

Fall 2021

## “Have you come out?”: Refutation of Segdwick’s Theorization of the Closet in Another Country and Lot: Stories

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### Repository Citation

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“Have you come out?”: Refutation of Segdwick’s Theorization of the  
Closet in *Another Country* and *Lot: Stories*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English at Bowling Green State University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in English

15 December 2021

ENG 4800H

Fall 2021

William Albertini, Instructor

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## Abstract

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick outlined in her book entitled *Epistemology of the Closet* a paradigm of expressing queer sexuality when it is known and when it is not known. In response to Sedgwick's closet paradigm, Marlon Ross wrote his essay entitled "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm" in which he demonstrated that Sedgwick's paradigm is not applicable to marginalized class and racial groups. He also made a call to action to change the necessity of the closet paradigm when discussing queer sexuality. In this paper, I put James Baldwin's *Another Country* and Bryan Washington's *Lot: Stories* in conversation with Sedgwick and Ross to see if and how they reject Sedgwick's closet paradigm and if and how they change the narrative that necessitates the closet. My analysis reveals that though *Another Country* rejects Sedgwick's theorization of the closet under the assumption that Rufus is queer, it does not change the common narrative of queer identities that necessitate a "coming out" or a closet. On the other hand, the story of Nicolas in *Lot: Stories* succeeds in not only rejecting Sedgwick's theorization of the closet paradigm but also in encouraging the movement Ross calls for to move beyond the closet as a necessary function of queer identity.

## Introduction

“Queer” was and is still used as an umbrella term that designates identities, behaviors, and bodies as nonconforming to specific notions of the normal, according to Martin F. Manalansan IV. He further argues that the term queer is no longer tethered to a monolithic notion of the sexual as it is applied intersectionally to other realms such as race, class, and gender. In other words, “queer” resists the easy partitioning or demarcation of discrete categories” (Manalansan 197). Manalansan etymological description of queer lays the foundation for my exploration today of queer identities, the closet paradigm, and “coming out narratives” within James Baldwin’s *Another Country* and Bryan Washington’s *Lot: Stories*.

Sedgwick in her work, *Epistemology of the Closet*, depicts the closet as a way to regulate identity by separating the queer parts of a person’s identity from others by means of a metaphorical door. According to Henderson’s *Queer Studies: Beyond Binaries*, “the closet has been for many people a necessary place for survival, and, just as saying “one is always coming out” has a kind of fundamental truth, so it is that people sometimes find themselves “recloseting” themselves for purposes of safety or social strategy (Henderson 72-73).

Sedgwick’s work was met with criticism by Marlon Ross in his “Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm”. Ross considers how the concept of the closet and coming out are part of (white) queer theory as they do not consider the race theory and class analysis as interconnected with them, particularly for people of different races. Ross states, “(White) queer theory and history are beset by what I call “claustrophilia”, a fixation on the closet function as the grounding principle for sexual experience, knowledge, and politics, and that this claustrophilic fixation effectively diminishes and disables the full engagement with potential insights from race theory and class analysis” (Ross 162). Ross later furthers his argument by showing how Sedgwick’s

closet theory is grounded in the works of European white men who lived in a culture where white people were dominant and where a closet was necessary. She neglects to discuss how this same culture and other cultures of different racial groups impact the idea of the closet and coming out.

“Implicitly, Sedgwick’s closet theory depends on a notion of the uneven development of the races, such that a miniscule, easily identifiable clique of elite white men...ambiguously do or do not determine the processes of sexual identification for everyone touched by modernity, etc. The closet theory seems very productive in ferreting out a particular kind of ambivalent (homo)sexual desire hidden in high, dense literary texts whose aesthetic practices are already shaped by the established European literary culture...Sedgwick’s preference for the method of close readings, in other words, is intimately related to the closed set of male European texts that exemplify the closet binary as formative and closed-off modernity and modernism. The claustrophilia lurking in this method – that is, the fascination with the closet as the primary epistemological device defining sexual modernity – results in a sort of racial claustrophobia, the tendency to bind both intragender desire and modernity within a small but deep closet containing elite European men maneuvering to find a way out. Beyond the claustrophobic closet, these men’s discourses – and the closet that functions in them – are shaped by cultures whose deeply embedded and thus invisible racial identifications play a large unanalyzed role in the conceptualization of desire and sexuality, knowledge and normativity” (Ross 171). Ross also dives in at the end of his essay into a call for action to the narrative that necessitates “coming out” or a closet paradigm for queer people.

