affair and its likely impact upon [his] family and [his] ability to govern.” (McGreevey 2004) However, he was unclear

about what these circumstances were and did not identify the man with whom he was involved. The resignation was to take effect on November 15 of that year, giving time for a transition, but eliminating the possibility of a special election for his replacement.

The event instantly became the object of media attention as details and rumors circulated about McGreevey's relationship with his wife, the name and identity of the man with whom he was supposedly involved, and McGreevey's choice to resign in November. These three topics were the center of the majority of the news coverage about the event, but they were certainly not the only stories discussed. McGreevey's resignation also sparked many reports of the personal reactions of his constituents and citizens across the country, especially in specialty newspapers which catered to specific populations such as gay or ethnic-focused sources. For example, McGreevey's press conference statements prompted gay activists and journalists to claim McGreevey as the first openly gay governor in the United States. While individual responses from gay spokespeople varied, there was a heavy overtone of pride and sympathy among gay news sources (eg. Zuckowski 2004, Travers 2004, Katalinas 2004). Other newspapers which catered to Roman Catholic communities, such as the Filipino newspapers in New Jersey, focused on McGreevey's longstanding and complicated relationship with the church and questioned McGreevey's ability to save his marriage (eg. Villadiego 2004).

The marriage between Dina Matos McGreevey and Jim McGreevey was also a focus of the mainstream press as reporters speculated about the stability of their future relationship, wondered whether or not Matos McGreevey had been aware of McGreevey's sexuality and affair, and questioned her choice to stand beside her husband during the press conference. Golan Cipel, a former New Jersey state employee who

McGreevey had appointed to serve first in a newly created homeland security position and then as a special counselor to the governor, was named by anonymous sources as the man with whom McGreevey had had an affair. This disclosure rekindled criticisms of McGreevey's choice to appoint Cipel to office. Meanwhile, Cipel refused to comment to the press for a period of time before claiming that McGreevey had lied about the 'relationship' and that McGreevey had actually targeted him as the object of sexual harassment.

McGreevey had appointed Cipel to the homeland security position in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, a close neighbor of northern New Jersey. Reportedly believing that Cipel would be an asset based on his experiences in Israel, McGreevey created the new position for him despite the fact that Cipel could not get the necessary security clearances to carry out the job effectively, given that he was not an American citizen. Faced with overwhelming criticism from politicians and New Jersey residents alike, McGreevey moved Cipel to the post of "Special Council." However, scandal continued as no one could figure out what Cipel was doing to warrant his large salary and seemingly special treatment from the governor. In the end, Cipel left the New Jersey government and was given a new job outside of the government by McGreevey's friend and campaign contributor, Charles Kushner, who had also sponsored Cipel in order to allow his immigration to the United States.

At the time of McGreevey's resignation speech, Charles Kushner was also an object of media scrutiny. Stories about a federal investigation of Kushner's allegedly illegal campaign contributions permeated the media; however, the stories became even

more titillating when Kushner ended up under indictment for trying to obstruct the investigation. Reportedly, Kushner hired sex workers to obtain compromising photographs of some of the people cooperating with the investigation, one of whom was Kushner's brother-in-law, in an effort to disrupt the investigation. However, the disruption did not go according to Kushner's plan. When his interference was detected, he ended up under indictment and at the center of an even more sordid media scandal. Although McGreevey was not directly involved in Kushner's investigation, reporters often connected Kushner's situation and McGreevey's resignation because the two men were linked by campaign contributions, friendship, and common connections to Cipel.

While the press on McGreevey's story died down over time, coverage of the event lasted well past the date of his speech and even after his official resignation, as McGreevey and his wife went through a fairly public divorce which was not finalized until the summer of 2008. Media coverage of the divorce often questioned whether or not Matos McGreevey was aware of her husband's homosexuality prior to his resignation speech. Another layer of scandal was added as a story broke about the couple having a "threesome" sexual relationship with a young man who was their former driver named Teddy Pedersen (eg. MacIntosh 2008). The story came to light during a deposition for the couple's divorce when Pedersen testified under oath about the relationship between the three parties. Matos McGreevey denied that this relationship existed while others argued that she must have been aware of McGreevey's sexuality due to these encounters. Some sources reported that McGreevey originally included a reference to the threesome in his memoir, but that he removed it before publication believing that it was "unnecessarily harmful" (MacIntosh 2008).

Between the time of the speech and the finalization of the divorce, a number of other key events occurred: the 2006 publication of McGreevey's *The Confession*, the 2007 release of Dina Matos McGreevey's *Silent Partner: A Memoir of My Marriage*, and McGreevey's admittance later that year to the General Theological Seminary in Manhattan, where he trained to become an Episcopal priest. While the national media attention was strongest around the time of the resignation speech, these subsequent episodes elongated the coverage, continuously building on the event's narratives for several years.

Throughout all of the stages of the McGreevey resignation event, three major genres of text affected the construction of the event: the speech, the newspaper coverage, and the memoir. In this project, I examine how each of these three genres influenced the McGreevey event as well as what they contribute to the construction of a mainstreamed Gay American subject. Both the genres themselves as well as the discourses of the texts within these genres contribute to the idea of the Gay American, which McGreevey introduced in his speech. The three genres also have contact with broad publics through massive circulation, but address the personal struggles of McGreevey's identity creation and disclosure, thereby mixing public and private spheres in telling ways. I argue that the discourses at work within the speech, press, and book work toward creating a Gay American subject position which can be observed by anyone with access to these media sources. In order to demonstrate the main influences on the Gay American construct in the story of McGreevey, I interrogate the discursive roles of coming out, confession, and conversion.

The first chapter examines the resignation speech as an event and as a text. I use Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities to assert that McGreevey utilized the scripts of coming out and of the confession to situate himself within both the gay 'community' and the Roman Catholic 'community.' This mixture of discourse created both the narrative of his speech and the construction of the Gay American. The chapter travels through a short history of gay rights movements in order to explain the development and implications of the coming out script. I also work in this chapter with Lisa Duggan's (2000, 2004) concept of homonormativity and Jasbir Puar's (2007) homonationalism work to answer the key question, *Who is the Gay American?* With regards to the confession script, the chapter refers to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1995) in order to explicate the origins of the sacrament of confession and also continues to consider Foucault's (1978) writing on how confession gained influence in contexts outside of the church.

In chapter two, I turn to the discourse within the newspaper coverage during the first week after McGreevey's speech. Close reading and quantitative analysis of fifty articles provide the center of this chapter's discussion. These analyses serve to illustrate how the text of the speech was used to create and manipulate McGreevey's voice within the press coverage as well as what other actors in the event were able or unable to speak within these articles. After introducing McGreevey's gayness and his political corruption as the two main themes of the newspaper coverage, I introduce the question, *Did James McGreevey's announcement of his gayness draw more attention in newspaper coverage than was drawn by his alleged political corruption?* I examine the interactions of the sexuality story and the corruption story in the newspapers so as to further expound on the

Gay American construct within the context of the McGreevey event. This chapter also takes up issues of race, religion, and class with the goal of mapping the borders of the Gay American category.

Chapter three takes up McGreevey's memoir *The Confession* to examine how the coming out and confession discourses intertwined throughout his writing. I examine McGreevey's treatment of the speech in his memoir through close reading, paying particular attention to the connection between coming out and conversion in his writing. As I explained in the chapter, this connection holds significant implications for the Gay American subject. The chapter also asks questions about the role of penance in McGreevey's writing, especially in the context of his recollections about his experiences at the Meadows rehabilitation facility, as well as in the practice of memoir writing itself.

Overall, this project aims to begin a discussion of the McGreevey resignation event and its Gay American construct as a contribution to the literatures on gay rights movements, discourse and sexuality, and sexuality and religion. Little to no academic writing now exists on the specific case of McGreevey's resignation speech, so this study seeks in part to begin an intellectual dialogue around this case. Beyond the specific case, however, this thesis and the issues it discusses hold implications for greater literature on interactions of sexuality, class, race and ethnicity, American politics, religion, social movements, and media. This thesis will add to general understandings of how politics and the media manipulate stories related to sexuality and political corruption. The thesis also serves to provide insight regarding understandings of discourse on politics, patriotism, homosexuality, coming out, and gay rights in the beginning of the 21st Century. As we move into the second decade of the century and begin to gain enough

distance to look back on the early 2000s, I believe that this thesis will contribute to the beginnings of a critical history of media discourse on homosexuality in this era.

My arguments in this thesis use Jim McGreevey as a starting point. He is used as a case study, in some respects, but it is important to distinguish between Jim McGreevey the person and the McGreevey event. To illustrate, activist, Romaine Patterson is quoted in the play *The Laramie Project: 10 Years After*<sup>1</sup> as she describes how she retained her memories of her friend Matthew Shepard despite organizing activist responses to his 1998 murder. Patterson said that she had to create a separation between “Matt” her friend and the memories of him, and “Matthew Shepard,” the event of his death and all the media attention which followed. Though McGreevey’s case is a very different situation, I argue that a similar distinction needs to be made here. This thesis is not about Jim McGreevey. It is about the McGreevey event and the discourse surrounding it. Speculations about his motivations, identity, and so on, have been made by others, and while this study takes up some of these speculations as materials of study, I do not aim to discover a ‘truth’ of McGreevey’s experiences or contribute further to the practice of speculating. Instead, I aim to ask and answer some questions about the discourse surrounding this event, especially in regards to the discourses of gay activism and religion.

In order to establish the conceptual space of the questions I ask, I would like to briefly reflect on the title of this project: *Coming Out of the Confessional*. First of all, and most obviously, this title references the two main discursive traditions addressed in the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Laramie Project: 10 Years After* is as yet unpublished. It was written by the New York City theatre group, The Tectonic Theater Project led by Moises Kaufman. The group was touring with the play at the time that this thesis was written.

arguments: coming out and the religious confession. So let us begin here. Coming out is after all a shortening of the phrase “coming out of the closet” as used to represent a disclosure of a gay (or other sexual or gender minority) identity. Someone who has not disclosed but is presumed gay by others is said to be “in the closet” or “closeted.” In her *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick argues that “the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (Sedgwick 1990, 71) So what is the closet?

Sedgwick points to the lengthy Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word “closet” which describes among other things a private place, a small space, and one usually reserved for devotion or study (Sedgwick, 65). If we are to take all these pieces of definitions into account, the metaphorical closet of the undisclosed gay subject can be described as a private place in which the subject can question or study their own sexuality or identity. It is small, and therefore limiting. There is no room to stretch. The closeted person may be devoted to privacy, maintaining the closet walls, or to further delving into the self before emerging from the closet space. While the lived experiences of actual gay- or homosexual-identified individuals obviously vary and may not align with this picture, this is the image of the closet which we have in the cultural imaginary. This is the discursive closet. It assumes that the closeted subject will emerge; that they will inevitably disclose their identity or suffer a limited life.

The confessional is also a small, private room reserved for devotion. Unlike the closet, however, disclosure occurs within the confessional. The disclosures which are spoken in the confessional are kept confidential between the speaker and the listener (or confessor). So what happens when the subject leaves the confessional? This is the time for penance, atonement, a change in the subject’s thoughts and actions. Penance is the

other theme behind this project's title, *Coming Out of the Confessional*. Throughout the narrative of the McGreevey event, discourse centered not only on his coming out or confession, but also on his penance, the changes in his character, self-outlook, and approach to life. Through the investigations of these three chapters, I aim to illuminate the roles of coming out, confession, and penance on the creation of the Gay American subject.

## Chapter One: The Speech

The McGreevey event began with the speech and its spectators. I would like to begin my analysis with an illustration from Keith Boykin's (2006) account of watching the speech. Boykin's story begins when he answered his cellular phone on August 12, 2004 to hear his friend Maurice ask "Are you watching TV?" Less than three years after the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11), Boykin immediately registered that "the urgency of the question suggested that something was happening that was important enough to be broadcast live on several different networks" (65). He immediately became worried that another attack had occurred and turned on the television to see what had happened:

I switched to CNN and to other networks, and there [McGreevey] was again on almost every channel. "He hasn't said it yet, but I can just feel it," Maurice told me. "He said something about grappling with his identity since he was a child. And he talked about having some 'feelings' that made him different from the other kids. I really think he's gonna come out," Maurice said. I was still doubtful—no governor of any state had ever come out before—but I could not deny the obvious code language in the words Maurice had quoted to me. Separated by thousands of miles, Maurice and I watched the television together in stunned silence as McGreevey finally reached the climax of his speech. "At a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul and decide one's unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is. And so my truth is that I am a gay American" (Boykin, 63-4).

Boykin's account raises several important issues about how the speech could be, and was, viewed in its original context by some viewers. First of all, just by the nature of being presented as a national news conference which was aired on multiple stations, McGreevey's speech affectively referenced the attacks of 9/11. In this manner, the speech presented as an urgent matter of crucial national importance in a very different way than

it would have before 2001. Given that McGreevey's resignation held little political importance for the majority of the country, the choice to present it as a national matter is telling. As will be discussed shortly, 9/11 was not only referenced through these means, but also within the "Gay American" label itself. It seems to be the use of this label which made the event of national concern. I argue that an immerging mainstream gay subject was publicly given a name, using the figure of McGreevey as an example.

As was illustrated in the quotation from Boykin, there was a recognizable script of coming out which could be observed by spectators. I will discuss this script in detail shortly, but at this point, I would like to raise some questions about the script and the idea of the Gay American: *Who is included or excluded from this shared understanding of coming out? Who is able to come out and who is kept silent?* These questions are tied closely to McGreevey's use of the term "Gay American," as they reference the emergence of a gay mainstream which has become more publicly acceptable within the early twenty-first century. Boykin's doubt and the context of his story hint at one possible answer, given that he is an African American author writing about the down low (DL) scene.<sup>2</sup> Though Boykin is an 'out' gay man (and therefore not a participant in the DL), his position as a non-white gay man may limit his access to the Gay American construct. As will be discussed further, race is one of the lines drawn at the borders of Gay American citizenship. Just as McGreevey was not considered part of the DL before his speech though he participated in similar activities to those who are considered insiders in the DL, men (and women) of color are kept on the outside of the Gay American label due to racialized boundaries.

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<sup>2</sup> The DL traditionally refers to a phenomenon of men of color who have sex with men, but do not identify themselves as gay.

In this chapter, I interrogate the discursive methods used within the speech in order to illuminate its messages about McGreevey's homosexuality, affair, and resignation as well as to better understand the concept of the 'Gay American' subject.<sup>3</sup> A full transcript of the speech is available in the first appendix. I will examine how the script of the "coming out" story and the script of Catholic confession are combined within the speech as well as what implications this discursive fusion lends to the imagined 'Gay American' community (Anderson 1983). McGreevey's speech references both his homosexuality and his Catholic background so these recognizable scripts are crucial in understanding how the speech was constructed and what types of messages it sent, intentionally or unintentionally, about homosexuality. I also ask how the discourses behind McGreevey's speech helped to shape the memory of the event. By focusing on the Gay American label and narratives of coming out and confession, McGreevey and his advisors presented one version of the resignation which eclipsed other possibilities. Let us begin the analysis with the trademark of McGreevey's speech, "I am a Gay American" as the center of this analysis. This is the quotation which was picked up most by the media (as will be illustrated in the following chapter) and it came to represent the story of McGreevey's resignation.

### **Who is the Gay American?**

I suspect that the majority of gay spectators (as well as many non-gay spectators) could predict the speech's outcome, as Boykin's friend did, from the first few sentences.

