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## Traumatic Experiences Through the Queer Lens

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# **Traumatic Experiences**

# **Through the **Queer** Lens**

**Holden Guckenberg**

**HCOM 475 Senior Capstone: Trauma and Healing**

**December 12 2019**

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## Capstone Proposal:

1. Holden Guckenberg, Writing and Rhetoric
2. I want to do a creative project. My idea is to write short stories about LGBTQ people who have had trauma regarding their LGBTQ identity, such as from bullying or coming out. I want to find real people who are comfortable sharing their story, then I want to write their stories in a more or less fictional way. Sticking to the facts and events, but changing names and places and adding details to aid to the overall flow and creativity. I want it to be a collection of short stories.
3. This semester's theme is trauma and healing and I want my project to be about the trauma that LGBTQ people have gone through, so I think it directly correlates in that way.
4. The purpose is to enlighten people about the trauma that LGBTQ people go through. So that others know, and also so that other LGBTQ people who may have gone through similar experiences know that they are not alone in these experiences and feelings.
5. I think by writing about these people's stories in a fictional way will help get these stories out there without compromising people's security and the added creativity will give a better sense and connection with the reader.
6. Trauma in Queer Lives
7. A collection of fictional personal traumatic experiences from queer individuals based off of real people and their real stories. These stories enlighten the reader to real events that cause trauma in the lives of LGBTQ people and help to bring awareness to people who may have had similar experiences.
8. I will of course have to find people who have traumatic experiences and are willing to share them. Then I will have to write their stories.
9. The skills required for this project would be the ability to find people who feel comfortable sharing their experiences, active listening skills, writing skills, and being able to be mindful of these people's personal experiences as well. Being an HCOM major, I have taken numerous classes where we have learned to effectively communicate and listen to people. I think this is a skill I definitely have. I would say the same for writing. With this major, I have done a lot of writing. I have also taken many creative writing classes in the past and I have always been a creative person.
10. First I will find LGBTQ people who are comfortable sharing their experience with me. I have many outlets to do this; such as personal connections through friends, social media outlets, and with many community groups on campus or within the bigger community. Then I will meet with people and hear their stories, making

notes and details. Then I will write these short stories and make them into a collection.

11.

- a. Search for people to listen to their stories- October 1
- b. Project Title and Summary- October 10
- c. Meet with individuals to listen to stories- October 11
- d. Meet with individuals to listen to stories- October 12
- e. Meet with individuals to listen to stories- October 13
- f. Write stories- October 16
- g. Write stories- October 18
- h. Write stories- October 20
- i. Project draft- October 29
- j. Keep working on project- Through November
- k. Turn in final project- December 12
- l. Capstone Festival- December 19/20

**About:**

This is a collection of short stories based off of real trauma that LGBTQ+ individuals have experienced. I have interviewed seven people who identify within the LGBTQ+ community and listened to their traumatic stories. Based on their stories, I have written their accounts with trauma while expanding and taking creative freedom to better enunciate and bring-forth their stories. Trauma affects the LGBTQ+ community at a greater height than it does the general population. It's important to recognize this fact so that we can support those people who have faced tremendous adversity in the form of trauma. In one form or another, it's apparent that everyone suffers from trauma. Of course some are much worse than others, but it's a universal thing that we as people all can understand and connect with. We see that minority groups tend to have a higher

percentage of people within that group that have experienced trauma than that of the general population, yet we do nothing to aid them. With my project I hope to enlighten folks about what is being experienced while allowing these queer individuals to have a voice. Getting stories out there is important because people can't help and people can't change if they don't know what is happening. Choosing to do a creative project rather than a research paper was a deliberate choice as to better reflect the realness of the traumas that people face. Stories add a personal touch and allow a deeper connection with the audience. It's not just a list of facts and events. I feel that it is more meaningful to write stories for this specific topic than it would have been to write a research essay both for me and for the audience. Our senior capstone class was titled Trauma and Healing. My project directly connects to our class because our class is about trauma, and my project is about trauma. In the class we looked at various types of trauma and who is affected by them. We discussed philosophical and creative ways in which communication can alleviate trauma. We also explored how our own identities have a relationship with trauma. By listening to these queer individuals speak they were allowed a platform on which to be honest. By writing their stories down it enabled them to have their experiences out there. As a person who identifies within the LGBTQ+ community, I felt that in our class studies and discussions queer representation was completely absent. I wanted to give queer people a voice and also show to the general population the traumas that we go through collectively and individually. Since living in California for five years I have seen that many people are over the whole "gay rights" thing because the climate here is so liberal. But California being a bubble, many people

don't see that there are still lots of issues that affect the LGBTQ+ Community. My project reflects the importance of knowing the traumas queer people face in society.