Literary texts that have queer characters of color that are being looked at under queer theory still often take Sedgwick's white heteronormative closet paradigm and forces it on these literary texts and its characters, despite the characters in these texts rejecting this dominant paradigm. James Baldwin's *Another Country* and Bryan Washington's *Lot: Stories* are two books written in different time periods that exhibit how queer people of color do not fit into the closet paradigm and coming out narrative. Because they do not fit in to this closet paradigm, I found it necessary to push them further to ask if they are not just rejecting but creating a new narrative that does not necessitate the existence of a closet, like Marlon Ross calls for. While *Lot: Stories* successfully moves toward rewriting the narrative, *Another Country* falls short.

*Another Country* by James Baldwin

*Another Country* follows a series of characters all connected by one central character – Rufus. A majority of the text takes place between the two New York City neighborhoods Harlem and Greenwich Village, with a handful of scenes taking place in Paris, France.

*Another Country* is set during the late 1950's and was published in 1962, a period in time where there were three notable outside influences impacting how the novel is formulated – the Lavender Scare, the tail end of the Great Migration, the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, and the rise of the Church of Islam.

The Lavender Scare came in tandem with the Red Scare following the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War with Russia. Essentially, the idea that homosexual people (especially those in the government) were spies for the Russia as they could be easily manipulated, and the Russian government was capitalizing on this. There were long lists of people working for the government believed to be Communists or homosexuals presented in

federal proceedings, resulting in the termination of many of these people from their positions. The homophobic rhetoric that stemmed from the government spread to the people of the United States, resulting in a silencing of pro-LGBT movements for fear of safety, according to James Gleason in his article entitled “LGBT History: The Lavender Scare” (Gleason).

In addition to the Lavender Scare, the Great Migration was at its tail end during this time. The Great Migration was a mass movement of black people living in southern United States moving to large, industrial cities in the north, notably Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit and New York City as a result of being perpetually oppressed by the southern caste systems that still existed after Emancipation and Reconstruction due to the continued existence of Jim Crow laws.

The Civil Rights Movement was also taking place during the time *Another Country* was being written and during the time the story takes place during. Prior to its publication, several huge events took place including Brown vs. Board of Education, the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and the Freedom Rider protests. Though none of these events are featured in *Another Country*, all affect the racialized environment the story took place in. There was immense tension building between white people and black people.

All these ideas and movements contributed their own cultural ideas onto New York City during the time the novel was written and takes place, a place important to Baldwin because he grew up there, causing him to know it's ins and outs better than every person casually walking through the neighborhood.

This environment that Baldwin describes in regard to his personal life in Harlem in both “Letter from a Region of my Mind” from *The Fire Next Time* and many of his essays from *Notes of a Native Son* heavily impacts his presentation of the characters and how they interact with

ideas of race and sexuality, notably Rufus. Rufus is a black queer character who struggles with this intersection of his identity. He is consistently harmed by anti-black racist acts from unnamed characters in the novel, from systems that fail him, and from his friends who try to take a colorblind approach to their friendship, perpetuating racist ideologies within their friend group. The culmination of these acts of anti-black racism causes Rufus's fear of identity due to internalized expectations of heteronormativity, and the lack of support Rufus would find in his identity as a black queer working class man from his friends, family and societal systems, leading to Rufus's decision to commit suicide.