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<sup>3</sup> While most transcripts and quotations of the speech use the capitalization "gay American," I have chosen to use "Gay American" throughout in order to distinguish the homonormative figure which this thesis discusses. Within quotations of other sources, however, the phrase will appear as it does in the original.

Its predictability lies in the coming out trope, a narrative script widely recognized as the ‘proper’ or ‘common’ way to disclose a homosexual identity. The script begins with the narrator’s childhood feelings of difference or not fitting in and continues through adolescent and/or adult personal identity struggles (and possible sexual experimentation); ultimately, it leads to the present identity disclosure, “I am gay.” Each time the script is utilized, there are nuances with respect to the individual’s circumstances, but it almost always follows this predictable pattern. As can be seen by reading or listening to McGreevey’s speech, it clearly follows this pattern; mapping his childhood difference and struggle, his adolescent and adult reflection and turmoil about his identity, and the final admission “my truth is that I am a Gay American.” Anyone who was familiar with this script, (which, due to the mass media’s attention to coming out stories, would not be a small minority) would be likely to recognize it while watching the press conference on August 12, 2004.

What was perhaps less expected was McGreevey’s *presentation* of his “coming out,” specifically the national press conference setting and use of the phrase “Gay American.” While some spectators are likely to have recognized the speech as one of coming out, the impact of these new elements must be studied. After all, while the speech references scripts such as coming out, it is still an event, and therefore subject to the influences of its context. In particular, I suggest that we examine the presentation of McGreevey’s speech in the context of post-9/11 patriotism as well as the then-recent legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts and domestic partnerships in New Jersey. I illustrate the influence of these three events on the meaning of McGreevey’s “Gay American” label through answering the question, *Who is the Gay American?*

In order to explain who the Gay American is and is not, let us first consider each of these words individually and in then in combination. It is notable that McGreevey called himself gay as opposed to homosexual since the term “homosexual” has historically carried implications of pathology (Duberman 1993, Foucault 1978). Despite his descriptions of struggling with his identity, the use of the word gay suggests that McGreevey did not view his sexuality as something that was wrong with him. The word gay was also used frequently in the media at the time of the speech as many activist and civil/human rights debates focused on GLBT people, so it is likely that viewers of his speech would be familiar with some of the relevant debates of the time. Therefore, by calling himself gay, McGreevey may have been able to send a more positive message about his understanding of his sexual orientation in spite of the struggles he faced.

To understand McGreevey’s use of the term “American,” one must look to the post-9/11 culture of patriotism which still affected public discourse in 2004. In this context, not only did the presentation of McGreevey’s speech reference the 9/11 events, as was discussed earlier, but so did the term “American” itself. Still only a few years after the attacks and the start of the “War on Terror,” pride in being an American was commonly talked about, especially in the field of politics (Puar 2007). Such patriotism was widespread, but especially strong amongst those with more conservative politics and those who were in favor of the war. By referencing his citizenship and loyalty to his country, McGreevey may have been able to soften the blow of his news for those spectators who were uncertain of their views towards homosexuals or did not usually include out gay people in their view of patriotic Americans. In this way, McGreevey

wielded his privilege as a citizen and a patriot in order to gain respect from those who may have otherwise challenged him.

Considering the patriotic resonance of the “Gay American” term, it is also important to review what McGreevey said immediately following his confession of gayness:

And so my truth is that I am a gay American. And I am blessed to live in the greatest nation with the tradition of civil liberties, the greatest tradition of civil liberties in the world, in a country which provides so much to its people (McGreevey 2004).

Here McGreevey continued to soften the blow of his confession by blatantly praising the United States and its civil liberty tradition, despite gay activists’ arguments that gay, lesbian, and queer people were not being treated equally. By making such comments and using the two very charged terms in combination (“Gay American”), McGreevey simultaneously invoked elements of liberal gay activism, conservative patriotism, and citizenship.

The more conservative elements of McGreevey’s “Gay American” label also align with the sentiment of guilt he portrayed throughout the speech. While he called himself “gay,” the activist pride aspect of the term appears to be absent from the rest of his speech. Instead McGreevey’s pride was based in his family and his ability to be honest despite difficulty at the time of the speech. McGreevey presented himself as much more troubled when it came to the issue of his gayness. He even stated that his gayness was the truth “not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is” (McGreevey 2004). This context, along with the fact that he admitted his affair with a man while he was married, helps in understanding why McGreevey combined his coming out with his

political resignation. I argue that McGreevey and his advisors constructed the speech with a focus on his sexual orientation, sexual conduct, and relationship with his family such that the financial and blackmail scandals of his resignation became all but lost. By utilizing several types of privilege such as his race, gender, citizenship, status as a father, and patriotism, alongside his coming out, McGreevey was further able to draw attention away from the additional scandals around his resignation.

Perhaps even more importantly, however, McGreevey referred in the quotation just mentioned, to his gayness as a ‘truth’. Specifically, the full sentence before McGreevey labels himself a “Gay American” stated that “at a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul and decide one's unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is” (McGreevey 2004). Besides alluding to personal struggle with his gayness, McGreevey here implied that it was a deep-seated and essential truth of his being. In fact, it was stated not only “a” truth of his being, but his “unique truth in the world”. This extreme sense of his gayness as truth placed McGreevey’s homosexuality at the center of his existence and suggested that to ignore or fail to admit this characteristic was to deny the ‘truth’ of who he is. Belief in such a position necessitates coming out in order to become visible to others.

Language such as this is tied to the identity politics type of gay activism which gained mainstream support through the 1980s and 1990s. Lisa Duggan explains this form of activism and its political foci:

*Identity politics*, in the contemporary sense of the right-claiming focus of balkanized groups organized to pressure the legal and electoral systems for inclusion and redress, appeared out of the field of disintegrating social movements [in the 1980s] (italics original, Duggan 2004, xvii).

The disintegration Duggan refers to here is that of the diverse liberal and radical social movements of the 1970s. Duggan claims that as these older movements and organizations fell apart in the early 1980s, the ones which remained or which were just beginning focused on identity politics as a means of legal, electoral, and legislative lobbying rather than working with other forms of more radical politics. In the midst of this era, the Human Rights Campaign Fund (now Human Rights Campaign or HRC, discussed previously) was founded in 1980 in order to raise funds for congressional candidates who were supportive of gay-positive legislation ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)).

As was mentioned earlier, the HRC has often used the phrase “gay Americans,” or more recently “LGBT Americans,” in their literature in order to emphasize the citizenship and expected rights of their ‘constituents’ ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)). The HRC also strongly advocates for coming out as part of a social movement and relies heavily on the ideas that gayness (and bisexuality and transgenderism) is not a choice, but an essential aspect of people’s identities. In the argument of the organization, gay people (and other sexual/gender minorities) can therefore be grouped together as a population which deserves ‘equal rights’.

While many of these concepts work their way into McGreevey’s speech, I still hold that the implications of McGreevey’s use of the phrase “Gay American” are slightly different than those of the HRC’s usage. The HRC uses this phrase, after all, in the plural and in reference to a group of people who are believed to have (at least) two common characteristics; gayness and American citizenship. They also utilize the term to mobilize political ideals in a way which assumes that all those within the category share a common sense of political, legal, and legislative desires. McGreevey’s ‘Gay American,’ however,

is a singular identity. It may tie him to the group HRC refers to, but there are some nuances at work here. For one, McGreevey's 'Gay American' position does not necessarily have *any* political demands. In fact, as was highlighted earlier, he represents the country's human rights record in glowing terms. In order to explicate some of the additional distinctions at play, let us consider the theory of homonationalism and its concept of "sexual exceptionism" (Puar).

In her writing on homonationalism in the post-9/11 United States, Jasbir Puar argues that "sexual exceptionism" is utilized as "homosexual subjects who have limited legal rights within the U.S. civil context gain significant representational currency when situated within the global scene of the war on terror" (Puar, 2, 4). Let us examine how she further explains the process through which homonationalism is produced:

In the state of exception, the exception insidiously becomes the rule, and the exceptional is the excellence that exceeds the parameters of proper subjecthood and, by doing so, redefines these parameters to then normativize and render invisible (yet transparent) its own excellence or singularity... The historical and contemporaneous production of an emergent normativity, homonormativity, ties the recognition of homosexual subjects, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism (9).

Puar argued that a gay mainstream was utilized in post-9/11 politics as a way to "prove" the United States' as a liberal and welcoming Western culture, while framing the Middle East as an oppressive region devoid of human rights. In this context, the exception (gayness) became the rule (homonormativity) through promotion of "the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism" (homonationalism).

Puar also highlighted that this acceptance of gays in the mainstream which was used as an example of the liberal West was not, however, inclusive of all people who may

be gay- or homosexual-identified (and likely not inclusive of those who are queer-identified). She cites, for example how the military “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy unequally discriminated against gay people of color because of the disproportionately large number of people of color in the military. Those accepted into the realm of homonormativity also must participate in other normative behaviors which mimic traditional heterosexual couples such as monogamy and established gender presentations. This understanding of sexual exceptionism provides one possible answer to the question of who is included and excluded from coming out or from being considered a Gay American.

While homonationalism may have been a new phenomenon in the post-9/11 culture, U.S. homonormativity has much deeper roots which stretch back to the 1950s homophile movement when coming out was first publicly advocated and organizations such as the New York Mattachine Society picketed in business suits (Duberman). From these roots, gay activism became more diversified through the 1960s and 1970s, but has been becoming steadily more mainstreamed through the 1980s to the present, as was previously mentioned in my discussion of Duggan’s work. Duggan also notes that in the early 1990s, “alongside radical and progressive AIDS activism, a new strain of gay moralism appeared [and] attacks on ‘promiscuity’ and the ‘gay lifestyle’ accompanied advocacy of monogamous marriage as a responsible disease-prevention strategy” (Duggan 2000, 182). I argue that the figure of the monogamous, mainstreamed liberal “Gay American” then arrives not only as a post-9/11 construct based in ‘proving’ the U.S.’s progressive status, but also out of several other eras’ searches for public

acceptance and physical safety for a privileged population of homosexual individuals in the United States.

In this vein, as McGreevey drew on his privileges while delivering his speech, (whiteness, maleness, citizenship, patriotism, etc.) he unwittingly suggested that a Gay American shares these privileges as well. Amongst the line drawing exercises of distinguishing between “us” and “them” in the post 9/11 era, particular subjects could be considered Gay Americans while others were not eligible. Specifically, gay men, lesbians, or queers who did not recognize the coming out trope or did not fit into particular positions of privilege may not have been considered Gay Americans in this understanding. Assimilation into the mainstream and patriotic “American” culture was crucial (Puar). Here patriotism or homonationalism may not only include pride in the country, but also participation in consumer culture and maintaining a location in white, middle-class, and other key subject positions (Puar).

The relationship between McGreevey’s speech and the debates around gay marriage and domestic partnerships play into these concepts of homonationalism as well. At the time of McGreevey’s speech, a significant amount of media attention was devoted to debates around same-sex marriages (often called gay marriage), given that Massachusetts had just legalized same-sex marriages in the spring before McGreevey’s speech. Likewise, domestic partnerships were legalized in the state of New Jersey under McGreevey’s administration. Gay marriage debates are especially important in understanding the “Gay American” label because of the associations between the word “American” and the status of citizenship. Many gay activists, including representatives of the HRC, argued in favor of same-sex marriages at the time as a civil right and cited their

citizenship as a reason for legalizing such unions. Some such activists even used accusations of the government treating them as “second class citizens” as part of the debate. Such activists have also often been criticized for encouraging assimilation and excluding those who cannot assimilate (e.g. based on class, race, etc.). These arguments provide not only an important context in which to understand McGreevey’s speech, but also fine examples of Puar’s use of the type of homonormativity assumed by homonationalism. This position of the homonationalist subject (white, middle-class, consumer, patriotic, etc.) is perhaps the best understanding of what McGreevey is referring to when he calls himself a “Gay American.”

### **The Discourse of Imagined Communities**

As was previously mentioned, discourse from both the coming out script and the confession is evident in McGreevey’s resignation speech. These two genres of discourse originate from and represent two imagined communities (Anderson 1983); ‘coming out’ from the gay community and confession from the Catholic community. I suggest that “Gay Americans” and the Catholic Church are each imagined communities which are each unified through a shared discourse. The communities can then be referenced through the discursive scripts which they each originate. While there may be additional script-like tropes which originate from and signify each of these imagined communities, my analysis will focus on the confession and coming out scripts given that they are each among the most recognizable tropes from their respective “communities” and are used clearly within McGreevey’s speech.

The concept of the imagined community comes out of Benedict Anderson's (1983) study of nationalism; however I hold that it is also applicable to other "communities" with similar properties. Anderson explains that nations are imagined communities "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). This concept can be applied both to Gay Americans and Catholics given that members of each see their community as a cohesive group with shared beliefs and qualities, however they will not actually meet the majority of the members of their respective groups. These imagined communities, Anderson explains, are formed in part through common language, a shared discourse. Shared language such as the coming out script and the confession help to create these imagined communities and 'unite' their members. The communities are also codified by creating distinctions between members and non-members. With a basis in language, imagined communities also can invite non-members in to become members, as with naturalization in the case of nationalism (Anderson). Coming out serves as the way in which individuals become part of a gay community while conversion does the same in Catholicism. In chapter three, I will examine the connections between coming out and conversion within the discourses of McGreevey's memoir. I will now continue the analysis of McGreevey's speech with the influences the discursive traditions of confession and coming out.

### The Confessional Voice of Sexuality

The concept of confession has over time become integrated into many other contexts aside from its origin in the church (Foucault). However, in order to better understand the influence of confession, let us first turn to the current edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995). In this religious text, which provides explanations of the Catholic church's teachings and rituals, old and new are mixed together to illuminate the practice and sacrament of confession. This temporal medley illustrates the deep-rooted traditions of the church and of confession while providing nods to the confession's influence outside of the church. For example, early on in the section on confession, the *Catechism* provides a quotation from the apostle John ("If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (397)) and several pages later refers to the use of confession models in medicine ("for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know" (Council of Trent cited in *Catechism*, 406)).

This second quotation is especially relevant to the study of how confession discourse has circulated in that it is a reference to confession within medicine, but is being used as a metaphor for confession of sins within the church. As Foucault shows, the practice of confessing faults and problems became integrated into medicine as well other contexts but it retained the urgency of being saved through the speech act, which originated in its Catholic context. In other words, the person who is to confess feels the necessity of disclosing their fault/disease/sins to the confessor in order to be forgiven and/or healed. This quotation also highlights the necessity of humility in confessions of all kinds by stating that the person who is to confess cannot be "too ashamed" of what

they are confessing because if they will not admit (or show) the fault, they cannot be healed. In this way, guilt leads to healing better than shame does. Within the church context, the person who confesses must admit and feel that what they have done is wrong, but they are forgiven through confession and shame does not always aid the situation.

The element of forgiveness also relates to the concept of confession and penance as conversion. This experience is described within the *Catechism* as a “conversion of the heart” or “interior conversion.” It does not connote conversion from one religion to another, but a conversion on a spiritual level; the sinful soul changes into something new (399). This conversion, according to the *Catechism*, is achieved through a process of self-examination, detailed confession, and penitential practice of trying to live a more intentional or less sinful life. As will be discussed further in the analysis of McGreevey’s book, this concept of conversion creates an understanding that through the experience of confession, one becomes a new and better person. A similar model becomes apparent in the discussion of coming out discourse in the Gay American mainstream. In both cases, these recognizable and repeatable processes, alongside the actual words spoken, create the scripts of confession and coming out.