## Traumatic Experiences Through the Queer Lens

Rieker 2016

School had been a long day, but my friends definitely made it fun. I had a student government meeting that day and I had just finished a really great art piece in class. I went home after school and kicked the soccer ball around outside for a bit.

Tomorrow was going to be another normal day of highschool.

I remember grabbing my earphones, putting on ColdPlay... just trying to relax a bit before I started on my homework. This kind of calming music always made me think. And what was I constantly thinking about? Being gay. Because being gay made me different. I was so sick of hiding and being scared. I actually felt that I was in danger because I knew if people found out they would not like it. It's crazy how people in our society, especially growing up in Montana, are so afraid of what they don't understand. They fear it so much that they actively rally against it, actively hate and bully, even use brutality. Of course I wasn't going to come out yet. Some people I had known did come out during highschool. They were an example to me that I could not, would not, and should not come out.

Really, I had been wanting to move out for so long and finally just really be GAY and just be myself. I guess every angsty teen as they progress through their highschool years becomes excited to move away from their parents. For me, I think it was something bigger, though. My plan was to come out after I moved out of the house. Probably far away- I would call my parents in the safety of my dorm room, over one



hundred miles away. I had never expected them to take it well, but at least I wouldn't have been there to witness their feelings first hand.

It was early fall- hadn't been too cold, but it definitely wasn't warm either. That night it started to snow a little bit. I recall looking out the window, seeing the little white flakes shimmering from the porch light.

The softly falling snow was beautiful, especially in contrast to the events that happened next.

I decided that it was time I tackled my homework so I could get to bed on time and wake up not being so tired the next morning. I walked over to my desk, flipped the lamp on and took out my books and notebook from my backpack.

It was mostly some light reading and then a short essay reflecting on what I had just read. So I got right to it... *In the South East it was very common amongst...*

I stopped reading when my dad walked into my room with a strangely nervous and disgusted look on his face. He told me he had heard a rumor. My mind started racing, I knew what the rumor could be. I was so terrified. It seemed like the longest time had passed before either of us said anything. He looked at me with grimacing eyes and said to me in a very accusational way, "Are you gay?" It looked like he was about to cry out of disgust.

I shut my book, too scared to look up. Too frozen to move.

*Are you gay?* My stomach sank, my vision blurred, I felt like I was on fire. *Are you gay?* I didn't know what to say. Thoughts went through my head in just seconds. *Should*

*I deny it?* I was scared, I couldn't escape. *Who did he hear this from?* Everything was about to change,

"Yeah," I said, barely audible. Still looking down.

"Are you serious, Rieker! What is wrong with you!? That is not acceptable!"

I stayed silent.

"You are not gay! My son is not gay! We are a christian family!"

"Can't you just be normal like me and your mother!?"

"Sorry, but I'm not," I said.

"You will go to Hell if you choose to be like this!" He yelled at me.

The thought came into my head... *Was I just going to let him yell at me like this?*

"I'm gay and I'm Christian and I'm your son! There is nothing wrong with me. I was born like this and I have always been this way," I said with a confusingly confident tone.

I was so scared, but I didn't want to show it. I wanted him to know that this is who I was and I was okay with that. It had been about a year ago that I came to terms with my gay identity. It was a struggle, but I was confidently myself at this point in life. I just wasn't ready for my family to know.

My dad looked so appalled. His son had just confirmed his worst suspicions. He does in fact have a gay son living under his roof. It's hard to explain his face. It was as if his face was clay and someone pulled his cheeks downward, pushed his eyes closer together, pressed their thumb into his forehead, and tugged his lips into an arch way. He looked sick to his stomach.

He stepped towards me and did something that I would have never thought he could do.

It happened so fast. He put his hand into a fist and swung it at me, hitting me right in the eye. I fell to the ground, yelling "STOPPPPP! Stop!!"

He kicked me in the ribs as I was lying on the ground. I rolled over as fast as I could. I tried to hit him back, but he was a lot bigger than me and I was just a skinny sixteen year old.

He kept hitting and kicking me and I kept yelling for him to stop, still in shock as all of this was happening. I couldn't believe the man who raised me and who was supposed to love me unconditionally would do this to me.

My younger brother got home from school to hear me yelling, He ran up to my room to see his older brother cowering in the corner with a face made of blood. My dad was still fuming, he got in a few more blows before my brother got him to stop. My brother grabbed the phone and dialed 9-1-1.

When the police arrived, they were told what had happened. They then proceeded to tell me, a broken battered sixteen year old with purple eyes and crimson dripping from my mouth, that my parents had the right to discipline me how they wish.

I couldn't believe and actually still can't believe that police would say this to me in the state that I was in. It was disappointing and I was fervent with anger and distress.

I slept at my friend's house that night, and then the next ninety or so nights after. It took my parents three months to allow me back into their lives after finding out that I was gay.