To proceed in this analysis of Rufus as a queer man and in conversation with his relationship to the closet paradigm, I would first like to establish how I have conceived Rufus to be a queer man despite Rufus never identifying as such anywhere in the novel. It is evident that Rufus had a romantic and sexual relationship with Eric, a relationship that Rufus thinks of often toward the end of his life. On the last night of his life, Rufus recalls his relationship with Eric, which is recounted by saying "He passed Cornelia Street. Eric had once lived there. He saw again the apartment, the lamplight in the corners, Eric under the light, books falling over everything, and the bed unmade. Eric—and he was on Sixth Avenue, traffic lights and the lights of taxis blazing around him" (Baldwin 84). Having a same-gender relationship with another man for what seems like a significant amount of time is the first indicator of Rufus's queerness.

Another indicator of Rufus as a queer man comes from descriptions of Rufus from his friends. A notable description of Rufus as queer comes from a conversation with Vivaldo. A conversation the two of them had went like this:

“‘Have you ever wished you were queer?’ Rufus asked, suddenly.

Vivaldo smiled, looking into his glass. ‘I used to think maybe I was. Hell, I think I even wished I was.’ He laughed. ‘But I’m not. So I’m stuck.’

Rufus walked to Vivaldo’s window. So you been all up and down that street, too,’ he said.

‘We’ve all been up the same streets. There aren’t a hell of a lot of streets. Only we’ve been taught to lie so much about so many things, that we hardly ever know where we are’” (Baldwin 51-52)

This quote reveals that Rufus considers being queer; but Vivaldo’s last comment in this conversation reveal an environment of lying in response to going up and down the street of exploring queerness.

Lastly a description that Vivaldo, Rufus’s best friend, gives of Rufus during the last night they spend together before Rufus dies, offers an intimate depiction of Rufus asking with his body language and eyes to be held by Vivaldo.

“And, at the very end, when he was finally in bed, after he’d cried, and after he’d told me—so many terrible things—I looked at him, he was lying on his side, his eyes were half open, he was looking at me. I was taking off my pants, Leona was staying at my place and I was going to stay there, I was afraid to to leave him alone. Well, when he looked at me, just before he closed his eyes and turned on his side away from me, all curled up, I had the weirdest feeling that he wanted me to take him in my arms. And not for sex, though maybe sex would have happened. I had the feeling that he wanted someone to hold him, to hold him, and that, that night, it had to be a man” (Baldwin 342).

Though this is not direct access to Rufus's interiority as to describe his own desire to be held and loved by Vivaldo, it is one of the closest connections to it. Vivaldo is one of Rufus's best friends and knows about his homosexual relationship with Eric. I'll return to this concept later.

The lack of interiority of Rufus leads to a lack of "coming out" story. Rufus exists in his queer sexuality, and it is present, but it is not acknowledged in a straightforward way. Though there is no way of knowing Baldwin's motives particularly for writing Rufus with this lack of interiority in discussing his sexuality, it is worth returning to the historical moment of *Another Country* to see what societal factors would have impacted Rufus's decision to display his queerness in a more public arena. Rufus would have been alienated by communities he was a part of had he publicly displayed his queerness.

The first reason that factors into Rufus's internalization of his queerness is found in his family and familial expectations. According to *Queer Studies: Beyond Binaries*, "...the most dominant social institutions that supported black people remained resolutely heteronormative, at least in their public presentation: the family and the church (most significantly at the time, various forms of Protestant Christianity, often evangelical)" (Henderson 156). Rufus's family is an appealingly traditional black nuclear family with a mom, dad, brother and sister that values their family ties, goes to church and are just trying to make it in the world. According to Ida, Rufus's sister,

“‘[Rufus] loved our father, for example. He really loved him I didn't. He was just a loud-mouthed, broken-down man, who liked to get drunk and hang out in barber shops—well, maybe he didn't like it but that was all he could find to do, except work like a dog, for nothing—and play the guitar on the week ends for his only son.’ She paused, smiling.

‘There was something very nice about those weekends, just the same. I can still see Daddy, his belly hanging out, strumming on that guitar and trying to teach Rufus some down-home song and Rufus grinning at him and making fun of him a little, really, but very nicely, and singing with him. I bet my father was never happier, all the days of his life, than when he was giving for Rufus. He’s got no one to sing to now. He was so proud of him. He bought Rufus his first set of drums’” (Baldwin 415).