In understanding the traditions of confession within and without the Catholic Church, Foucault elucidates how confession and understandings of sexuality have become connected. Given that McGreevey’s ‘confession’ is about sexuality, it is important to take these explanations into account to understand how he utilizes confession in the resignation speech. As Foucault explains, confession of or about sexuality has historically come out of silence:

Without even having to pronounce the word, modern prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence. Censorship (17).

Out of this imposed silence, the church began to demand that sins, including those of sexuality, be spoken about when the sacrament of Confession (also known as Penance, Reconciliation, or Contrition)<sup>4</sup> became codified in 1215 by the Lateran Council. Foucault argues that the creation of the sacrament and its “resulting development of confessional techniques” created a shift from accusatory to self-confessing methods of power as a means of social (and religious) control (58). In addition to this shift in the modality of power, the increase in confession also created a new context for the development of a discourse of sex.

This context for sexual discourse not only provided an acceptable place to speak of sex, but more importantly “an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (italics original, Foucault, 18). From these origins, then, the confessional discourse about sex was focused on the necessity of turning actions, thoughts, and desires all into detailed language which *must* be heard by some listener. As was mentioned in the discussion of the *Catechism*, this feeling of necessity was rooted in the need to save or cleanse the soul from the dangers of sin. Similar incitement to speak about sex can also

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<sup>4</sup> While “sacrament of Confession,” “sacrament of Penance,” “sacrament of Reconciliation,” and “sacrament of Contrition” are used interchangeably and refer to the same set of practices which comprise a ritual (sacrament), confession and penance are two separate parts of this ritual. Confession refers to the speech act in which sins are described to the confessor (usually a priest or bishop) while penance refers to the process of atonement which follows the confession. Penance may include prayers, charity, and/or other good works.

be seen in more recent anti-AIDS activists who encouraged coming out as a means of disease prevention.

Likewise, Foucault also argued that “sex was considered a problem of truth” and that confession was used as a procedure for producing or giving light to that truth (56). In one passage, Foucault describes the concept of sex as truth in terms which not only speak to confession, but also relate intimately to the discourse of “coming out”:

It seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation (60).

This description of the necessity of confessing sexuality as a type of truth relates back to a passage of McGreevey’s speech previously discussed:

At a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul and decide one's unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is. And so my truth is that I am a gay American (McGreevey 2004).

Here, whether knowingly or not, McGreevey’s speech resonates with Foucault’s language of sexuality as a truth lodged in a deep place within the self which must be examined and brought to the surface. In this way, the earlier discussion of truth in McGreevey’s speech ties back to the discourse of confession and its influences in the script of coming out.

Elements of penance also resonate clearly in McGreevey’s writing, especially within his memoir *The Confession* (2006) which will be discussed in chapter three. The language of penance is also recognizable within McGreevey’s resignation speech:

Let me be clear, I accept total and full responsibility for my actions. However, I'm required to do now, to do what is right to correct the consequences of my actions and to be truthful to my loved ones, to my friends and my family and also to myself (McGreevey 2004).

What McGreevey explains he is “required to do” is to resign, and so his resignation is presented as part of his penance since this is what he is doing to “correct the consequences” of what he presents as his wrongdoing. In response to his ‘sin’ of adultery, he presents himself as needing to resign and “to be truthful to [his] loved ones, to [his] friends and [his] family and also to [himself]” as a form of atonement. To clarify, the concern here is not whether McGreevey viewed his resignation as a form of penance or his speech as a confession, rather I argue that the discourse of confession and penance were used in his resignation (whether intentionally or not) as one mode of narrative construction.

Finally, before moving away from confession discourse, I would like to note the power relationship which is assumed in the confession script. Obviously, within the original context of Catholic confession, the person who was confessing would tell their sins to a priest or bishop (the confessor), i.e. to a listener in a position of power (Foucault). Within the Catholic tradition, this listener is not only in a role of social power, but actually holds the ability to absolve the confessor of their sins (*Catechism*). With this origin of the script, listeners to confessions outside of the church also often hold positions of power (as in the case of a doctor), or are able to exercise power by nature of being the listener of the confession (Foucault). In many of these cases, the listener may not be able to “absolve” the “sin,” but is still able to grant or refuse forgiveness and in some cases, such as a doctor, may be able to provide some form of healing. This power dynamic is also evident in McGreevey’s speech:

I am also here today because, shamefully, I engaged in adult consensual affair with another man, which violates my bonds of matrimony. It was wrong. It was foolish. It

was inexcusable. And for this, I ask the forgiveness and the grace of my wife (McGreevey 2004).

This particular example is interesting because there are multiple power dynamics at work. Within the passage quoted above, McGreevey acknowledges his wife as one able to grant or refuse forgiveness. However the confession is presented to the media and viewer audience of the press conference.<sup>5</sup> Dina Matos McGreevey, McGreevey's wife, was present, but standing behind and beside him in a position showing support, rather than facing him and being addressed by him. In this way, Matos McGreevey is referenced as one listener to the confession; however the audience was really who the speech was being addressed to. McGreevey acknowledged that he would be judged (and either granted or refused forgiveness) not only by his wife, but also by his constituents and other viewers. As I will elaborate in the next section, this power dynamic is also evident in the coming out script, though it operates in a slightly different manner.

### **The Coming Out Script**

Given that I have already provided some details on the history of coming out and its related social movements, I would like to turn now to a discussion of some of its institutionalized discourse. The believed importance of coming out, which I previously discussed, resulted in formal models and guides of how to do so, such as Cass' (1979) Sexuality Identity Formation Model. Cass' model has become so well recognized and entrenched that it still appears in more recent guides on coming out for GLBT people and professionals who work with them (such as social workers and other mental health

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<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed in the following chapter, McGreevey also ends the speech with asking forgiveness from his constituents. I have chosen here to focus on his wife given that her position in this scene is recycled through the newspaper coverage and McGreevey's memoir, thereby producing the relationship with his wife as the major power dynamic of forgiveness.

professionals) (Eichberg 1990, Hunter 2007). As is evidenced by Cass' six stage model (Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride, Identity Synthesis), the foci of coming out models and the discourse around coming out are often on a linear process of phases which culminates with the product of a well-integrated, gay-identified individual (Hunter, 43).

Hunter and other recent critics of the coming out models argue that earlier understandings of coming out are now dated. For example, Hunter argues that "early findings [such as those of Cass] may not generalize beyond the cohorts that entered adolescence in the 1960s and 1970s" (61). However, coming out as a mandatory stage of identity formation and acceptance is still largely adhered to by mainstream gay populations. Walters (2001) compares the importance of telling coming-out stories for gay-identified (and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-identified) people to the social sharing of the wedding scene for heterosexuals. She elaborates by saying that telling coming out stories is often used as a bonding experience for new same-sex couples or for groups of gay friends and that the most typical stories are about coming out to family members. These stories often have a recognizable script about feeling different as a child (in reference to Cass) and are most often about coming out to an audience which is assumed as straight (Walters). The power structure of these stories, though often about a sense of empowerment felt by the person performing the 'coming out', often mimic the power relationship of the confession in that the listener or receiver often sits in a powerful position in which they can accept or reject the speaker and their sexuality. The power dynamic is especially strong in the case of coming out to one's parents, one of the more common of the shared coming out stories.

The start of McGreevey's speech plays straight into this classic coming out model, as can be seen from the first two sentences:

Throughout my life, I have grappled with my own identity, who I am. As a young child, I often felt ambivalent about myself, in fact, confused (McGreevey 2004).

Here, whether knowingly or not, McGreevey draws on Cass' model's early stages and likewise the beginnings of many other coming out stories. This is what creates the predictability of the speech which I asserted at the beginning of this chapter. A bit further along in the speech, McGreevey elaborates further on Cass' stages of Identity Confusion and Identity Comparison as well as how he fought against acknowledging his gayness earlier in life by getting married and pursuing the lifestyle he led up until the time of the speech:

Yet, from my early days in school, until the present day, I acknowledged some feelings, a certain sense that separated me from others. But because of my resolve, and also thinking that I was doing the right thing, I forced what I thought was an acceptable reality onto myself, a reality which is layered and layered with all the, quote, "good things," and all the, quote, "right things" of typical adolescent and adult behavior... Yet, at my most reflective, maybe even spiritual level, there were points in my life when I began to question what an acceptable reality really meant for me. Were there realities from which I was running? (McGreevey 2004).

As has already been stated, the speech continues on from here by following the recognized script which culminates in McGreevey's statement "I am a Gay American" and the subsequent announcements of his affair and resignation (McGreevey 2004).

Following this acknowledged discourse of coming out, McGreevey's speech presents as a coming out speech as well as a resignation speech. In fact the public and the media referred to his words during the press conference using both of these terms. I argue that

the form of the speech connects McGreevey to the Gay American construct just as strongly as using the phrase “Gay American” itself.

### **Conclusion: The Speech as Narrative**

I began this chapter by asking how and why McGreevey’s speech employed certain discursive methods such as the scripts of confession and coming out. Having answered the questions of how, I now return to why these particular models, as well as the term “Gay American” were used. In response to this question, I argue that McGreevey and his supporters within the administration constructed the resignation speech with reference to these tropes in order to draw attention towards the drama of McGreevey’s personal story of sexuality and struggle and, in turn, away from any other reasons he may have had to resign. Given that he had been accused of political corruption and questionable fundraising methods by a variety of critics throughout his career and that the newspaper coverage of his resignation sometimes brought these accusations back to light, as will be discussed in the following chapter, I suggest that the narratives surrounding McGreevey’s sexuality were used, perhaps even intentionally, in order to lessen the effects of the corruption accusations. In this way, McGreevey’s speech is the first in a series of narratives which construct the story of his resignation to reference certain tropes and manipulate how McGreevey is remembered.

In this chapter I showed how McGreevey’s speech constructed him as a penitent and liberated subject through his confession and coming out. By participating in this confession/coming out speech act, McGreevey presented himself as the Gay American. I

also asked who the Gay American is and how this subject relates to the context of McGreevey's speech. His use of the phrase "Gay American" created the image of the sexual exception that has become normative. The Gay American norm then has its borders. Race, class, patriotism, and national citizenship, along with sexuality, map the borders of this subject. To be a Gay American does not simply mean to be someone who is gay and an American citizen; all of these borders of normativity come into play.

In the following chapters, I will continue to follow how narratives of McGreevey's resignation developed by examining the newspaper coverage of his speech as well as his memoir. Overall, these three chapters will establish how and why the various narratives of the event were constructed and with what collective image of James McGreevey and the "Gay American" they leave us.

## Chapter Two: The Press

After McGreevey set the stage with his memorable speech, news sources of all types were on the case of contributing to the discourses of the event. Through all of the sources in which narratives were constructed, a collective image of James McGreevey and the event of his resignation were fashioned. In this chapter, I speak to the newspaper coverage immediately following<sup>6</sup> the speech in order to see what types of narratives were constructed from the start, how they spoke to the speech itself, and how they shaped later discussions of the event. I have chosen to focus on newspaper coverage as opposed to other news sources in this chapter in order to eliminate some potential problems caused by transcription (as in television or radio news) and in order to be able to locate each article in a geographical context (as opposed to internet sources).

An analysis of fifty articles<sup>7</sup> which were released immediately following McGreevey's speech revealed that the two main themes of the newspaper coverage were (1) McGreevey's gayness and the affair with Cipel and (2) his political corruption. The sample of fifty articles was examined using basic statistical analyses, such as identifying the percentages of articles which used particular themes, as well as qualitative close

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<sup>6</sup> By immediately following, I mean that each article was released in the first (or in one case, second) edition of each of their respective publications following McGreevey's speech. For daily newspapers, this means that the articles were released the following day while articles from weekly newspapers were released in the first weekly edition after the speech. In the case of the two articles from the Jewish Telegraphic Service, no articles were released until the following week due to recognition of the Sabbath.

<sup>7</sup> This study of the fifty articles does not claim to be representative of all articles written in this time period; however it does represent a diverse sample of articles from different geographical regions around the country. The articles were chosen in order to present a variety of points of view and stories about the event. Due to the influence of the Associated Press (AP) a large amount of the newspaper material included in this immediate time frame was recycled from AP sources, often whether or not the article was written by an AP reporter. With this in mind, articles were chosen in order to acknowledge the influence of the AP material without including multiple identical articles.

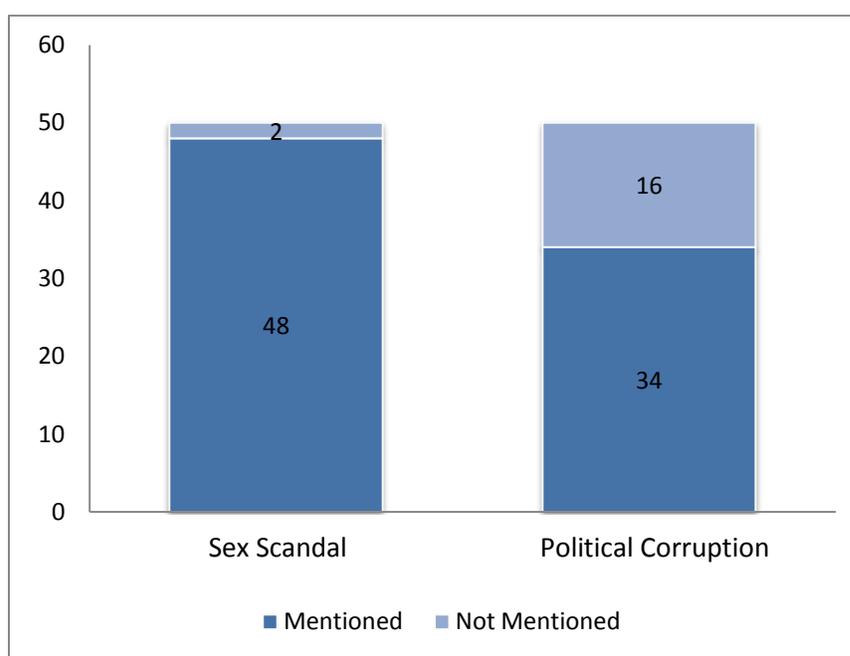
readings of the texts. All articles in the sample are from United States newspapers, however I included both mainstream newspapers and papers which cater to specific ethnic communities in order to more closely examine the role of ethnicity and religion in the coverage of McGreevey's speech. This is relevant given the media discourse on James McGreevey's Irish Catholicism and Golan Cipel's Israeli citizenship.

In this chapter, I seek first and foremost to illustrate how and why McGreevey's gayness and corruption were used in the newspapers. The main question of this chapter is: *Did James McGreevey's announcement of his gayness draw more attention in newspaper coverage than was drawn by his alleged political corruption?* I will also identify which other themes and stylistic elements were used within the press in order to explicate their impact on the overall narrative memory of the event. I highlight which voices were allowed and not allowed to speak in these sources as well as what they had to say. The chapter also compares the newspaper coverage to the text of McGreevey's speech by identifying what parts of the speech were most often quoted in the newspaper articles, which parts were focused on or described, and which were left out. Through addressing each of these questions I illustrate how the newspapers influenced the narrative of the McGreevey event and what impact this had on the construction of the Gay American.

Let us return to our main question: *Did James McGreevey's announcement of his gayness draw more attention in newspaper coverage than was drawn by his alleged political corruption?* I answer this question with a resounding *Yes*. As can be seen in figure one, below, the majority of the articles addressed both issues, however considerably more articles addressed the sex scandal. Also 96% of the articles addressed

the sex scandal, an overwhelming majority, with only two articles omitting the topic. Such an overshadowing treatment of the sex scandal mainly kept the corruptions issues swept under the rug. Even when questions of corruption were raised, they were often in connection to Golan Cipel, and therefore always implicitly connected to issues of sexuality, as will be discussed further. Overall, this manipulation of the narrative allowed the story to become primarily about McGreevey's sexuality, even when other issues were discussed. I argue however, that while McGreevey's sexuality remained at the forefront, the presentation of the story was not actually focused on sex itself.