## **Kabir 2018**

Coming from a very Hindu, very Indian family I have been constantly in thought about my gay identity since I was fairly young. I didn't accept myself until a few years ago, though. I came to California on a visa, I got my masters with a 4.0. My family was very proud of me; the first in the family to do so well in school. Then I continued on with work once my work visa was approved. I think one of the biggest reasons I wanted so badly to stay in the US was because I wanted to avoid my family back in India so that they didn't find out about me.

I was twenty-six when my parents really started pressuring me about getting married to a girl in India; they were actively looking for someone for me. The pressure got to be too much for me. I just wanted to scream at the top of my lungs, "I'm GAY!!!!!" But I also couldn't bare the feeling of disappointing my parents.

I was at work when my father called me about a girl they wanted me to meet. It was planned for me to go back to India soon because I needed it for my visa to be officially approved. I just kept thinking about the awkwardness of being set up with a girl. I didn't want to hurt her, either.

I told my father “I don’t want to marry a girl because I am gay.”

He was shocked. He was speechless. He only said “Why?”

I didn’t know what to say. It’s just who I was... I wished it wasn’t. He asked me what he had done to deserve this karma.

Neither of my parents talked to me for days after. When they finally called me it was just crying... regretful words... crying... denial... crying.

This is why I waited so long to tell them, I had fully expected this reaction.

I was finally in the US where being gay was okay, and I felt so much better about myself. But hearing my parents disapproval brought my mindset back to when I was living in India. At the time it was illegal to be gay in India; ironically it was exactly a month later that the law was abolished and it became legal to be gay.

That didn’t change the opinions of my parents, though. I’m sure my father, who always reads the paper ignored it that day.

I was sad and depressed, but I was just a bit happy because I was finally not lying to my family. I was sort of free in a way. The brief happiness I felt was overshadowed by the intense guilt of disappointing my parents. I felt like I was a bad son, they deserved better... someone who can fulfill their wishes. My parents told me that I would end up alone, and I believed them. My father also said that all of my accomplishments meant nothing.

It came to be November and I flew back to India. Out of the twelve days I was back home, my parents took me to four different therapists and eight total sessions. My

parents didn't really understand what "gay" was. They thought I wanted to be a girl or that I would start talking in a different voice. I tried to explain to them that I was just the same person they have always loved, but they didn't listen. They couldn't accept that I was gay. I decided that I would go along with the therapy sessions because these doctors have got to be on my side and my parents would have to listen to them.

Therapy session 1:

The first thing he asked me is how did I know I was gay. I told him that I am attracted to the same-sex and not girls. He then asked me many basic questions, mostly about me being gay. He asked me many questions about my sex life and what I had experienced and what I liked about all my experiences. It was all very uncomfortable. At the end of the session he brought my parents in and tried to explain to them that this was just who I am, gay. My parents just started crying. I think they expected the therapist to fix me, but when he was on my side, my parents were very upset.

So onto the next therapist; it seemed that my parents were going to keep looking for a therapist until one of them sympathized with them and agree with them. They needed someone to fix their son.

Therapy session 2:

This experience was more uncomfortable than the first one. His approach was more direct, he seemed to be coming from the oppositional side of things. I thought he would be on my parent's side.

He asked me "Why are you gay?" Then he asked me if I was attracted to him. This all felt very unprofessional. Accusational. And personally placing himself into context. I did not like this. Then he did a physical examination of my genitals, as if he could find out the first question he asked by doing this. Would looking at me naked help him determine why I'm gay? I was so confused and uncomfortable. Was this even allowed? I went with it because I really wanted my parents to have a piece of mind... and he's a doctor right? His examination seemed to be inconclusive. He asked me if I could try to change my thoughts, just stop liking men.

After my session he told my parents that he didn't know what to do, they would need to seek alternative help. My parents didn't accept this therapist either. Onto the next one.

Therapy session 3:

This therapist seemed to understand what I was going through, her motive seemed more leaning towards helping my parents. I think that she understood that me being gay was just who I was. We only spoke for about five minutes and then she brought my parents back. She tried to tell my parents that being gay was not a choice

and that being gay was okay. I'm still their same son they have always known, but they would have to learn to come to terms with who I was.

They obviously didn't like this one. They decided to try another therapist. Maybe the next one would agree with them and help them, they thought.

Therapy sessions 4-8:

This final therapist, I had five sessions with. She seemed like the best therapist so far. She asked me so many questions about my gay identity. She told me to tell her everything about myself as a gay man. How I felt being gay, how comfortable I am engaging with men, what did I think about myself being gay. It was a lot of questions and it was tough for me, but I felt that she was actually trying to help me. There were no weird vibes like the other therapists, either.

After each session she talked to my parents and tried to explain my feelings to them and that it was okay to be gay. She was very kind to me and very kind with my parents.

When I went back to India in 2019, I expected my parents to be more accepting and kind towards me. I was surprised when they had another therapy session set up for me. Anger shot through my body like electricity.