Coming from a heteronormative family where there was lots of love and pride as this passage displays encourages a keeping with the norms and expectations of the family. Moreover, considering the history of representation for black families, black families have historically been oppressed on the basis of having a strong family unit. What I mean by this is when the American enslavement system was still in place, families were often separated by white slave owners who did not want to encourage these bonds. After the Emancipation Proclamation, many formerly enslaved people immediately began to rebuild and reconnect their family units; however, not without violence back from white people, as documented in Koritha Mitchell’s article “The Resilience of Black Love in Black History” published on Black Perspectives.

Rufus was also tied to the black church through his family, a religious structure that also has a historical nature of heteronormativity. As Baldwin depicts in his book, *The Fire Next Time*, the Nation of Islam emphasizes the necessity of black men to protect their women (*The Fire Next Time* 76), an idea that perpetuates the heteronormative nature of churches black people are apart of. Though, Rufus’s family is not involved in the Nation of Islam – his father only turning to listen to its preachers after Rufus’s death – the same is true for the black churches established in Harlem that his family attended. Rufus’s family’s connection to the church becomes most evident when his family goes to retrieve his body. Ida recalls this moment saying,

“When we saw Rufus’s body, I can’t tell you. My father stared at it, he stared at it, and stared at it. It didn’t look like Rufus, it was—terrible—from the water, and he must have struck something going down, or in the water, because he was so broken and lumpy—and ugly. My brother. And my father stared at it—at it—and he said, They don’t leave a man much do they? His own father was beaten to death with a hammer by a railroad guard. And they brought his father home like that. My mother got frightened, she wanted my father to pray. And he said, he shouted it at the top of his lungs, Pray? Who, pray? I bet you, if I ever get anywhere near that white devil you call God, I’ll tear my son and my father out of his white hide! Don’t you never say the word Pray to me again, woman, not if you want to live. Then he started to cry. I’ll never forget it. Maybe I hadn’t loved him before, but I loved him then. That was the last time he ever shouted, he hasn’t raised his voice since. He just sits there, he doesn’t even drink any more. Sometimes he goes out and listens to those fellows who make speeches on 125th Street and Seventh Avenue. He says he just wants to live long enough——long enough——” (Baldwin 416-417).

Though Rufus’s father gets angry at the church and at the “white god” for allowing this to happen to his son, this passage elucidates a now broken connection that his family had to the historically heteronormative church that would have rejected Rufus had he embraced his queer identity. This passage also elucidates the idea that there is only a white church that black people have adopted, but that still hurts black people. It shows that societal systems most valued by people still exude systemic racial oppression, particularly toward black people.

Though Rufus does not interact much with other black people in the novel, he still largely identifies with the black people in Harlem and just generally in his racial group, as exhibited in his constant cognizance of the space he is claiming in the novel as a black man in white spaces.

This connects largely to Mignon Moore's work about black queer individuals in black communities. According to sociologist Moore, who did research about black queer individuals in Los Angeles, she found that "Black lesbians and gay men in Los Angeles born before 1954 tend to conceptualize Black group membership as an identity status that must remain primary for the continued advancement of the race" (Moore 6). Rufus, though not from Los Angeles, would fall into this group of people who was born before 1954. Though there is a lack of interaction between other black people and Rufus in the novel, his constant thoughts about being black in New York City show his connections to that identity group over his queer identity.

Lastly, Rufus's friend group moreover perpetuates an environment of anti-queerness with Rufus after accepting him only as their tokenized black friend. Though friends with Eric, a white queer man from a wealthy Southern family, and accepting of Eric's queer sexuality, Rufus's friend circle that included Eric, Vivaldo, Cass and Richard was made uneasy by Eric and Rufus having a relationship. Being comfortable with Eric's sexuality before he was with Rufus would indicate that friend group is uncomfortable with Rufus's sexuality when combined with other aspects of his identity. This is revealed in Eric's contemplation of who sent him the letter telling him Rufus had died. Eric thinks,

"It could scarcely have been Vivaldo, who was made too uneasy by what he knew of Eric's relation to Rufus—knew without being willing to admit that he knew; and it would certainly not have been Richard" (Baldwin 191-192).