**Figure 1: The Number of Articles Which Address the Major Themes<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> All figures in this chapter are based on an analysis of the fifty articles provided in the third appendix.

### “It’s Not About Sex”

While the material about the affair and “secret” identity of the governor was often presented as a sex scandal, I argue that this “scandal” is not in fact about sex at all, but rather about identity. In order to develop this argument, I would like to turn briefly to James R. Kincaid’s (2001) essay on the Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton scandal, “It’s Not About Sex”. Kincaid argues:

Sex exists where we can find ways to talk about having sex. Where we can’t do that, there is no sex. Desire, then, is the same thing as sex, in that neither one exists outside of narratives, and those narratives coincide. If we can tell a story of desire, then we are telling a story that will enable us to imagine having sex, which is, for Americans, sex itself (Kincaid 2001,73).

In this understanding, McGreevey’s case is not about sex per se, because no one was writing about sex itself. There simply are no narratives of sex present in the event; instead the language is about adultery, corruption, and personal struggle, but most of all it is about the Gay American. As it is written in the newspapers, then, this is not a sex scandal, but an identity scandal or a *sexuality* scandal. All of the language present in the articles feeds into this alternate narrative. The adultery constructs McGreevey as “the closet gay,” “the cheater,” “the torn man,” even “the liar,” but it does not provide us with actual sex. In other words, the scandal is not about what McGreevey *did*, but who he “is.”

The sexual identity narrative was further constructed through use of the ‘gay representative.’ Several gay rights activists and gay citizens were quoted within some of the mainstream news coverage often to the effect of referring to ‘experts’ (especially in the case of gay activists). Many of these quotations from the ‘gay representatives’ reference the coming out script and McGreevey’s struggle with his identity as narratives that they can relate to as gay subjects. Likewise, they express feelings of support and

disappointment that he felt the need to resign (Zuckowski 2004, Travers 2004, Katalinas 2004). One representative who was often quoted was Steven Goldstein of Garden State Equality, a New Jersey based gay rights organization. An article from Easton, Pennsylvania's *Express-Times* states the following:

Steven Goldstein, chairman of Garden State Equality, a New Jersey-based organization, said he was in tears watching McGreevey's televised speech. "This speech hit me far more as a gay person than it does as a political activist," Goldstein told The AP. "There are millions of lesbians and gay citizens of America who know how very hard it is to come out as an openly lesbian or gay person, but to have to do so in such a public fashion like this, I cannot even imagine what the governor has gone through.

"My heart is filled with emotion and compassion - and I know I speak for the whole lesbian and gay community - not only for the governor but for his entire wonderful family" (Zukowski 2004).

Through clinging emotionally to his imagined "lesbian and gay" community, Goldstein constructs his narrative of McGreevey's resignation as one of personal struggle and identity creation. His statement, "This speech hit me far more as a gay person than it does as a political activist," shows clearly that the political elements of the story are all but lost in context of emotion within this supposed community.

By including such material in the news coverage, reporters continued the identity narrative and recreated the imagined community of gays and lesbians. Likewise, I argue that by drawing on the emotional connection to the identity story, attention was drawn away from the issues of corruption. Even when corruption was raised, it was sometimes presented as just another symptom of the struggles of a tortured man. As was discussed in the previous chapter, other social elements also mediate the discourse around McGreevey's character, one of which is class.

### Class and Trash

Throughout the news literature there are many comments about McGreevey's class background and his campaigning within class and culture-based communities. References to McGreevey's Irish Catholic upbringing, "bootstraps," tax policies, and parochial schooling all reference particular class markers which become part of the narratives of his character, scandal, and resignation. One example of this is provided by an editorial from the newspaper, "Irish Voice":

McGreevey traced his roots back to Banbridge in Co. Down, and had visited the town to much local fanfare. He was the small Northern town's most famous exile son and he basked in the attention.

His annual St. Patrick's party when he raised the Irish Tricolor at Drumthwacket, the residence of the New Jersey governor, was a great occasion and a welcome reminder that an up from the bootstraps Irish kid could make it all the way to the top job in his state.

In his early days in power there was even talk that McGreevey might have a promising future as a possible vice presidential candidate on a Democratic ticket. Such talk now, of course, is utterly pie in the sky (O'Dowd 2004).

While these class narratives could stand alone as character background, they interact with the two other main narratives: political corruption and the sexual/identity scandal.

Here again I believe the Clinton case can help in understanding the interactions of race, class, and sexuality at play in the McGreevey event. In her essay, *Trashing the Presidency* Micki McElya (2001) argues that Clinton was the first "white trash president" and that his class position was intricately entwined with the Lewinsky scandal (156).

Specifically McElya argues that Clinton's:

charges of sexual impropriety [were] framed within the terms of 'trash' narratives of race and class. These trashy improprieties have then been framed as a significant danger, not only to the high office of the presidency, but to the nation at large (157).

References to McGreevey's working class upbringing, then, could be understood to allude to a "white trash" sensibility of 'excessive' sexuality. However, notable differences between McGreevey and Clinton include not only sexual orientation, but also region and religion. The fact that McGreevey is a Catholic northerner mediates his class image and adds elements absent in Clinton's case. In addition to McElya's understandings of sexuality and class, we could also consider the impact of Catholicism's strict regulation of monogamist heterosexuality within marriage, though this will not be my focus at this time.

McElya's argument is more applicable to McGreevey's case if we combine it with Jasbir Puar's (2007) discussion of homonationalism. Let us examine another passage from McElya's argument in order to place it in this frame:

...the dominant organization of sexual practices and gendered behaviors into static, cohesive identities distributes power and enables regulatory oppression.

Representations of excessive and uncontrolled sexuality signify practices which must be expelled from the category white, literally as trash, because they endanger the heteronormative alignments of sexuality and gender which center whiteness, and heterosexuality, as supposedly abstract cultural norms (159).

If we combine this argument with the previous discussion of Puar's homonationalism concepts, McGreevey's fault is not his gayness, but his gay adultery. Perhaps if he had come out 'properly' and not married women, he would be more acceptable as a politician and as a (white) Gay American. A narrative of struggle illustrated by the media, then, was his penance for this sin as he attempted to convert to a more normative and acceptable Gay American subjecthood.

## **Sex, Lies, and Homeland Security**

Behind all of the distraction of the identity narrative, however, McGreevey's alleged political corruption still occasionally broke through, and so we must address this as well. Besides a few stray comments about his tax policies (which were praised in some cases and criticized in others), the three main topics about corruption were McGreevey's appointment of Cipel, his delayed resignation, and his connections to corrupt campaign donors. While these topics all clearly criticize McGreevey's political decisions and suggest corruption, I argue that the issues surrounding Cipel and even some of those about campaign donors have sexual elements intermixed, thereby referencing the sexuality narrative, even if unintentionally. The connection between the corruption and the sexuality resulted in further distraction from issues of corruption.

Many concerns about McGreevey's appointment of Cipel were present in the media, including concerns about Cipel's high salary, his position as Homeland Security Advisor when he did not have proper security clearances, Cipel's Israeli citizenship, and, of course, the controversy over McGreevey hiring his lover. For example, one article even carried the headline "Governor's Aide was no Stranger to Controversy – Few Could See What Qualified him to be New Jersey's Security Chief" which concludes with the following passage:

McGreevey, appearing on an Ask the Governor radio show, was asked to explain his relationship to Cipel, who had continued to work for him in an unpaid capacity as liaison to the Jewish community. He called him "a very good friend" (Riley 2004).

Despite the clear corruption implications of the story about Cipel, the arch of the narrative almost always circled back to the issue of their sexual relationship. For example, in the article just mentioned, the narrative which begins with Cipel's

questionable appointment curved back to his second appointment as Special Counsel and questions about his relationship with McGreevey (Riley).

The second focus of the political corruption arguments, the criticism of McGreevey's delayed resignation, came almost exclusively from Republican representatives (McAlpin 2004c, Bucks County Courier Times 2004c). One often repeated quotation from former Republican Governor, Christie Whitman, represented this argument well:

Former Republican Gov. Christie Whitman said McGreevey "made a courageous decision" but criticized his plan to wait until Nov. 15 to leave office, saying it "smacks of politics." She said it "would be in the best interests of the state" for the governor to step aside immediately (Bucks County Courier Times 2004a).

While these arguments were somewhat harsh with McGreevey, many of them also qualified their criticisms with expressions of sympathy or personal support as Whitman did. Also, the fact that this critique came almost exclusively from Republicans also constructs a party opposition between the generally supportive and personal Democratic politicians and the critical Republicans. The party division weakens the force of this criticism as a sign of political corruption given that they argument also served the Republican Party's political goals.

The last, and most sensational, of the political corruption arguments was that of the corrupt campaign donors. At the center of this narrative was the character of Charles Kushner, one of McGreevey's biggest campaign donors and the reported link between McGreevey and Cipel (eg. Wiener 2004, Robertson 2004, Bucks County Courier Times 2004d). At the time of McGreevey's resignation announcement, Kushner was under

investigation and indictment for a series of provocative charges. One article from the Bucks County Courier Times (2004d) presented the story as follows:

McGreevey's biggest campaign contributor, Charles Kushner, was the link between McGreevey and Cipel.

Kushner is under federal investigation for allegedly making illegal campaign contributions and under indictment for trying to obstruct a campaign finance probe. He is accused of hiring prostitutes to obtain compromising videotapes and photographs of a witness cooperating with the federal investigation.

Cipel had worked for real estate developer Kushner, also a major donor to state Democrats. Kushner signed the papers the Israeli citizen needed to work in the United States, and gave him a \$30,000 a year marketing job (Bucks County Courier Times 2004d).

By placing Kushner's story at the center of the corruption suggestions about McGreevey, many articles raised relevant and thought provoking material about McGreevey's political lack in credibility. However, by bringing in the sexual elements of Kushner's indictment, the narrative of corruption again referred back to sexual issues. While the narrative of McGreevey's sexuality and identity could be separated from the corruption narrative, the corruption narrative was always tied back to sexuality through the use of Kushner and Cipel. Due to this connection, the corruption narrative lost some of its potential discursive power. The identity/sexuality narrative maintained its central position in the memory of the event by thusly lessening the power of the corruption arguments.

### **Voices of the Press**

Which people were and were not allowed to speak within the media coverage is also central to the understanding of how these narratives were created. By examining who

(besides the reporters) were and were not allowed to speak we can better understand which people were constructed as key players, what imagined communities were being referenced, and who was being excluded in the production of the event. It is notable that in the first day of newspaper coverage McGreevey was only able to speak through his speech or through other previously quoted material. McGreevey refused to answer questions at the press conference and did not speak to reporters for several days afterwards, so McGreevey's voice in this immediate coverage was completely limited to the speech and other previous public statements. The result in the media coverage was that James McGreevey as a person was partially erased from any analysis of the event and he was instead replaced with his speech. As is detailed in my analysis, the speech was often used in short quotations which were put in the context of whatever argument the reporters wanted to make. Quotations were also sometimes arranged out of their original order, thereby constructing new narratives.

Several imagined communities were referenced through press reporters' choices of spokespeople in their stories. For example, the gay community was recognized through quotations from representatives of gay rights groups as well as from 'out' citizens and voters. The majority of quotations from both of these groups addressed their emotional reactions to the speech and many spoke to the coming out script identified in chapter one (eg. Zukowski 2004, Travers 2004, Katalinas 2004). Such quotations not only reified the coming out script, but served to link McGreevey to an imagined gay community. The effects of these 'gay spokesperson' quotations will be discussed further after identifying some of the other 'communities' which were highlighted by the press.

Like some of the gay spokespeople, quotations from local Democratic politicians also focused on sympathy for McGreevey. The difference here is that many of these politicians actually knew and worked with McGreevey, and were therefore not an imagined community (eg. Blok 2004). Local Democrats also differed from gay spokespeople by commenting on their feelings for McGreevey's family and providing testaments of his personal character. Through these comments, some of McGreevey's life as a person, rather than an event or symbol of gayness, was able to come through. Local Republican politicians provided a foil to the Democrats. In their quotations, most presented polite bows to sympathy before criticizing McGreevey's choice not to resign immediately, as was discussed earlier (eg. McAplin 2004c, Fink 2004). The other politicians who were present in the newspaper coverage were the unnamed sources from McGreevey's administration who were cited as the first to provide Golan Cipel's name as the potential love-interest featured in McGreevey's speech. These characters arise in a number of the articles (eg. Associated Press 2004c, 2004e, Zukowski 2004), but remain unnamed throughout.

Some of the articles also provided the voices of local New Jersey residents such as "the NJ voter" (eg. Curran 2004b, McCarthy 2004, Travers 2004). Within the ethnic-focused newspapers, local people from their target audience were also quoted as representatives of their respective communities (eg. Wiener 2004, Villadiego 2004). These voices were almost exclusively written as emotional responses to the speech and often had to do with shock, sympathy, and/or pride rather than political opinions or interpretations of the meanings of McGreevey's resignation. Similarly, religious leaders were sometimes quoted, but most often about the emotional and moral issues surrounding

McGreevey's announcement as opposed to issues of politics (eg. Katalinas 2004, Campo 2004).

Who does not speak in these articles is also important. As was previously mentioned, McGreevey only speaks for himself through his speech. However, there are others central to the event also who do not speak, though they are often spoken about. Golan Cipel was the most often discussed and many articles referenced that he was "not available for comment." Some of the first comments that were available from him in the newspapers following the speech were in papers which catered to Jewish communities. In these, his comments were strongly opposed to McGreevey's version of their interactions. In fact Cipel argued that McGreevey had sexually harassed him and that they were at no point involved in a consensual affair. Cipel's silence in the beginning of the coverage, coupled with the fact that his comments were later included in a newspaper with a limited target audience and small distribution, added to the lessening of his side of the story within the media construction of the event.

Likewise, while Dina Matos McGreevey was often commented about, she is never quoted herself in any of the articles which I surveyed. Like her husband, she refused to speak to the press immediately after the speech. The absence of her words in the newspaper coverage effectively erases her as a person from the narratives, replacing her with the image of the suffering wife or even just as a prop in McGreevey's saga. One effect of Matos McGreevey's silence in the press is that McGreevey's request for his wife's forgiveness was never publicly answered. While the future of their marriage and Dina's perspective on the event were questioned and speculated about by the media and the public, Dina herself voluntarily lacked any public voice on the matter until much later

on in the ordeal. In fact, she stated in her 2007 book that she decided to write a book in order to finally share her side of the story (Matos McGreevey 2007). Given that the three main characters in the story (McGreevey, Matos McGreevey, and Cipel) all refused public comments during this formative era of media coverage, the beginning of the press' narratives was completely subject to the constructions of the reporters using only the speech, voices of other 'representatives' and 'observers', and the reporters' own perspectives on the event.

### **McGreevey Speaks**

Since it functioned as the focal point of the event, as well as McGreevey's voice, in early newspaper coverage, the resignation speech was very frequently quoted. As can be seen in the second appendix, the vast majority of the speech was quoted. Each quotation added something to the narrative structure of the event. In order to more easily discuss which quotations were used, how, when, and perhaps why, I have given each part of the speech a name which can be found in the second appendix. Each of these quotations was used with varying frequency not only in order to provide McGreevey's perspective, but also to give a sense of factual information about the resignation. Before further entering discussion of these quotations, however, I would like to highlight which portions of McGreevey's speech were not quoted by the various newspaper sources I examined. While the quotations which were used constructed the narratives of the event, the choice to not include other portions of the speech also influenced these narratives.