**Veronica 2004**

Just like a lot of people who grow up questioning their sexuality do, I came out in waves to different people who I felt comfortable enough with. It was years later that I finally said to myself, "You know what, Veronica. You like girls and that's okay."

The first person I told was my brother when I was about fifteen years old. I never put any labels on it, but I knew I was different. I didn't like boys the same way other girls did. Just as I wasn't too accepting of myself at this time, my brother had some reservations, as well. He was nonetheless supportive of me.

The night before my mom found out about me liking girls I remember walking past the living room where she was watching a TV show. It was Rosie O'Donnell's talk show. Who was an out lesbian for about eight years at the time. I remember it because it was quite a coincidence that it had been on TV the day before my relationship with my mother would be forever changed. I wondered if Rosie O'Donnell's mother also had a life planned for her daughter in which she would get married and have children at twenty-one years of age.

I was a seventeen year old tomboy, sound asleep in my bed. I had planned to sleep in because the following night I was going to go to a party with my cousins. I opened my eyes after a knock at the door.

My mom sounded frantic, "Veronica! Wake up!"

She opened my door, grabbed my shoulders and shook me to get up, "Veronica. We need to talk. Now!"

I was worried, I didn't know why my mom was acting so strangely. "What? It's so early? What's going on?"

"Come to the garage with me, now," she said.

So I follow her to the garage, very confused about what might be wrong. *Were my brothers okay? Did a relative pass?* I couldn't shake the feeling that something bad had happened. I was shaking.

When we both entered the garage my mom quickly shut the door and said quietly, "Are you lesbian?" as if she didn't want anyone to hear, which I now know she didn't.

I completely owned up to it, "Yeah, Mom, I am."

She looked furious. She slapped me across the face, it stung a bit. Her reaction stung more than the actual slap, though.

"Do not tell anyone else. Do you hear me?!" She said angrily.

*Is she ashamed of me?* I thought. I looked down.

"Veronica. Do you hear me!?" She said again.

"Yeah," I said, "Who told you?"

“Does it matter? I can’t believe this right now. I am so upset,” she said, sounding so disappointed in her only daughter.

I came to find out that my cousin who I told about me told my oldest brother and my oldest brother called my mom to tell her. Of course that enraged me, but I was still more hurt that my mom was so ashamed of me, so embarrassed.

### **Stevie 1971**

I was in my late teens and early twenties during the seventies; I wasn’t really a hippy and I wasn’t really into much music. What I did really like to be involved in was going out with my girlfriends... dressing up, going to clubs, and dancing. I passed as a girl; guys could never tell me apart from my friends who were born cis-gender girls. That is until I spoke. So I made a habit of not talking when we went out, boys would even kiss me thinking I was just one of the girls. And I was. I just didn’t really know it yet. I hadn’t talked to my family in five or more years at this point, but my friends would say that I was just a very flamboyant guy. Now I have had the full surgery and I am fully a woman on the inside and outside too, now.

I went by Stevie back then, but I was still legally Steven. I had it legally changed later on in life to Stevie. So my friends and I would go out as often as we could. I wasn’t in college and neither were my friends. I did like college boys, though!

One Saturday night I was out with my friends, I think we were at Dillon's on Westwood in LA. It was a decently popular place. It was just another regular night out, one of hundreds I spent going out with this group of girls. I didn't know it was going to be my last night going out with them.

I was wearing a yellow jersey wrap dress with chunky high heels. I don't recall what my friends were wearing, but probably some combination of tube tops, spandex, and boots. I always felt like the prettiest girl, even though I was anatomically a boy.

We walked into the club eyeing all the cute boys. It went just like a typical night. Dancing, flirting. A boy sort of latched on to our group, breaking away from his group of friends. He seemed to have a particular interest in me. We had sat down together and he was asking my friends why I was barely speaking. I had a fairly deep voice for how flamboyant and girlish I was. I was nervous that he wouldn't like me anymore if I spoke. I eventually spoke, nervously. He grabbed my hand and I had a sigh of relief.

He wanted me to go outside with him, so I did.

My friends came out a bit later; I wished it had been a little bit sooner, though.

As soon as we got outside, we went around the corner... not too far, maybe 20 yards or so. As soon as we rounded the corner, he shoved me against the wall and said, "Are you a boy!?" Accusationally.

At that moment I wanted more than anything to just be a girl.

I didn't respond and he took that as my answer. He shook his head in disgust and punched me in the side of the face. A line of blood flew out the other side of my mouth and my wig flew to the ground. I screamed.

My friends had come out at this point, they were followed by some new guys. Casually walking closer to me, they were all laughing until they saw me around the corner. The boys that were with my friends ran up and shoved the guy the ground saying, "Get off her!"

The boys turned around and realized I wasn't what they thought I was. One of them said, "Oh, it's a boy!"