Being a part of a circle of friends who did not support Rufus as a queer man and who did not understand him as a person in large part to their white innocence expressing queer sexuality would keep Rufus an outcast from their friend group.

Yet that didn't stop Vivaldo from recognizing queer tendencies within his friend. Vivaldo recounts the last time he was with Rufus, having decided to stay with Rufus after a violent domestic dispute with Leona. Vivaldo recalls of this night,

“The last time I saw Rufus, before he disappeared, ...I looked at him, he was lying on his side... Well, when he looked at me, just before he closed his eyes and turned on his side away from me, all curled up, I had the weirdest feeling that he wanted me to take him in my arms. And not for sex, though maybe sex would have happened. I had the feeling that he wanted someone to hold him, to hold him, and that, that night, it had to be a man... I lay on my back and I didn't touch him and I didn't sleep... I still wonder, what would have happened if I'd taken him in my arms, if I'd held him, if I hadn't been – afraid. I was afraid that he wouldn't understand that it was – only love. Only love. But, oh, Lord, when he died, I thought that maybe I could have saved him if I'd just reach out the quarter of an inch between us on that bed, and held him” (Baldwin 342-343).

Though the point can be made that Vivaldo is projecting onto Rufus, I argue that instead Vivaldo is both contemplating his own sexuality while knowing of Rufus's queer sexuality that could lead to a sexual encounter. Rufus does not make any move because he knows Vivaldo did not approve of his relationship with Eric and therefore would not engage in any sort of queer relationship with him.

All this is to say that there were several societal factors that contributed to Rufus's inability to express a queer sexuality explicitly outside of a very private relationship with Eric and a private encounter with a random man from the street.

There is one other queer black man in *Another Country* worth comparing Rufus's experience to—LeRoy, Eric's first lover. Though Eric had expressed affection and experienced

same-gender attraction from black men he knew growing up in the South, LeRoy was the first black man he was intimate with.

We meet LeRoy in a flashback that Eric gives about his youth. Eric is walking to visit LeRoy who is working, describing how they had been friends since youth but had undeniable romantic and sexual feelings for each other. He describes how their relationship “was suspect, it was indecent” (Baldwin 202) to people in the community, putting both of them in more dangerous positions. However, Eric in a state of innocence did not want to acknowledge the danger their relationship brought.

“Eric did not know, or perhaps he did not want to know, that he made LeRoy’s life more difficult and increased the danger in which LeRoy walked—for LeRoy was considered ‘bad,’ as lacking, that is, in respect for white people. Eric did not know, though of course LeRoy did, what was already being suggested about him all over town. Eric had not guessed, though LeRoy knew only all too well, that the Negroes did not like him, either. They suspected the motives of his friendliness” (Baldwin 202).

In this passage, it is revealed that LeRoy is considered an outside to the white people in his community and the black people in his community as they were suspicious of the apparent queer relationship he had with Eric. Same gender relationships and interracial relationships were criticized in this time period due to the Lavender Scare occurring and due to interracial marriages not being legal until 1967. LeRoy also knew that he was in danger showing affection for Eric because though Eric was from a powerful white family, LeRoy was not. The Ku Klux Klan was still lynching black people at this time, something LeRoy was no doubt aware of, though not mentioned directly in the text. As a result, LeRoy was wary of their relationship, as demonstrated later on in their conversation.

“LeRoy looked briefly over at Eric and smiled. ‘You a nice boy, Eric, but you don’t know the score. Your Daddy owns half the folks in this town, ain’t but so much they do to you. But what they can do to me—!’ And he spread his hands wide... ‘You better get out of this town. Declare, they going to lynch you before they get around to me’”

(Baldwin 205-206).