First, despite the presence of many off-hand mentions of McGreevey's family in these articles, the largest section of McGreevey's speech which was not quoted<sup>9</sup> was the section about his marriages and children:

By virtue of my traditions, and my community, I worked hard to ensure that I was accepted as part of the traditional family of America. I married my first wife, Kari, out of respect and love. And together, we have a wonderful, extraordinary daughter. Kari then chose to return to British Columbia.

I then had the blessing of marrying Dina, whose love and joy for life has been an incredible source of strength for me. And together, we have the most beautiful daughter (McGreevey 2004).

While the factual information of this passage (his marriages, his two daughters) were often included in the news articles, it was provided as background instead of mentioning it as part of his speech (eg. Associated Press 2004e). The quotations which do have mentions of his family were more often ones addressing his struggle and perceived debt to them, thereby placing more focus on the personal struggle, isolation, and sexuality issues of McGreevey, rather than on his love and support for his family. Likewise, McGreevey was quoted as asking the forgiveness of his wife, but the following sentence of the speech ("She has been extraordinary throughout this ordeal, and I am blessed by virtue of her love and strength.") which shows her support of him, was not present in any of the articles. Again, by including the request for forgiveness, but no response from Matos McGreevey, any of her potential agency or voice was excluded from the press' narratives.

These quotations also drew attention away from McGreevey's commitment to his state and country, and likewise away from his commitment to politics, although there

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<sup>9</sup> All analysis of the use of speech quotations is based on the 50 articles studied. This includes all in-text comments as well as the labeling of quotations in the appendix.

were passages in the speech which addressed these issues. One passage discussed in the previous chapter that was excluded from the newspaper coverage not only shows a tone of patriotism, but also addresses the issue of civil liberties:

And I am blessed to live in the greatest nation with the tradition of civil liberties, the greatest tradition of civil liberties in the world, in a country which provides so much to its people (McGreevey).

The ending of McGreevey's speech, which is also excluded from the newspapers, shows his pride in and commitment to his administration and presents thanks to his constituents:

I'm very proud of the things we have accomplished during my administration. And I want to thank humbly the citizens of the state of New Jersey for the privilege to govern (McGreevey).

Aside from showing his commitment to politics, this absent quotation provided one half of an anticipated conversation with NJ citizens. While NJ voters were quoted by some of the news articles, they were not put in conversation with McGreevey but simply provided their emotional and political reactions to the event. This presentation excluded the possibility of a more personal conversation between McGreevey and his constituents. Instead McGreevey was set up as only something at which to react.

Now, let us return to my investigation of those portions of McGreevey's speech which *were* quoted by the newspaper articles. I will begin by exploring what function each of the eighteen separate quotations I identified served in constructing narratives about the event, as well as the character of James McGreevey. Each quotation I have identified was used by one or more article in this investigation and may have been used in whole or in part by various articles. In order to more effectively discuss the narratives supported by these quotations, I have broken them into thematic categories and will address each category in succession.

First of all, a large proportion of the speech quotations were used to support the narrative of McGreevey's personal struggle. While some of these quotations also performed other functions in the press, the quotations used to illustrate and emphasize struggle were Grappling, Worked Hard, Separation, Good Things, Reflection, Belief, Mirror, Suffering, and Personal (See Second Appendix). By using these quotations to support the narrative of personal struggle, reporters placed a large emphasis on the dramatic personal elements of the event as opposed to drawing on the political elements. In many cases, these also supported the narrative of the coming out script. Focusing on the coming out script placed attention on the process of discovering a personal identity instead of the political or sexual scandals which were also present in some parts of the literature. As an example, let us begin with an excerpt from an article from Easton, Pennsylvania's *The Express-Times* which was printed the day after McGreevey's speech:

"At a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul and decide one's unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is," [McGreevey] said.

McGreevey, a Democrat who previously served as a state senator and mayor of Woodbridge Township, said the resignation would take effect Nov. 15. He is in the third year of a four-year term.

The public pronouncement of his sexuality followed years of living untruthfully in his marriages, McGreevey said.

Of the affair, he said, "It was wrong. It was foolish. It was inexcusable."

The decision by McGreevey, 47, was both personal and made more difficult by the intense publicity.

"Throughout my life I grappled with my own identity, who I am," he said. "As a young child, I often felt ambivalent about myself, in fact, confused." (Dopp 2004).

In this relatively short excerpt, the author used the Mirror, Wrong, and Grappling quotations in combination with factual background material. The resulting effect of the

passage promoted a narrative of struggle, based on the material used. One sentence stands out from this excerpt as more opinion-based than factual, however: “The decision by McGreevey, 47, was both personal and made more difficult by the intense publicity” (Dopp). This sentence presents the argument that McGreevey’s decision was personal, difficult, and more pressured by high publicity; however, it is camouflaged amongst the quotations and factual information such as his age, thereby presenting the argument more as fact than as opinion.

While this group of quotations all supported a narrative of McGreevey’s personal struggle, two of them (Reflection and Belief) also addressed his reflection on his personal outlook. While this closely relates to struggle, these quotations, which appeared back to back in the speech, provided a slightly more grounded sense of McGreevey’s spiritual and emotional beliefs that may not have been immediately apparent in the struggle narrative. An article from the Washington Post used portions of both quotations with a unique tactic:

Gov. James E. McGreevey resigned Thursday, announcing that he had an affair with a man that has left him vulnerable to "false allegations and threats of disclosure."

"My truth is that I am a gay American," the married father of two said at a news conference at the Statehouse here. "This, the 47th year of my life, is arguably too late to have this discussion. But ... at a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul" (Powell 2004).

First of all, this excerpt used four separate quotations from McGreevey’s speech (Threats, Mirror, Belief, and Gay American), but in the opposite order of how they appeared in the speech.<sup>10</sup> By placing the Threats quote first, quickly followed by the Gay American quote, McGreevey’s sexuality and the struggle it caused are placed front and center. The Belief and Mirror quotes were then used as reasons for why he needed to face his

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<sup>10</sup> The Belief and Mirror quotations are in their original order, but are linked as they are in the speech.

sexuality struggle rather than using them as they were in the original narrative structure of the speech. Also, it is notable that the use of the line “this, the 47th year of my life, is arguably too late to have this discussion,” reinforced a normative view of coming out. By emphasizing that it was supposedly unusual or inappropriate to come out at McGreevey’s age, the narrative built on the idea of McGreevey’s announcement being all the more unique, urgent, and fraught (Powell).

Likewise, while there were quotations which dealt with McGreevey’s sense of responsibility, they were far fewer than those in the personal struggle category and they tended to be dwarfed by the narrative of struggle. These quotations which highlighted his sense of responsibility included Good Things and Responsibility. Following a passage which focused on Golan Cipel’s employment history with the Governor’s office, an article from the New York Post used the Threats and Responsibility quotes in the following passage:

At the news conference, McGreevey said his sexuality and his affair left the governor's office vulnerable.

"I am removing these threats by telling you directly about my sexuality," he said.

"Let me be clear: I accept total and full responsibility for my actions. However, I am required to do now to do what is right to correct the consequences of my actions" (Geller 2004).

It is remarkable that the reporter wrote “McGreevey said his sexuality and his affair left the governor's office vulnerable” thereby allowing an interpretation that the sexuality and the affair are the risk, rather than the threat of rumor-spreading or exploitation (Geller). By following this comment with the quotations which focused on McGreevey’s responsibility, this treatment created a narrative both of responsibility and of restoration,

but also of fault. In this version of the events, it was not the rumors which are at fault, but McGreevey's own actions and identity.

In the previous section, I discussed how the articles ignored a large section of McGreevey's speech which was focused on his family. With this in mind, it is interesting that all of the quotations about family which *were* used were also in reference to struggle or forgiveness (Worked Hard, Suffering, Forgiveness). For example, though they addressed his family, the Worked Hard and Suffering quotations were often used as evidence of McGreevey's deep personal struggle or creation of lies, depending on the angle of the reporter. A Boston Globe article used the Gay American, Grappling, and Worked Hard quotations almost seamlessly to create a story of McGreevey's suffering which led into material on the former rumors about his sexuality:

"My truth is that I am a gay American," McGreevey said. "Throughout my life, I have grappled with my own identity, who I am. As a young child, I often felt ambivalent about myself, in fact, confused. By virtue of my traditions, and my community, I worked hard to ensure that I was accepted as part of the traditional family of America."

Rumors had been swirling about McGreevey's sexuality in recent years, reaching the level of discussion on New Jersey talk radio shows. The man believed to be involved in the affair is a former state employee who several weeks ago said that unless he was paid "millions of dollars," he would file a sexual harassment lawsuit against the governor, a political adviser to McGreevey told the Associated Press. Administration officials found out about that Wednesday night, according to a high-ranking state official (Robertson 2004).

This passage and others similar to it helped to build the sex scandal narrative by combining McGreevey's struggle, within the discourse of the coming out script, with the former rumors of his sexuality (during the 'closet era') and current rumors about Golan Cipel's threat of the lawsuit. By keeping Cipel unnamed, the drama of the rumors is heightened as the current rumors mimicked the former sexuality rumors (which have now

been shown true). Most notably, however, McGreevey's talk about his family in this passage of the speech was all but lost in the article's treatment (Robertson).

What was given slightly more emphasis were the quotations about the affair (Affair, Wrong, and Responsibility). These three quotations are the ones most often referenced by the newspapers to express negative views of the affair, especially in the context of some of the ethnic articles. Two articles (Villadiego 2004 and Campo 2004) from Filipino newspapers used these quotations in combination with Catholic-centered arguments to create negative narratives of the affair. Villadiego's article combined the affair and the gayness to an interesting effect:

McGreevey disclosed that he had an extramarital affair with another man. "My truth is that I am a gay American," the governor said in a press conference shown on television. "Shamefully, I engaged in adult consensual affairs with another man, which violates my bonds of matrimony. It was wrong, it was foolish, it was inexcusable."

The Democrat said his resignation would be effective Nov. 15.

Although predominantly Roman Catholic - the church that opposes gay marriages - Filipinos accept McGreevey's sexual orientation, but feel he is a big loss to the State of New Jersey (Villadiego 2004).

This excerpt shows the complicated relationship between the shame of adultery within Catholicism, the liberal desire to accept homosexuality, and the Catholic opposition to gay marriages. The tension is clear in the last sentence of this passage when the author states that Filipinos accept McGreevey's gayness, "*but* feel he is big loss to the State of New Jersey." The use of the word "but" rather than "and" suggests that McGreevey's sexual orientation and resignation were contingent on each other and that if he were not gay, he would not resign.

The Catholic influence within some of the narrative construction was central to the editorial by Campo:

"I am also here today because, shamefully, I engaged in, adult consensual affairs with another man, which violates my bond of matrimony. It was wrong. It was foolish. It was inexcusable." - New Jersey Gov. James L. *McGreevey's resignation* speech, Aug. 12, 2004.

GOV. McGreevey, being a Catholic, what is the position of the Catholic Church on his public confession?

Though the Church does not approve of his past transgressions the Church treats them with respect and compassion (Campo 2004).

Given the discussion in my first chapter about confession scripts within McGreevey's speech, I would like to highlight the question which Campo asks of McGreevey. First of all, Campo spoke to McGreevey (through the medium of the editorial) as a Catholic speaking to another Catholic, thereby relating to the concept of the imagined community. Secondly, Campo identified the resignation speech as a public confession and claimed an answer of how the Church has responded to them. In effect, Campo (though he identified himself as a layperson), partially played the role of the confessor through his editorial. Through stories such as this, a confession narrative was continued in the press.

Four quotations towards the end of McGreevey's speech (Threats, Abilities, Resign, and Transition) were used within the media to represent McGreevey's attempts to justify his resignation and appease the various imagined communities to which he spoke. The Threats quotation spoke to easing the concerns of NJ voters and politicians by explaining that he was concerned with the integrity of the Governor's office. Similarly, the Resign quotation concerned the welfare of his family. In contrast the Abilities quotation appeased the liberal and gay rights audiences by stating that his homosexuality

was not the reason for his resignation. The Transition quotation spoke to all viewers, but most specifically to residents of NJ and possible critics by arguing against immediate resignation. One article by McAlpin of the Associated Press (2004b) uses three of these quotations (Threats, Abilities, and Resign):

McGreevey, 47, refused to answer questions at the Statehouse news conference. He said "it makes little difference that as governor I am gay," but added that staying in office and keeping the affair and his sexual orientation secret will leave the governor's office "vulnerable to rumors, false allegations and threats of disclosure."

"Given the circumstances surrounding the affair and its likely impact upon my family and my ability to govern, I have decided the right course of action is to resign," he said without elaborating on what the circumstances were.

Two sources close to McGreevey, both speaking on condition of anonymity, said the man involved in the affair was Golan Cipel, an Israeli poet who worked briefly for the governor as a homeland security adviser despite having no security experience.

One source, a senior McGreevey political adviser, said Cipel threatened McGreevey several weeks ago that unless he was paid "millions of dollars," Cipel would file a lawsuit against the governor charging him with sexual harassment. (McAlpin 2004b).

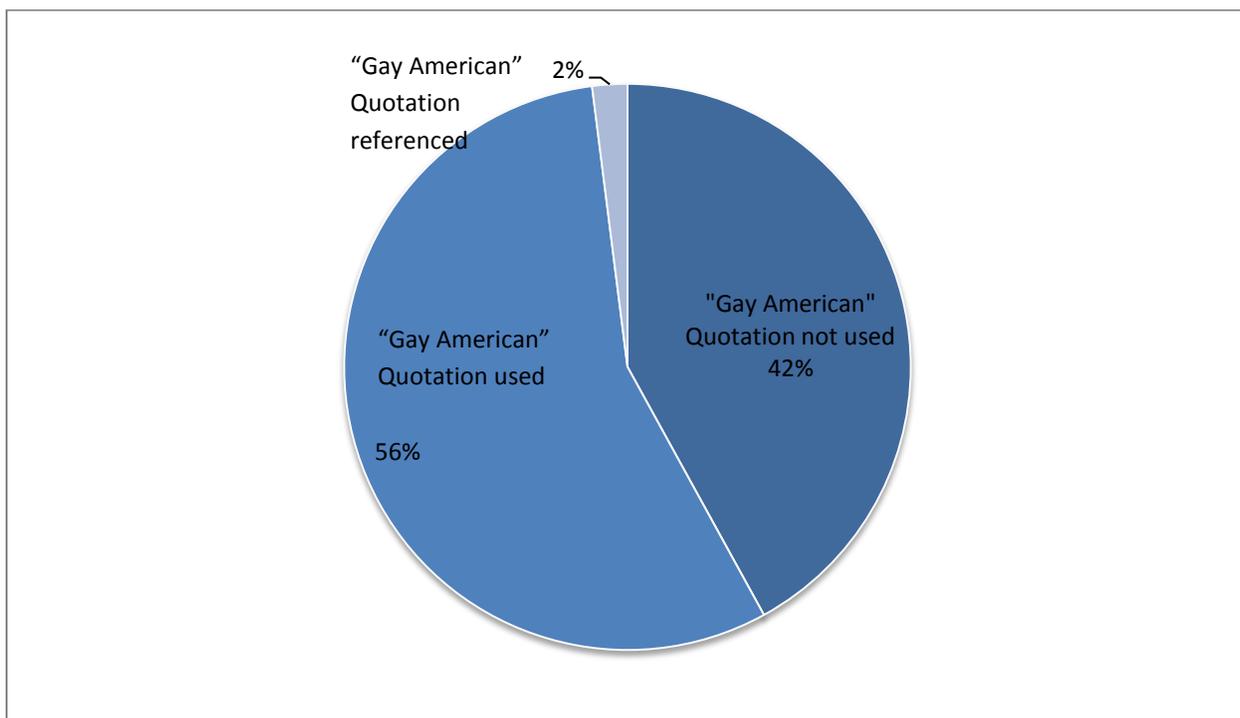
This passage not only illustrates how each of these quotations was crafted to appease a certain community, but also points to the narrative creation around the issue of Golan Cipel.<sup>11</sup> While the article pointed out that McGreevey did not elaborate on the circumstances of his affair, it quickly followed the speech quotations with the anonymous source material about Cipel and his alleged threat of the sexual harassment suit. This was another narrative about the event which was used in the majority of Associated Press articles, and thereby filtered through to a wide variety of newspapers.