They left after they realized I wasn't what they had thought. My friends followed the group of boys and the boy who punched me ran the other direction.

I was left there alone in the street, a little bit bloody, but more emotionally damaged than anything.

From that moment I realized that I didn't just really really really wish I was a girl, I realized that I really am a girl.

## **Fernando 2000**

I was about seven when I told my parents that I think I liked boys and girls. At the time it was so easy for me to tell them; it seemed to regular to me. At first they told me that it was normal and every little kid has both girls and boys as friends. I remember being frustrated because they didn't understand that I didn't just like them as friends, but something more. I wasn't sure how I knew. I was only seven and I didn't have any sexual attraction, I just knew that I liked boys too.

I persisted over the course of a few weeks. I guess my parents talked to a counselor at my school about it and the counselor told them that it is possible for someone to know they are gay or in my case, bi at that age.

After my parents visit with the counselor they told me that if I think I like boys and girls, then that is okay. They never once showed me any negative feelings towards me declaring my bisexuality at age seven.

Looking back, I am so thankful to have such parents. My mother told me much later on that they were so compassionate because her parents, being strict catholics from Mexico, would never have acted the same. And that she actually had a gay brother who her parents never accepted. Her brother passed away when he was a teenager from an illness and her parents never forgave themselves for not being in his life in his final few years.

I didn't ever think there was anything wrong with me until some boys in my class started making fun of me because I told them that I had a crush on a boy in the grade above us. I had never expressed interest of boys to my friends at school because I had never liked a specific boy until then.

It wasn't a regular day of school, our class was having a party to celebrate Easter. My teacher had an egg dying station and a snack station. Also there was a movie ready for us to watch after lunch.

I was sitting at the table trying to dye an egg purple, but it came out brown because I mixed blue and orange. The two boys sitting next to me were throwing paper balls at this girl in class so I joined in.

Another girl from class came up to us and said, "You know if you bully a girl that means you like her!"

"Noooo, I don't like her," said one of the boys.

I said, "I don't like her either. I like Michael."

The three other kids looked very confused.

The boy sitting closest to me said, "You're a boy, you are supposed to like girls."

I told them that I liked girls, but I also liked boys.

The other boy got up and walked over to the teacher. The teacher and him walked over to our table, "What's the problem?"

The boy sitting closest to me said, "Fernando said he likes boys."

The teacher looked puzzled, maybe she hadn't ever dealt with this kind of thing before. She had a little smirk on her face.

Very confidently she spoke, saying "Fernando, boys like girls and girls like boys. Stop playing around, you know that."

Being a child hearing that from an adult had a different effect on me. I thought that she must be right. She's a teacher; she's the smartest person I know.

I went home and told my parents that I didn't like boys anymore. They left it as it was. I didn't speak of liking boys for years after, I kept it hidden away like a dirty secret. It really changed how I felt about myself for years to come.

**Alex 2012**

I came to terms with my queer identity and fully accepted it when I was fairly young. I started dating when I was quite young, as well. I didn't really come out to anyone for awhile, but my partner and I got pretty serious when we were fourteen years old. Or at least as a fourteen year old I thought we were pretty serious.

So I decided it was time to tell my parents about our relationship and about my queer identity.

I planned the day I would tell them weeks in advance. Every day it grew closer I became more and more nervous. When the day finally came, I woke up and headed to school. My plan was to do it right when I got home. On the drive to school my dad noticed I was acting very nervous, even though it wasn't going to happen for hours. I told him that everything was okay, and he brushed it off.

All day at school I was so distracted, I felt a bit sick to my stomach. My friends even noticed I was acting strange. Just like I told my dad, I told my friends that nothing was wrong. I said that I was just feeling a bit sick. One of my teachers tried to get me to go home because I looked like I was going to throw up, but I told him that I was fine. The thought of going home earlier than I had to made me feel even worse. It meant that I would be telling my parents hours before I planned.

I got through the school day. Home in the living room, I asked my parents to come sit on the couch. Despite my nervousness all day, I felt pretty confident when it



was actually happening. It took them awhile to finally get to the living room and ready to listen to whatever I was about to say.

“So, I wanted to tell you guys something,” I said with a slightly shaky voice.

My parents nodded, “Okay, what is it?” My dad said.

“I... you know how I hangout with Taylor a lot? Um...” I stopped because my voice faltered.

My parents were still just looking at me, my dad looked calm and my mom looked confused.

“We are dating, I think I’m queer,” I said.

“WHAT?! Are you lying?” My mom said hysterically.

My dad was very stoic, he put his hand on my mom’s back and she leaned forward and put her face in her hands.

There were a few minutes of silence before my mom let out a big sigh as she finally looked up at me. “Give me your phone. You don’t have this privilege anymore; I’m going to look through your messages.”