LeRoy evidently knew the danger Rufus and him were in if they were to outwardly perform their sexuality and relationship. To add to this danger, LeRoy was working to help support his family. Any injury that left him unable to work or his death by lynching would mean that LeRoy’s family could not support themselves and the many kids. Though not discussed specifically with the danger of violence, LeRoy tells Eric he cannot go with him to a city and escape the South. “I can’t be thinking about leaving. I got my Ma and all them kids to worry about...Ain’t everybody’s old man runs a bank, you know” (Baldwin 203).

Though we understand more about the specific danger LeRoy was in compared to Rufus as a queer black man, their stories are similar. Queerness was not accepted by the communities they were a part of – for Rufus, his friends and family; for LeRoy, the community he lived in – particularly when that queerness crossed the color line too; and they already experienced danger for being black in these communities – Rufus with existing in white spaces with his friends where he was perceived as a threat, such as when Jane, Vivaldo and Rufus were in the bar; LeRoy with being in the South when the Ku Klux Klan still lynched black people consistently. Neither LeRoy or Rufus could fully express their queer identities without the threat of danger, further exclusion, and further discrimination and oppression.

The comparison of Rufus and LeRoy reveals that existing in severely heteronormative spaces where black people are systemically oppressed and are threatened with violence on the

basis of their race and their queer sexuality does not make a safe environment that would be necessary for Sedgwick's closet paradigm to be played out among black people in *Another Country*.

Marlon Ross as mentioned in the introduction that beyond Sedgwick's closet paradigm failing to account for marginalized racial and class identities, he advocated for a changing of the narrative in queer studies so a closet paradigm would not be necessary. While *Another Country* was written before Ross advocated for this, it is one of the reasons that such an argument for the advancement of queer studies is necessary. I have argued in this essay that Rufus is queer; however, several Baldwin theorists, such as Matt Brim, would say that Rufus is straight, as demonstrated in his chapter "What Straight Men Need: Gay Love in *Another Country*" from *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*.

Baldwin rejects any idea of categorization for himself and for the characters in this story. Brim wrote in a separate essay that "For Baldwin, the writer's dilemma emerged from the necessity of inventing the terms of his own existence in the face of a world that ferociously demanded that he bow to its definition of him. For example, Baldwin was born into a time and place where he was frequently called [n-word] or, in its flatly derogatory sense, "queer". Baldwin perceived, even in his youth, that he was neither and that he must be at war with these terms if they were not to consume him" (Brim 87-88).

"Baldwin's vision for and of humanity in its complexity, [locates] him not as exclusively gay, black, expatriate, activist, or the like, but rather as an intricately negotiated amalgam of those things – an amalgam that had to be constantly tailored to fit the circumstances in which he was compelled to articulate himself" (McBride 75).

Though this rejection of labeling is admirable and *Another Country* does not fall directly within the closet paradigm, it is still implicated by both. By rejecting labeling, Baldwin had left readers up to their own devices on how to understand the Rufus and the other characters in the story. We have not reached a place in society where there has been a dismissal of labeling, thereby readers feel the need to label Rufus as queer or straight to engage with the text, just as Brim and I did. Therefore, though *Another Country* does not fall into the closet paradigm directly, it is still implicated by it when interpreted by readers, making it so the text does not move beyond the necessity of the closet, like Marlon Ross called for.

#### Bryan Washington's *Lot: Stories*

Washington's *Lot: Stories* takes place in Houston, Texas during the 2010s. Each chapter changes the narrator; however, there is a recurring narrator almost every other short story with the name Nicholas (Nic) who lives in an apartment above his family's restaurant with his two parents, brother Javi, and sister Jan.

We learn in the first chapter that we meet Nic that he is gay when he has his first sexual interaction with his neighbor. "The first time we tugged each other his father was sleeping beside us. They'd cemented the 610 exit and he'd found himself out of work. It was silent except for the flies above us, and Ma on the porch with his mother, promising that they'd figure it out" (Washington 3). Though this is an explicit description of Nic engaging in sex with another man, like Rufus in *Another Country*, Nicholas engages in sexual relations with men without putting labels on his sexuality explicitly. He never "comes out" and says "I am gay". His lack of labels stems from different expectations of the performance of sexuality in Houston within his

socioeconomic, racial, and sexual communities. Nicolas highly values his ties and acceptance into the different communities he is a part of, thereby creating this circumstantial performance.