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<sup>11</sup> I would also like to point out here the press' tendency to describe Golan Cipel as an "Israeli poet." This phrase was circulated widely as news sources tried to find additional information about Cipel. As was revealed earlier, however, Cipel was not a professional poet and in fact the label refers to the fact that he wrote some poetry while a student. It is unclear why this became a common label for Cipel, but the repetition of "Israeli poet" does help to create an image of him as foreign and unqualified for his position in the NJ government as well as using the word "poet" to create a stereotypical gay artist persona.

To conclude my discussion of the newspapers' treatments of the speech, we must return to the "Gay American" quotation. We have already seen several treatments of this quotation throughout this section; however I have kept it in its own category simply because it has become the icon of the James McGreevey story. An easily repeatable sound-bite, this quotation was used by a majority of the news articles as can be seen in figure two below. Given that the quotation was either provided or referenced in nearly sixty percent of the articles surveyed, while many others were used once or twice, it is clear that this quotation gained a large amount of attention. Since some treatments of this quotation have already been explored in this chapter and that its possible meanings and implications were more thoroughly analyzed in the previous chapter, I will let the issue rest here, however its influence will follow throughout the rest of this work.

**Figure 2: Percentages of Articles with Use of "Gay American" Quotation**

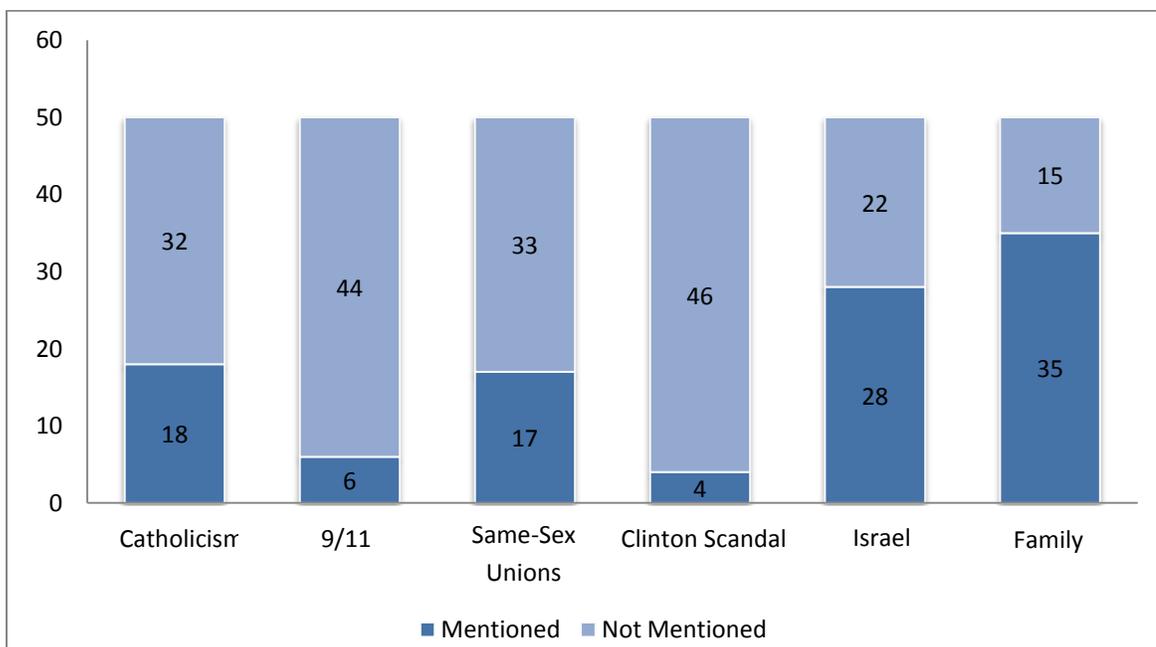


### Conclusion: News Narratives

Throughout the newspaper coverage of McGreevey's resignation speech, narratives of sexuality, identity, and corruption were created and intertwined. However, as has been shown, the narrative of sexuality/identity became the strongest. Despite the attention given to McGreevey's affair and the speculations about his relationships with both Matos McGreevey and Cipel, the news stories overall did not actually talk about sex. Therefore, I argue that the event was not a sex scandal, but an identity scandal.

Allusions to the imaginary gay community, through use of gay representatives, added to this focus. While other topics such as family, class, and religion were raised in the media coverage (see figure three below), most of these elements were added in a fact-dropping manner which only contributed to the construction of McGreevey's identity as the Gay American.

**Figure 3: Number of Articles which used other Themes**



Even the newspaper articles which did address McGreevey's political scandals tended to reference back to the sexuality/identity scandal through the figures of Cipel and Kushner. Overall, I argue that the newspaper coverage minimized the attention given to the political scandals, thereby further codifying the event as an issue of sexual identity. The focus that McGreevey established with his speech held through the newspaper articles. In a way, his choice not to speak to the press helped him retain some control over the news narratives since the speech was all that the reporters had to work with. In this way, the speech became the center of the event and maintained control over the narrative construction in the news. As I continue into the third chapter, I will draw on these narratives from the media to explore how McGreevey responded to and, in some cases, continued these narratives within his memoir.

## Chapter Three: The Book

*I worry about how publishing this book will affect my healing journey. I know I do not come across in heroic terms. Even the parts of my legacy I'm proud of were products of my addiction, borne of the compromises I'd made. Having finally realized my errors is hardly heroic.*

(McGreevey 2006: 350)

While continuing to work within and around the genres of the confession and the coming out story, *The Confession* (2006) also lived within the genre of memoir, something McGreevey knew well. As he mentioned several times within his book, McGreevey was an avid reader of biographies and memoirs. He even provided a humorous complaint about living in the New Jersey governor's mansion by saying that "the enormous living room was better equipped for greeting heads of state than for reading biographies in my boxers, my traditional mode of relaxation" (257). Given McGreevey's familiarity with biography and memoir, in this chapter I ask how McGreevey interacted with genre in *The Confession*. Through examining McGreevey's manipulation of genre in his writing, I establish how *The Confession* added to the memory of the McGreevey event and to the Gay American construct.

Biography or autobiography and memoir are closely related and though they have some differences, *The Confession* has been called by both names. While biography tells a story of a person's life, memoir usually has a specific theme which is carried through the storytelling about a life. In his analysis of biography, psychologist Arnold M. Ludwig (1997) pointed out some of the key points of the genre:

The rules of the genre impose important constraints on you, the most important of which is verisimilitude. Far more than fiction writers, who can invent qualities or

events to fit their preconceived image of a character, biographers work to bring about a fit between existing persons and all the existing information about them. Though this fit at times may seem as fanciful as a paleontologist's reconstruction of early humans and inferences about them from a few fragments of bone, the biographer, like the paleontologist, is obliged to take into account the discovery of new artifacts and contrary evidence in the interpretation of his or her subject (259-60).

These constructions of the narrative from pieces of information play out in slightly different ways when the author is writing about his or herself instead of about another person; however Ludwig's statement still applies to autobiography and memoir. In writing *The Confession*, McGreevey made choices about what stories from his life to include or discard and about how to tell those stories which were included. The striking differences between his writing and that of his former wife, Dina Matos McGreevey, in her memoir *Silent Partner* (2007) also go to show how, while some stories may not be completely fabricated, writing about the self is always molded into the particular frame of a perspective.

It is evident that McGreevey was conscious of the issue of verisimilitude throughout *The Confession* as he often wrote about issues of truth and authenticity. The reader cannot know whether individual stories and 'facts' which he provided were completely fabricated or not, but it is clear that he at least presents his accounts as truthful, which aligns with the norms of the genre. McGreevey's emphasis on the truth also stemmed from his position at the conclusion of the book as a devotee of the twelve-step philosophy, as will be discussed in further detail. For example, twelve-step language such as "integrated self" and "self-actualization" were used in reference to the concept of a 'true self.' Of course, McGreevey's choices of how to construct the stories also were made based on a number of other factors, including the effort to construct a themed narrative throughout the work. This chapter serves to tease out what themes McGreevey

worked with in *The Confession*, and how they related to the other narratives which were created about his resignation.

In *The Confession*, McGreevey discussed the importance of reading biographies in his life within two main contexts, his relationship with his father and his relationship with the gay 'community.' In the beginning of the third chapter, he described how he spent his childhood reading "wartime biographies" of political leaders with his father (McGreevey 2006, 24). Through this process McGreevey became aware that his father had high expectations for him. This example raises the concept that biographies are written about people of supposed historical importance. Given that McGreevey referred to how history books may speak of his resignation later in his writing, we may be able to infer that McGreevey placed himself in a line of political figures whose biographies (or autobiographies/memoirs) are not only of interest, but also of importance. This idea is supported by the fact that *The Confession* is not only a story of his personal struggles and lessons, but also a catalogue of his political achievements and mishaps.

With regards to his connection to a gay community, McGreevey made a few somewhat-offhand, but vital references to having read the biographies or memoirs of other gay men. Besides the connection to the gay community as an imagined community, the practice of reading such biographies aligns with Cass' (1979) Sexuality Identity Formation Model within the phase of "Identity Comparison." In this phase of the coming out process, the model states that the individual seeks out role models in social situations as well as in media in order to compare identities, behaviors, and so on. While McGreevey mentions reading several biographies and memoirs of gay men, including Rock Hudson (who remained closeted until reaching his deathbed), one passage stands

out as a key example of Identity Comparison. In this passage, McGreevey describes reading, “*Becoming a Man*, Paul Monette’s searing memoir of identity and community, which I only discovered after my own troubles, when he was already dead” (6). In this short description of his reading, we can see not only that McGreevey read this particular book, but also that he compared Monette’s experience to his own. Also, by stating that he read the book after his “troubles,” McGreevey further plays into the Cass model by placing this stage of Identity Comparison after that of his “troubles” (i.e. Identity Confusion). In this example and in his discussion of reading with his father, we can understand that McGreevey associated biographies within his life with both his father’s encouragement toward leadership and building a connection to the gay community. These two contexts are important to understanding how McGreevey constructed his own memoir.

### **Writing the Self**

In his book *Rewriting the Self* (1993), Mark Freeman asked a series of questions about how concepts of the self are formed through autobiographical writing. As Freeman reminded his readers, “the *concept* of the self is very much relative to time and place.” (italics original, Freeman 1993, 27). Therefore, the experience of writing about life events from a retrospective position creates a unique type of narrative and presentation of self in autobiography and memoir. Freeman stressed this process of self-understanding as recollective, a process of gathering memories and making new sense of them. Specifically, he suggested that “a life history, rather than being a ‘natural’ way of accounting for the self, is one that is thoroughly enmeshed within a specific and unique

form of discourse and understanding” (28). From this position, it is crucial to examine not only the time and place in which McGreevey was writing, but also the discursive context of the autobiography itself. Part of Freeman’s analysis was devoted to Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*. Given that the title is only the first of many similarities between Augustine and McGreevey’s writings, I would like to review Freeman’s analysis of Augustine in order to bring some of it to bear on McGreevey’s work.

Written in the 390s C. E., Augustine’s book was an attempt to understand himself which he wrote as a confession of his past misdeeds and the story of his conversion to Christianity. Not only was Augustine one of the Latin church fathers and one of the strongest influences on early Christianity, but his *Confessions* is often argued to be the first Western autobiography ever written. Freeman stated of Augustine that “his aim is to provide us with an interpretive account of the movement of his life, precisely for the sake of trying to understand, through this very process of writing, who and what he is all about” (29). As will be shown shortly, McGreevey’s writing followed a similar narrative movement; laying out his past sexual encounters, personal struggles, and ‘conversion’ through coming out and joining the twelve-step movement.

Freeman also emphasized that throughout Augustine’s narrative of his life, the narrator knows the end of the story. While looking back on his past, Augustine did so through the eyes of the religious man he had become. While he tried to describe events as he experienced them when they transpired, his perspective at the time of writing builds into it and “*confers a meaning* on the event which, when it actually occurred, no doubt had several meanings or perhaps none” (31). McGreevey’s accounts of his youthful sexual escapades are fine examples of this phenomenon as he cited them as evidence of

his gay identity early in life. Despite the retroactive labeling of these experiences, it is unclear if McGreevey's gay identity was present at the time of the encounters or if it was attributed later.

The narrative, however, was constructed with an air of authority which is created through reflection. Freeman states that "narrative reflection... opens the way toward a more comprehensive and expansive conception of truth itself" (32). In the example of Augustine's narrative, his past actions were depicted as misdeeds and sins which he, at the time of writing, needed to atone for while at the time that they happened this was not how he viewed his actions. For both Augustine and McGreevey, the 'truth' of the events becomes constructed from the point of view of the narrator in their space and time rather than from any other version of the experience, including the original experience. In addition to the craft of choosing scenes for a memoir, Ludwig also notes that memories are affected by psychological processes of selection and repression such that "your memories and perceptions are designed to support your biases" (155). In such an understanding, there are multiple layers of conscious and unconscious selection of what stories get told and what type of narrative they collectively create within memoir.

As was illustrated above, the same holds for McGreevey's narration. His writing may not be quite so religiously heavy-handed as Augustine's, however he did construct his narrative from a particular position, that being the position of an 'openly-out' Gay American subject who has devoted himself to the twelve-step lifestyle. The influence of this position can be seen throughout the book in side commentaries as well as in how the narrative itself is crafted. It is notable that while the majority of the book is written chronologically, the first chapter begins when he first suspected that his wife knew about

his affair. By beginning with this scene, McGreevey postponed the expected chronological beginning of his life and instead substituted a possible beginning of the chain of events leading to his resignation and current position. Through doing so, he also gave his expected audience some of what they were presumably looking for from the very beginning. It is also notable that following this chapter, McGreevey still did not begin with his birth, but with a history of his working-class Irish-American parents. By foregrounding this background material, McGreevey not only provided factual information about his origins, but also intentionally foreshadowed his patriotic Gay American identity. The telling of his family background and childhood also helped to draw in the reader through a personal narrative which then moved through into coming out and conversion narratives, as will be discussed further.

In telling life stories, Taylor (2005) suggests that speakers with the discourses of master narratives. 'Identity work' is carried out in relation to these master narratives by both appropriating and resisting these narratives in practices of storytelling (5). McGreevey's identity work is evident in the opening chapters about his family's background and childhood. It then is carried throughout the book as he moves toward his concluding position as 'openly-out' Gay American subject and twelve-step devotee. McGreevey also appropriates master narratives such as that of the working class boy who worked his way to the top, which work alongside the mixture of appropriations and resistance in the coming out and conversion narratives. While McGreevey utilized many types of narratives in *The Confession*, his fusion of coming out and conversion narratives drive the story.