That scared me so much, my private messages with my partner? I kept thinking about what we had talked about. I hope there was nothing bad that my mom would see. I gave her my phone and went to my room.

I cried that night in my bed, I don’t think I slept at all.

Later she told me that I was grounded and that I wouldn’t be allowed to do any extra activities outside of school.

My mom and I didn't have much of a relationship for many months after this. We would talk casually, but nothing off the surface level. She still knew I was queer, and I still knew she didn't accept it.

My dad was so supportive of me during this whole time. He accepted my sexuality and even allowed me to see my partner without my mom knowing. He was unemployed at the time and would even drive me to spend time with my partner while my mom was at work.

Valentines Day came around, I was a freshman in highschool at the time. My partner bought me a huge stuffed bear holding a red heart that read, "I love you."

I loved it, but I was so scared because my mom was supposed to pick me up from school that day and the bear was way too large to fit in my little backpack. I frantically texted my dad, "Can you please pick me up from school instead of Mom because I got a stuffed animal from Taylor and it's too big to fit in my backpack."

I waited outside the school. When I saw my dad pull up I was in such relief, but when I opened the door, he looked me dead in the face and said, "You're fucked."

Apparently my mom had my dad's phone and saw the message.

When we arrived home my dad went into the house and I stayed in the car. I actually stayed in the car for almost five hours because I was too scared to go inside. My dad and mom were yelling at each other the whole time I was hiding in the car.

I realized that I eventually would need to face her so I went inside. The moment I got inside she started screaming at me about betrayal and lying.

She yelled at me, "I don't even want you to be my child!"

A week after this incident occurred, I became very ill. I had a one hundred and six degree fever and I was having frequent seizures. I fell into a coma after one of my seizures.

I remember being half conscious, my mother kneeled down beside my bed and grabbed my hand. She spoke very softly, "I'm so sorry Alex, I don't want you to die and not know how much I love you. I fully accept who you are."

I don't think she knew I was awake, but I distinctly remember it.

When I fully came out of the coma, my parents and my partner were all standing around me hugging.

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HCOM 475

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### Reflective Essay

My project is a collection of LGBTQ+ experiences I wrote based off of the real trauma these individuals have gone through. Each experience is written in first person as if they were telling their stories themselves. It adds a certain realism to them. While conducting these interviews I was paying close attention to not only the story and the details, but to how the person spoke and the way they acted. This was to get a feel of who they are as a person and how they speak and interact with the world so I could better write their experience to sound like them. I also asked a lot of questions to each person that I didn't end up using in the end result, but just to have the background information in case it would add to their story. It also helped me see how they speak and such. While many of the questions I asked these people were not used in the final result, many of the questions were used more interwoven within speech and thoughts. I asked what went on in their heads when the traumatic experience happened and throughout the different parts of their experience as to better understand and put myself into their shoes. All of these extra steps I took while interviewing and listening to them tell their experiences really helped the overall writing of their experiences. The stories have a very personal touch to each of them based off of the person whose story it was.

The way in which I wrote each of the experiences they have very much internal dialogue. Depicting the character's thoughts and feelings. I did this because when speaking of matters like trauma I felt it was important to make sure their feelings were on showcase. I felt that the most important part of telling these stories was to show their feelings when they were in the moment of the event that has caused them trauma. I use imagery so that the reader could have a deeper connection to the scene before their eyes. A couple examples from my project; "*Are you gay?* My stomach sank, my vision blurred, I felt like I was on fire," and "They then proceeded to tell me, a broken battered sixteen year old with purple eyes and crimson dripping from my mouth, that my parents had the right to discipline me how they wish." The reader can get a better sense of what the character is feeling when he says he felt like he was on fire. A sense of complete embarrassment and imbalance of the situation. Then with the other quote, "...purple eyes and crimson dripping from my mouth..." Often using an adjective as simple as a color gives really good non complex imagery for the reader.

When choosing how to use the dialogue to its greatest potential I decided that I would include the most important and effective parts. At first there was a lot more dialogue that I cut out, not that it didn't add to the stories, but I felt they were more clear and impactful with just the most influential and meaningful pieces. I felt that cutting right to the chase was good, especially because of the amount of internal dialogue. The internal dialogue gave the short sense of suspense and background needed without having to use as much dialogue. My goal was also to have each character have their own vibe, their own voice that was unique to themselves. Along with editing much of the

initial dialogue I chose to do the same with detail. I wanted to add just the right amount of detail as to not bore the reader and to get the message across while still being pleasant to read. In most of the short experiences I wrote there was only one or two separate scenes; the event in which they experienced their trauma. The scene was probably the least important for these stories when thinking about literary elements. The most focus was put on the character's internal dialogue, like I mentioned above.

There are three main audiences for my project. One being the LGBTQ+ Community and specifically those who have trauma relating to their queer identity, another being people who are interested in learning what the LGBTQ+ goes through, and another being a mixed group of people reading out of interest. LGBTQ+ people will resonate with these stories and relate to them in many ways. Everyone within the LGBTQ+ community has either had some form of trauma relating to their identity or knows someone who has. Trauma is a very relatable thing for this community because of the heteronormative and many times homophobic society that we live in. As queer people we experience the world vastly different than the majority of the population does. There are many experiences that the heterosexual and cis-gendered population haven't and will never go through and it's important to acknowledge that. Queer people will read and feel like it's just for them and feel connected. My main audience is LGBTQ+ people. For my second audience it would be the general population who maybe knows and loves someone in the LGBTQ+ community and is interested in knowing about issues that they have faced. People who read these stories will better understand what many LGBTQ+ people have gone through in life for just being born in this society. While it's a

small sample of experiences that LGBTQ+ people go through, it offers a glimpse into their minds and feelings and what is being experienced. My third audience would be the general reader looking for something of interest, whether they are a part of the LGBTQ+ community or just interested in the community, or maybe just interested in reading about trauma in story form.

Choosing to do a creative project rather than a research paper was a deliberate choice as to better reflect the realness of the traumas that people face. Stories add a personal touch and allow a deeper connection with the audience. It's not just a list of facts and events. I feel that it is more meaningful to write stories for this specific topic than it would have been to write a research essay both for me and for the audience. I had my basic outline of what I was going to do for my project on one of the first days of class when we talked a little bit about the capstone options. I feel that it was important to choose a topic that was relatable and personal to me. Being a member of the LGBTQ+ community and understanding the traumas that our community can experience, I felt that it was important to do this. Through the various Human Communication(HCOM) classes I have taken I have learned effective ways of communicating and listening to people. That is something that played a large role in this project. I spent almost as much time doing interviews as I did writing and creating the final project, so it did indeed turn out to be very helpful. Of course I also learned to hone my writing skills and make better use of them through the many HCOM courses I have taken. I also took some creative writing courses while studying abroad in Australia where our final grade relied solely on two final, large pieces of writing. The class was

actually a graduate course that translated back to CSUMB as a regular writing course. It was a difficult class with a lot of needed engagement. That being said, I feel like I learned a lot about writing and about my own writing.

Our senior capstone class was titled Trauma and Healing. My project directly connects to our class because our class is about trauma, and my project is about the traumas that LGBTQ+ have experienced. In the class we looked at various types of trauma and who is affected by them. We discussed philosophical and creative ways in which communication can alleviate trauma. We also explored how our own identities have a relationship with trauma. By listening to these queer individuals speak they were allowed a platform on which to be honest. By writing their stories down it enabled them to have their experiences out there. As a person who identifies within the LGBTQ+ community, I felt that in our class studies and discussions queer representation was completely absent. I wanted to give queer people a voice and also show to the general population the traumas that we go through collectively and individually. Since living in California for five years I have seen that many people are over the whole “gay rights” thing because the climate here is so liberal. But California being a bubble, many people don’t see that there are still lots of issues that affect the LGBTQ+ Community. My project reflects the importance of knowing the traumas queer people face in society.

Trauma affects the LGBTQ+ community at a greater height than it does the general population. It’s important to recognize this fact so that we can support those people who have faced tremendous adversity in the form of trauma. In one form or another, it’s apparent that everyone suffers from trauma. Of course some are much



worse than others, but it's a universal thing that we as people all can understand and connect with. We see that minority groups tend to have a higher percentage of people within that group that have experienced trauma than that of the general population, yet we do nothing to aid them. With my project I hope to enlighten folks about what is being experienced while allowing these queer individuals to have a voice. Getting stories out there is important because people can't help and people can't change if they don't know what is happening.

It's important to acknowledge the differences between now and the past. Choosing to do my project on LGBTQ+ people was a choice I made with hesitance because of the heteronormative and still homophobic society we live in. I am gay, but it's still hard and scary to tell people that and to do things that would suggest my orientation (such as doing my final project about LGBTQ+ community). Although, for many LGBTQ+ people in the past it was much worse off. The further back in time we look the worse off it would be for people to have written about LGBTQ+ people. Luckily in our society, it has been getting much better over time and will probably continue to be better.

A lot of people have taken a similar approach in order to reveal and put forth stories based on real events. There aren't any stories or authors that I know off the top of my head that wrote stories based on real events. There is a movie that comes to mind, though. *Prayers for Bobby*. It's about a gay boy who comes out to his very religious family and they disown him. He struggles for a long time and eventually gives in to his depression by jumping off a bridge. His mother later becomes a huge advocate

for gay rights. This movie was based on a true story. In this movie you see one of the major experiences that LGBTQ+ people may go through, being rejected by his family. He then has so much trauma from this event and from the whole occurrence that he commits suicide. Then his family has to suffer because of the mistakes they made, but in the end they heal because they become champions of gay rights. This movie was a movie I watched a long time ago and it really affected me. I hope that my project will affect people in a similar way.