### **Coming Out at the Altar Call**

As can be told by the title of the book, *The Confession* constructed a particular narrative of McGreevey's career and resignation as a religious process of self-reflection, confession, and penance. While the religious narrative lived in the undercurrents of the resignation speech and was acknowledged by some of the newspaper coverage, McGreevey brought religious themes blatantly to the forefront of his memoir. The climax of this narrative was a scene in which he first came out to his friend and mentor, Curtis Bashaw. McGreevey also explained that this was the first person he ever came out to. At this point in the narrative, McGreevey decided to come out to Curtis after talking with him and his other friends and advisors about how to respond to Golan Cipel's threat to file a sexual harassment lawsuit. In this climatic scene, McGreevey came out to Curtis within this context and then decided, as per Curtis's suggestion, to announce his sexuality in a press conference:

“That’s it!” [Curtis] shouted. “That explains everything. Don’t you see? The truth will set you free. This is the truth! Tell it to everybody. Hold a press conference and tell the truth. And suddenly the tawdry affair with your political appointee makes sense. You were a man in the closet, and now you’re free. Jim, I think the voters will understand.”

Curtis’s enthusiasm was like a preacher’s altar call. Tears splashed down my face. I’d never told anybody this about myself before, and every word of his affirmation lifted me on a thousand wings. The transformation in my soul was shocking and instantaneous. I had told somebody I was gay, and he was right – that explained everything (319).

In this scene, McGreevey placed Curtis in comparison to a preacher and himself as the converted. His heavily religious language in the second part of this passage is unavoidable. With references to an altar call, tears splashing on his face, and feeling lifted upon wings, McGreevey here recreated a classic baptismal conversion scene.

Almost as if these signs were not recognizable enough, he drove the point home with the statement, “The transformation in my soul was shocking and instantaneous.”

However, this scene was not a traditional religious conversion, despite the language used. The conversion was, after all, a coming out and this was how McGreevey himself presents the scene in his writing. Likewise, Curtis was used by McGreevey not only as a religious guide, but also as a gay mentor. In addition to the religious discourse used, McGreevey reinforced a certain form of gay normativity here with Curtis as his guide. The rapid expansion of McGreevey’s disclosures also signifies the powerful effect of his coming out. It is rare, after all, for a man to have his first coming out to one close friend and decide in the same conversation to tell the entire world about his gay identity. Within a very short period of time McGreevey came out to Curtis, his other advisors and friends, his family, and his wife and then held his widely broadcast press conference. Such a swift transition speaks to the conversion element of McGreevey’s coming out.

McGreevey also wrote about a group of gay men within his administration who served as political advisors about the resignation while he simultaneously used them as a gay role model community. Shortly after the conversion scene, McGreevey described preparing to tell his family about his sexuality stating that he “wanted the collected experiences of this tribe to inform [his] language” (320). The reference to a “tribe” as well as the feeling of wanting to combine their experiences through his own connects to a codification of the gay coming out experience as well as referring back to the Cass model’s Identity Comparison. Through utilizing Curtis as both a gay mentor and a spiritual guide, as well as describing the coming out scene with religious discourse, McGreevey weaves the gay and religious discourses into one narrative. I argue that

McGreevey's use of this "tribe" suggests that his conversion was not only a conversion to a gay subject, but also a rite of passage that bound him to an imagined, and actual, gay community.

This argument is further supported by McGreevey's combination of gay and religious discourse from the point of the altar call scene through to the end of *The Confession*. From that point forward, McGreevey utilized religious and moralistic language in discussing his resignation. Also, from the point of Golan's threat of a lawsuit through to the end, he described all of his main advisors as religious or spiritual guides (Curtis Bashaw, friend and advisor Ray Lesniak, Roxy the Meadow's therapist, and Pia Mellody, the Meadow's founder). McGreevey portrayed the resignation and speech as necessary, moral, and essential to his "integrated self" in several instances. For example, as he described his experience of delivering the speech at the press conference, McGreevey stated, "I thought I would be queasy, racing through my resignation in a blur of words. But an easy silence fell on my mind and everything seemed to stand still as I laid my notes on the lectern, as if nothing mattered in the world besides this moment" (326). This passage illustrates the centrality of the speech within his view of his life as well as referencing a state of religious calm. It also serves to frame the importance of the speech transcript itself which immediately follows the quotation within *The Confession*.

Perhaps more heavy-handedly, the passage immediately following the speech transcript continues such language as follows:

It seems illogical to say, but comparing my inauguration to my resignation, I can't tell you which moment was most jarring. But I can tell you this: in only one of them was I my true self. History books will all say that I resigned in disgrace. That misses the point entirely. Resigning was the single most important thing I have ever done. Not

only was I truthful and integrated for the first time in my life, but I'd rejected a political solution to my troubles and took the more painful route: penance and atonement, the way to grace (328).

McGreevey reiterated his concern with truth and integration as well as the importance of the speech event for these issues; however this passage was also notable for several other reasons. First of all, this passage was reflective not only of McGreevey's view of himself or even how those close to him viewed him, but it also acknowledged that a public narrative of his resignation was and is being created. Specifically, McGreevey stated that history would view him as a disgrace and he did not argue against that portrayal. Instead, he said that narrative "misses the point entirely." He is more concerned, at least within the memoir, with his narrative of personal struggle of pain, penance, and atonement.

McGreevey provided some examples of how his life was becoming more "honest" or "truthful," but the focus was mostly on the struggle to move in that direction. In one of the clearer examples of his "ethical" choices, McGreevey described giving a speech which declared an executive order against pay-to-play fundraising, a controversial, but legal, mode of campaign fundraising used by McGreevey himself.

McGreevey stated of this speech:

It was the most honest political speech I'd ever given. Not that apologizing for my marital infidelities wasn't honest, but this speech came without being prompted by threats. I had free choice. My motive was purely ethical. That's the way I'd always wanted to function in life, and now, at the end of my political career, I was as integrated on a policy level as I've become on a personal level. It was my proudest moment (339).

McGreevey claimed in this passage to be integrated and ethical both within his personal and political lives, however much of the rest of *The Confession* following the arrival of Golan's threats is full of personal struggle. In fact, despite this claim of balance, McGreevey continued on to describe his experiences with a rehabilitation facility (which

will be discussed further in this chapter) and the ongoing struggles he faced as of the date of his writing.

In this way, *The Confession* was actually not the confession itself within McGreevey's narrative. The place of the confession scene in this narrative is instead filled by numerous other actions: the resignation speech, talking to Dina about the affair, and so on. Instead, I argue that writing *The Confession* is part of his penance after he has already confessed. It is the self-reflective practice which questions how his life has been lived and attempts a conversion to a less sinful (he would say "more integrated") lifestyle. Let us further examine some of these passages within McGreevey's memoir which filled the positions of confession and penance.

### **Confession in *The Confession***

The account of McGreevey's confession to Dina in his memoir is striking in that it states very little of what he actually said to her. In fact, it completely skipped anything about the nature of his relationship with Golan and instead began the dialogue with his explanations about how long ago the relationship had ended and that Golan was then threatening a law suit. What is particularly telling about McGreevey's narrative here is how it clearly referenced confession, yet in an unexpected way. To lead into the conversation with Dina, McGreevey described his preparations as he dealt with Golan's threats:

No Matter what happened, though, I knew I owed Dina an explanation, and an apology. Ray [Lesniak], with his tremendous spiritual footing, helped me prepare for the moment. His faith was so strong that, in this moment, it carried both of us. That night, I headed upstairs to talk to my wife. At the last minute, I asked Ray to join me as my confessor (317).

By describing Ray's faith and naming him as a confessor, McGreevey disrupted the expected dynamic of Dina as the confessor. Given that he was telling his 'sins' to, and asking forgiveness from, Dina, she would have filled the role of confessor in the traditional confession model. The question is raised, then: *Where does this third party (Dina) fit in to the confession model?*

I see two possibilities here. First, it is possible that McGreevey was so removed from his wife at this point that she was irrelevant other than as an obstacle, however this seems unlikely if he did indeed seek her forgiveness. The other possibility is that Ray was the confessor or priest, but Dina filled the role of God. Ray became the intermediary because McGreevey was perhaps too afraid of Dina to speak to her directly. She was the one who was able to bestow forgiveness, but was removed while Ray offered counsel and religious strength. This model was also supported by McGreevey's description of how little Dina spoke to him during the conversation and how Ray provided guidance before, during, and after the confession. While I do not wish to suggest that McGreevey viewed his wife as a God figure, I do believe that in a discursive manner she filled a God-like role within the confession construct. By positioning her in such a way, McGreevey's manipulation of the scene also shows us how distant he felt from his wife at this time, despite desiring her forgiveness. It is clear that McGreevey intentionally depicted this scene as a confession given the language used (eg. Ray as confessor) and the focus on his difficulty with the act. In *Silent Partner*, Dina's account of the same conversation was quite different, thereby providing a reminder that these stories are all constructed within their own narrative contexts.

### **Twelve Steps through Penance**

As was previously suggested, the process of writing *The Confession* was a part of the penance phase of McGreevey's confession narrative. However, the writing process itself is not McGreevey's sole usage of penance. His book ends with an account of his experiences in The Meadows rehabilitation facility and with living the twelve-step program lifestyle as a form of penance. McGreevey described how he was inspired by Meadows' founder, Pia Mellody's philosophy as follows:

Her answer is to tear down everything – our adult constructs (which she calls our “adapted self”) and our childhood injuries (our “wounded child”) – and then to rebuild our lives around a spiritual core that allows us to be imperfect (347).

While using terminology from the twelve-step movement, this description and others like it build off of the conversion element of confession and penance. In other passages, McGreevey and the therapists he quoted used other terms for this process including “self-actualization” and creating an “integrated self,” yet while these phrases come from a different discursive tradition, they are still tied to the ideals of penance (346). The idea of self-reflection and rebuilding one's life is, after all, the core of penance. Coming to a spiritual balance which allows for imperfection could be reworded as accepting that you are a sinner, likewise a central theme of penance within Catholicism.

McGreevey not only identified this process as the intent of the twelve-step program and imply its connection to penance. He also claimed that he was living this process as a personal journey. He stated of the method and of himself:

Pia Mellody's model isn't just a method of treatment; it's a way of living. It encourages a lifestyle of honesty, rigorous self-examination, and spirituality – all the things I'd learned to live without (348).

Here is one of McGreevey's many moments where he looked back from the position of writing and judged his past self. This tactic was used throughout the book, but much more heavily as it moved towards its close, thereby building a sense of self-reflection within the narrative of the memoir.

At this point it is essential to highlight the quotation with which I chose to open this chapter and the lines which immediately follow:

I worry about how publishing this book will affect my healing journey. I know I do not come across in heroic terms. Even the parts of my legacy I'm proud of were products of my addiction, borne of the compromises I'd made. Having finally realized my errors is hardly heroic.

I do know that many people have told me that they were moved by my coming out speech. I don't flatter myself by thinking I am some sort of role model for anybody – I certainly hope I'm not. But people connected with my suffering, I think. An astonishing number of Americans live inauthentically [sic] and are unhappy living that way (350).

This passage not only supports the penance narrative, but also speaks back to others who may claim McGreevey as a role model, such as some of the gay activists mentioned in the previous chapter. What is puzzling is the last sentence of this passage. It is unclear whether McGreevey was referring to Gay Americans living "inauthentically" or Americans in general. It is likely that he was referring to a more general public, but in combination with the role model comment, this may be the one place where McGreevey hints at dissatisfaction with a Gay American, or homonationalist, norm.

I do not wish to speculate about why McGreevey chose to write this memoir, but it is particularly telling that he states his concern with how it will affect his "healing journey." If he is so concerned, why write it? If he pursued the writing process for therapeutic or penitential purposes, but was concerned about the impact of publishing, why publish it? While I cannot claim to know the answers to these questions, I believe

one possibility is that, if his narrative of conversion is to be believed, McGreevey felt a moral obligation to become a role model, not as a gay man, but as an apostle of the twelve-steps. His comment about the lack of authenticity in people's lives also suggests that this is the case.

### **What Will the History Books Say?**

While we do not know what the general reading public took from *The Confession*, reviews of the book and its audio book counterpart go to show that the newspapers' focus on the sexuality story carried through in the context of the book's coverage. A review of the audio book from *Publisher's Weekly* (2006) emphasized the "insight into the pain of being a closeted gay man for more than four decades," but also said that it provided more than just the struggle. The review also said that "listeners seeking juicy sex-life details will not be disappointed, but this memoir is as much a lesson on authenticity in politics as in sexuality" (Publisher's Weekly 2006). While the review commented on "authenticity in politics," McGreevey's concern, at least towards the end of the book, seemed to be more with authenticity in life in general.

Another audio book review by Karla Jay of *Lambda Book Report* (2008) calls *The Confession* a "gay memoir" and states that "his coming out story will touch those who also find it impossible 'to use the word 'gay''" (Jay 2008). It is not surprising that this review labeled the book as a coming out story and a gay memoir, given that it was from a gay-catering publication. However it serves as another example of how McGreevey's story was simplified by many gay activists who wanted to fit McGreevey's story to the

coming out script and claim him as an out politician, despite the further complications of his resignation.

The confession aspect of the book was highlighted in a *Newsweek* review by Marc Peyser (2006) with the first sentence “Hasn’t Jim McGreevey confessed enough?” While referencing confession, however, the rest of the review focused on McGreevey’s sexuality narratives calling it “an astonishingly candid memoir of his life in the closet starting with his schoolboy crushes, through his years of sordid trysts and ending with the relationship that ended it all, with an Israeli political consultant” (Peyser 2006). Despite focusing on elements of McGreevey’s sexuality, this review took a slightly broader and less positive view than the *Lambda* review. It also commented on a perceived altruistic intent of the book stating, “it’s a brave and powerful book, the tale of a man who’s lost everything and is willing to relive the pain in hopes of helping others and healing himself”. By using such language as “sordid trysts” and emphasizing the loss and struggle in McGreevey’s story, this review created a more morally ambiguous and dramatic picture of *The Confession*. It is notable that this is the only review which even hints at the conclusion of McGreevey’s book or his message of healing through the twelve-step process. If this message got through to readers, it does not seem to have come through for reviewers.

As was stated in the beginning of this chapter, McGreevey associated biographies within his life with both his father’s encouragement toward leadership and building a connection to the gay community, however by the end of his own book, he had almost completely shut himself away from both leadership roles and the gay community, instead choosing a more solitary and reflective approach toward life. McGreevey began his

memoir's narrative from the roots of a leadership narrative (spending an entire chapter on his family, writing about his political campaigning, etc.), but at the point of his life's transition, triggered by his coming out and resignation speech, the narrative also shifted. From that point on, McGreevey's gay and religious narratives became intertwined and more thoughtful as he moved towards his conclusion and support of the twelve-step movement.

Through this narrative shift, McGreevey's memoir had the potential to significantly affect the overall memory of the event, however with one catch: the readers had to both finish and believe the book. The memoir was widely read, or at least widely bought, as it reached the *New York Times* Bestseller list, but it is unclear at this time how it was received by the general reading public. Likely some believed it, thereby changing the overall image of the event and McGreevey himself while others may have viewed it as an attempt to gain more attention or money, following off of some of the newspaper narratives. What we do know is that McGreevey used his memoir to continue some of the narrative threads such as confession, coming out, and penance, while altering them from their previous forms.