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HCOM 475

12 December 2019

### Final Synthesis Essay

In our class, HCOM 475: Trauma and Healing we discussed the various concepts and ideas surrounding multiple different groups of people and how trauma affects them and also different ways in which to cope or alleviate trauma. At the beginning of class we read some books about trauma and discussed them in class. Before each class we read a section of the book or a different reading and then discussed in class. The discussions were mostly class wide, but we also talked in smaller groups sometimes. I'm not one to speak in front of the class, so I felt good about having small groups. In these small groups I shared my opinions and point of views. They were varying from my fellow classmates, which brought about some good conversations. Into a few classes the discussions started being lead by the students in the class. My partner and I lead a group discussion about trauma in journalism and the professional world. I came up with some very thought provoking questions and we raised the questions in class. Within our discussions we talked about the readings and our own personal views and ideas on the matter. We talked about major issues issues dealing with that reading and who is being affected. Being a variety of students there were many different points of views from various students who either had experienced similar traumas or knew of them and looked at them from a different perspective. Within

the discussions there were also questions raised by the facilitators and also by the other students participating in the discussion. Often the discussion would lead into a more personal and connectedness than what the original reading was. We realized that we all have different points of views and listened to one another with regard to the person speaking and understood that even though the opinions varied that we all had an interconnectedness in the topic at hand.

The theme of our class being “Trauma and Healing”, we talked a lot about the traumas of different groups of people and various ways of healing. We talked about different types of traumas and the different groups of people and different types of individuals experiencing them. It was an interesting theme because so much is still unknown about trauma that a lot of our class discussions were very opinion based. Although there is a lot of unknown in this subject, there is still a lot that is known in which we learned through our readings. There are individual traumas that an individual could experience because of one traumatic event and there are shared traumas that a group of people can experience because of their identity.

Working on my capstone project was a long process with a lot of different steps. My first move in that was finding LGBTQ+ people who have had traumatic experiences and were comfortable sharing them with me. I had to find different avenues to find these people. I asked many friends and also asked them to spread the word. I asked a lot of LGBTQ+ people that I know if they could pass the word along to anyone they thought may be a good candidate to help me in my project. I posted on social media seeking LGBTQ+ individuals; many people came forward to share their experience with me. My

last outlet was asking organizations and different clubs to put the word out there. Most of the people in my project were friends or friends of friends, although there were some from social media and one person who heard about my project from a club event they went to. The interviews were dispersed throughout the semester, but the majority of them were all around the same time. These people shared their experience while I quietly listened. After they were done telling their story in as much detail as they felt comfortable, I asked them questions. Questions about their background, questions about the actual trauma and event, and also general personal questions. These all helped me to gauge the person and to write their experience. Most of these people I interviewed were very outforth about sharing their story with me, but there was one person who half way through decided that it was too triggering for her to keep sharing her experience. That in itself was an experience for me, to see a person so shook from their trauma that they had to stop speaking and withdrawal. We talked for a bit afterwards and I assured her that there was nothing to feel sorry about and that I really appreciated her help anyway. So, as I said, for the most part these people were comfortable and happy to share. They said that it was healing for them to share their story and they were excited to be a part of my project.

Then came the writing part. I began by writing down the story summary on a piece of paper and then developing a voice for the characters based on my interactions with the people who experience it was. I wrote these personal stories with care and trying to understand how they felt in this moment and the surrounding moments. After I wrote all of these stories I edited them to make them more clear and more readable.

Then I had some people peer review them, did a little editing and rearranging based on people's suggestions. I created the poster, which in doing so gave me even more incite into my stories. So I went back and did some additional editing of the writing. Then I wrote the reflection paper, reflecting on the project and assignment.

I took a deeper explorative journey into the theme of the class by selecting one group of people who experience a huge amount of trauma as a community and learned as much as I could about them and their trauma. The queer community has a high percentage of people who have experienced and suffer from trauma. I did my research, but then I went further into a more personal level. My project was more personal than anything, which is really going into a great depth of knowledge that can't be found from just research. Meeting with these individuals was so enlightening to me and I thought that I already knew a lot about my community. It was saddening to understand on this level some of the traumas these people have experienced. My own trauma felt so minimized compared to these people I spoke with. My explorative journey into our theme was very personal and enriching.

I created a project that enveloped our class theme in a personal threshold that bores enlightenment for readers and a sense of connection. My project was a significant amount of work with a lot of time given for interviews and listening to stories, as well as writing and editing to get to an end result. I demonstrated my skills in listening and understanding, as well as in writing and having a grasp of the theme and how it connects to these people's personal experiences. I used my unique voice in creating

seven other unique voices to create a small diverse collection of experiences. My project is a unique work of creativity and is also personally informative.