I argue that his combination of these narratives also served to support coming out as a necessary ritual for becoming a proper Gay American subject. McGreevey framed his own coming out as a spiritual and emotional conversion which changed who he was as a person. This conversion was not only from 'closeted' to 'out,' but also from troubled politician to Gay American. In *The Confession*, McGreevey used the air of authority which reflection provides to create his own summary of the event. The genre of memoir,

therefore, allowed him not only to offer his own account of his resignation, but to push his agendas of both the twelve-step movement and Gay American conversion.

## Conclusions: Coming Out, Confession, Conversion

The connection between coming out discourse and the confession not only helps to explain the narratives of the McGreevey event, but also aids our understanding of the Gay American construct itself. Coming out and confession are both speech acts of disclosure which cause a change in the speaker. The speaker feels that something about who they are has been changed through the act of disclosure. In the case of the confession, as was explained previously, there is a sense of spiritual conversion which is achieved through disclosing one's sins and practicing penance. I argue that there is a similar experience in the discourse of coming out. The speaker is converted into a 'proper' mainstream gay subject through the disclosure of their sexual identity. In the case of McGreevey, he became a Gay American by giving his resignation speech which was not only a political speech, but also, as I have illustrated, an instance of coming out.

I would like to offer a short review of my argument thus far in order to illustrate how we have arrived at these conclusions. In chapter one I reviewed the construction of McGreevey's speech and its use of the confession and coming out scripts. By using these scripts, the speech presented McGreevey as a penitent and liberated Gay American subject and reached out to the gay and Catholic imagined communities. This chapter also questioned the construction of the Gay American as a subject within the speech and compared this subject to the homonormative and homonationalist subjects of Duggan and Puar's work. These comparisons showed that McGreevey's Gay American subject follows in this tradition of sexual exceptionalism and the creation of a gay mainstream subject. The Gay American subject was then revealed as a mainstreamed, white,

middleclass, normative subject based on Puar and Duggan's work as well as the speech's connections to post 9/11 patriotism.

The second chapter turned to the immediate newspaper coverage of McGreevey's resignation speech. In these sources, narratives of sexuality, identity, and corruption were created. The narratives of sexuality and identity became the strongest and stories of McGreevey's corruption almost always retained some connection to sexual overtones. While other topics such as family, class, and religion were raised in the media coverage, most of these elements were mentioned in passing without overshadowing the main story of McGreevey's sexuality. Since the majority of news coverage focused on issues of identity and underplayed McGreevey's political corruption scandals, more discursive power was placed behind the narrative of McGreevey as the Gay American.

These narratives carried into chapter three where I provided several close readings of McGreevey's memoir. This chapter aimed to tease out the mixture of coming out and confession narratives at work in his writing. The scene in which McGreevey first came out and decided to give his speech serves as the main turning point of these narratives as well as the center of my argument in this chapter. In this scene, coming out and religious language intermix in a strong and emotional coming out/conversion scene, thereby combining these two major narrative discourses. His combination of the religious and coming out narratives serves to support coming out as a necessary ritual for becoming a proper Gay American subject. This scene also clearly maps McGreevey's coming out as a conversion.

This understanding of the Gay American builds off of Duggan and Puar's work by beginning with the acknowledgment of a gay mainstream subject and adding the element of conversion. Not only is the 'acceptable' gay subject a mainstreamed one (middle-class, white, monogamous, gender-conforming, patriotic, etc.), but sexual identity and its disclosure is central to the very being of this subject. Without the disclosure of coming out, the Gay American does not exist. The identity must be proclaimed to become a Gay American, and therefore, to become publicly accepted through this mainstream subjecthood. If acceptance comes through disclosure, however, one may ask why McGreevey faced so much scandal following his disclosure.

First of all, it is important to recognize that despite facing controversy, there was still a presence of sympathy and support for McGreevey in the press and in the public. Even some who criticized him still expressed sympathy and acknowledged his personal struggle behind the disclosure. However, it cannot be denied that there was a strong opposition to McGreevey and his speech by many. There are many elements in McGreevey's story which complicate things, but there are two which make the largest impact in the lack of acceptance for McGreevey as a Gay American. The first, and most obvious, is that he was married (twice) and had children. I argue that by getting married, McGreevey decreased his chances of being accepted as a gay man, even though it likely helped his chances of getting elected (as he believed it would). While Gay Americans are becoming more publicly accepted, they are still not, after all, as culturally honored as married heterosexual couples. McGreevey took up the privileges of marriage and fatherhood, but they ironically limited his privileges as a gay man because it was necessary for him to leave his wife in order to take up the Gay American subject position.

The other element of McGreevey's story which limited his ability to fully wield Gay American privilege was the complication of appointing Cipel to the homeland security post. Regardless of how suitable McGreevey believed Cipel to be for the position, or even how qualified Cipel actually was for the job, in the narrative of the event Cipel became the caricature of the unqualified lover who was carelessly given a job by the governor. Specifically because the Cipel was placed in a homeland security position in the wake of 9/11, his lack of qualification became viewed not only as a poor choice on the part of McGreevey, but also as a state and national security risk. The extremity of this charge challenged not only McGreevey's choices, but also his patriotism. Cipel's Israeli citizenship further complicated the ordeal given the discursive resonances of homeland security with issues in the Middle East. McGreevey's marriage and appointment of Cipel complicated his coming out such that he could not occupy a proper Gay American position.

Though McGreevey is the example with which I work here, the implications of this Gay American construct travel far past the case of the McGreevey event. I recognize that my argument for a Gay American subject as a homonormative mainstream position runs the risk of sounding like a political call for individuals to take up this position in order to become more accepted. This is not the case, however. First of all, as the example of McGreevey shows, it is not a perfect model. Intervening elements impact the acceptance or rejection of individuals regardless of whether or not they adopt a Gay American identity. Secondly, the Gay American position is not accessible by all people, as I have established. There are borders around this position which include race, class,

and citizenship. The more that those who do fit the Gay American mold gain acceptance through playing this role, the more those on the outside get pushed to the margins.

Closely related, another important element to consider is that not every gay-identified person is in the position to disclose their identity safely. McGreevey faced public scandal and the voluntary loss of a job. These were risks of disclosure; however the risks faced by some individuals are much higher. Physical danger, abandonment, forcible job loss, and many other consequences are the realities of many people who may wish to take up Gay American subjecthood, but are unable to do so. For all these reasons, I wish to clarify my argument. I do not assert that all gay-identified or same-sex-loving people should take up this position in order to become accepted. The argument for a Gay American construct serves simply to highlight that this construct has been created and that it carries consequences when it is operationalized discursively.

As can be seen in the work of the HRC, the Gay American subject is adopted not only for the personal gain of those who can wield it properly, but also for political and social campaigns such as the push for same-sex marriages. In these contexts, the Gay American comes alive through arguments for marriage as a civil right or claims that gay people are treated as “second class citizens.” It is crucial to understand these discursive methods in order to make sense the social and political culture of the United States in this era as well as to understand any potential for social change in any way. Understanding the Gay American can be used in order to make mainstream argument such as the HRC’s or to rebut those arguments in favor of more flexible social understandings of sexuality and identity.

I would like to leave my commentary on contemporary political and social movements at this time given that it is not my aim to make recommendations of what should be done with regards to social change. I have argued that the Gay American construct holds implications for potential social change, but I do not wish to make suggestions of how it should be used or to what ends. Instead, my concern is with how these discursive narratives about sexuality and identity become constructed and circulated. In order to return to this argument, I would again like to take up the McGreevey event and my treatment of genre in this analysis.

In this thesis I have utilized three different genres which create narratives of the McGreevey event: the speech, the newspaper article, and the memoir. Each of these genres constructed their own narratives of the event and, while they referred to and connected with each other, each of the genre's respective narratives created something different in the overall memory of the event. The speech introduced the term "Gay American" and set up the discursive context for the event through the use of the coming out script, with references to the confession. The newspapers mediated which material was highlighted and what was underplayed, thereby establishing the event as one about sexual identity as opposed to any other issues (such as corruption, or even the sex itself). McGreevey's memoir provided more detail for the narrative behind the speech, specifically displaying his coming out as a conversion, thereby codifying the Gay American subject. While the narratives of these three genres flow one into the other, each accomplishes a different task in the overall memory of the event. The accomplishments of each piece of the narrative also teach us something about what different genres themselves are able to do; political speeches set the tone and terms for the event,

newspapers tell the public what is important about an event, and memoirs reflect back on the event and attempt to create a more cohesive interpretation of what was important. The overall memory of the event and of McGreevey himself was simplified by all three of these genres in the manner with which they were most accustomed.

Overall, genre and the construct of the Gay American serve the same purposes. Both show us how more complicated details of an event or an individual are cut away to create a more digestible version of reality. Genres serve to simplify a story by addressing it from a particular point of view with one goal in mind. The Gay American, similarly, provides a simplification of queer people by eliminating differences between individuals and presenting one unified image. As was previously discussed, the overvaluation of coming out as the conversion to a proper Gay American subject omits some individuals from recognition. Just as details of the McGreevey event such as his corruption or the perspectives of other characters were eliminated or downplayed through the genre-bound narratives of the event, marginalized queer individuals and their identities become eclipsed by the homonormative image of the Gay American.

## Appendix One: Speech Transcript

**McGreevey: 'I am a gay American'**

**Transcript of news conference comments from CNN**

Throughout my life, I have grappled with my own identity, who I am. As a young child, I often felt ambivalent about myself, in fact, confused.

By virtue of my traditions, and my community, I worked hard to ensure that I was accepted as part of the traditional family of America. I married my first wife, Kari, out of respect and love. And together, we have a wonderful, extraordinary daughter. Kari then chose to return to British Columbia.

I then had the blessing of marrying Dina, whose love and joy for life has been an incredible source of strength for me. And together, we have the most beautiful daughter.

Yet, from my early days in school, until the present day, I acknowledged some feelings, a certain sense that separated me from others. But because of my resolve, and also thinking that I was doing the right thing, I forced what I thought was an acceptable reality onto myself, a reality which is layered and layered with all the, quote, "good things," and all the, quote, "right things" of typical adolescent and adult behavior.

Yet, at my most reflective, maybe even spiritual level, there were points in my life when I began to question what an acceptable reality really meant for me. Were there realities from which I was running? Which master was I trying to serve?

I do not believe that God tortures any person simply for its own sake. I believe that God

enables all things to work for the greater good. And this, the 47th year of my life, is arguably too late to have this discussion. But it is here, and it is now.

At a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul and decide one's unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is.

And so my truth is that I am a gay American. And I am blessed to live in the greatest nation with the tradition of civil liberties, the greatest tradition of civil liberties in the world, in a country which provides so much to its people.

Yet because of the pain and suffering and anguish that I have caused to my beloved family, my parents, my wife, my friends, I would almost rather have this moment pass.

For this is an intensely personal decision, and not one typically for the public domain. Yet, it cannot and should not pass.

I am also here today because, shamefully, I engaged in adult consensual affair with another man, which violates my bonds of matrimony. It was wrong. It was foolish. It was inexcusable.

And for this, I ask the forgiveness and the grace of my wife.

She has been extraordinary throughout this ordeal, and I am blessed by virtue of her love and strength.

I realize the fact of this affair and my own sexuality if kept secret leaves me, and most importantly the governor's office, vulnerable to rumors, false allegations and threats of

disclosure.

So I am removing these threats by telling you directly about my sexuality.

Let me be clear, I accept total and full responsibility for my actions. However, I'm required to do now, to do what is right to correct the consequences of my actions and to be truthful to my loved ones, to my friends and my family and also to myself.

It makes little difference that as governor I am gay. In fact, having the ability to truthfully set forth my identity might have enabled me to be more forthright in fulfilling and discharging my constitutional obligations.

Given the circumstances surrounding the affair and its likely impact upon my family and my ability to govern, I have decided the right course of action is to resign.

To facilitate a responsible transition, my resignation will be effective on November 15 of this year.

I'm very proud of the things we have accomplished during my administration. And I want to thank humbly the citizens of the state of New Jersey for the privilege to govern.

## Appendix Two: Quotations from the Speech Transcript

*Note: Quoted passages are bolded and named in brackets.*

McGreevey: 'I am a gay American'

Transcript of news conference comments from CNN with quotations annotated by the author.

TRENTON, New Jersey (CNN) -- James McGreevey held a news conference Thursday to announce he would resign in November. This is a transcript of his remarks.

**[Grappling] Throughout my life, I have grappled with my own identity, who I am. As a young child, I often felt ambivalent about myself, in fact, confused.**

By virtue of my traditions, and my community, **[Worked Hard] I worked hard to ensure that I was accepted as part of the traditional family of America.** I married my first wife, Kari, out of respect and love. And together, we have a wonderful, extraordinary daughter. Kari then chose to return to British Columbia.

I then had the blessing of marrying Dina, whose love and joy for life has been an incredible source of strength for me. And together, we have the most beautiful daughter.

**[Separation] Yet, from my early days in school, until the present day, I acknowledged some feelings, a certain sense that separated me from others. [Good Things] But because of my resolve, and also thinking that I was doing the right thing, I forced what I thought was an acceptable reality onto myself, a reality which is layered and layered with all the, quote, "good things," and all the, quote, "right things" of typical adolescent and adult behavior.**

**[Reflection] Yet, at my most reflective, maybe even spiritual level, there were points in my life when I began to question what an acceptable reality really meant for me. Were there realities from which I was running? Which master was I trying to serve?**

**[Belief] I do not believe that God tortures any person simply for its own sake. I believe that God enables all things to work for the greater good. And this, the 47th year of my life, is arguably too late to have this discussion. But it is here, and it is now.**

**[Mirror] At a point in every person's life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one's soul and decide one's unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it or hope to see it, but as it is.**

**[Gay American] And so my truth is that I am a gay American. And I am blessed to live in the greatest nation with the tradition of civil liberties, the greatest tradition of civil liberties in the world, in a country which provides so much to its people.**

**[Suffering] Yet because of the pain and suffering and anguish that I have caused to my beloved family, my parents, my wife, my friends, I would almost rather have this moment pass.**

**[Personal] For this is an intensely personal decision, and not one typically for the public domain. Yet, it cannot and should not pass.**

**[Affair] I am also here today because, shamefully, I engaged in adult consensual affair with another man, which violates my bonds of matrimony. [Wrong] It was wrong. It was foolish. It was inexcusable.**

**[Forgiveness] And for this, I ask the forgiveness and the grace of my wife.**

She has been extraordinary throughout this ordeal, and I am blessed by virtue of her love and strength.

**[Threats] I realize the fact of this affair and my own sexuality if kept secret leaves me, and most importantly the governor's office, vulnerable to rumors, false allegations and threats of disclosure.**

**So I am removing these threats by telling you directly about my sexuality.**

Let me be clear, **[Responsibility] I accept total and full responsibility for my actions. However, I'm required to do now, to do what is right to correct the consequences of my actions** and to be truthful to my loved ones, to my friends and my family and also to myself.

**[Abilities] It makes little difference that as governor I am gay. In fact, having the ability to truthfully set forth my identity might have enabled me to be more forthright in fulfilling and discharging my constitutional obligations.**

**[Resign] Given the circumstances surrounding the affair and its likely impact upon my family and my ability to govern, I have decided the right course of action is to resign.**

**[Transition] To facilitate a responsible transition,** my resignation will be effective on November 15 of this year.

I'm very proud of the things we have accomplished during my administration. And I want

to thank humbly the citizens of the state of New Jersey for the privilege to govern.

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