To preface what I will lay out over the next bit of text in regard to the circumstantial performance, I want to define a term that I will refer to as the expression continuum. Throughout *Lot*, there are many acknowledgements of Nicholas's sexual attraction to men. He has conversations with his family members that both allude to and directly touch on this. Yet, there are also many moments where other characters, particularly his brother Javi, choose not to acknowledge or even go so far as to deny or encourage repression of his sexual orientation. The expression continuum refers to this back and forth that Nicholas experiences of his sexual orientation being noticed and applicable then back to being ignored or repressed due to other circumstances occurring around him. In more simpler terms, people know he is gay so he does not necessarily have to tell anyone, but they are sporadic in when they acknowledge and accept his sexual orientation.

Due to the nature of this expression continuum, it is evident that Nic does not fall into Sedgwick's closet paradigm. Over the next part of my paper, I will be discussing the different communities Nic is a part of that reinforce this expression continuum, including family, "home", friends and neighbors, class, and race, though all are intertwined so there will not necessarily be a definitive start and end point for each topic.

The first insight given regarding Nic's sense of home comes in the first short story entitled "Lockwood" where Nic and Roberto, his first sexual partner from the previous passage, are talking about what home is to them.

"Could be worse, I said. You could be back home.

Home's wherever you are at the time, said Roberto.

You're just talking. That doesn't mean anything.

It would, he said, if you knew you didn't have one" (Washington 3)

This conversation sets up Nicholas's idea of home that is interwoven throughout the rest of the story. Nicholas disagrees with Roberto on the idea that home is wherever you are at the time because home is more than that to Nicholas. Home is the sense of community Nicholas feels with his family, with his neighbors, with the spaces he shares with those people.

Sociologist Mignon Moore has done a lot of research in black communities, the racial community Nic is a part of, as he is Afro-Latino. She writes in regard to the importance of community for queer black people that

Those who remain [in a physical community space], particularly those with the resources to leave if they choose, say the support of and membership in the larger racial group is important to their sense of self. They remain because they trust in racial solidarity and racial group membership, and believe this sense of linked fate, combined with the collective mobilization they are engaged in, will result in the evolution of community members towards full acceptance. They also remain because they have less confidence that they will be fully accepted as members of other identity groups such as those based in sexuality. Nevertheless, in recent years they have been increasingly willing to test that support by making their gay identities more public and asserting their interest in taking on leadership roles in Black social environments as openly gay members of the racial community (Moore 16)

These findings from Moore longitudinal research in Los Angeles is applicable here to Nic too. He finds solidarity and comfort in being linked to other people who are experiencing the

same way of life as him. To dissect this more, it is necessary to look at the innermost community Nic is a part of – his family.

As stated in the introduction, Nic is a member of a five-person family. His father, his mother, Ma, his brother, Javi, and his sister, Jan. In the first short story “Lockwood”, though every sexual encounter Nic has with Roberto happens in their neighboring apartments, it is relatively hidden and left undiscussed with the family. The same is true in the second short story featuring Nic as the narrator. His sexual life is juxtaposed with his family life.

When it was finally just Ma and me, and I wasn’t cruising Midtown, or stuck in the back room washing dishes, or out in Montrose fucking boys, I’d sit on one end of the sofa, and Ma’d settle into the other, and her knees would graze the edge of my thigh as she slept through the drone of the television” (Washington 34)

Ma is a woman who chooses to not acknowledge fully her son’s queerness once she knows he is queer. For all of *Lot*, when Ma is discussed, Nic’s queerness is not. Her position on the expression continuum falls to the middle in what I call the point of “acknowledgement and nothing more” (See Figure 1 in Appendix C). Nic reveals where his mom stands on the expression continuum when his mom and him see each other in the restaurant each morning.

“She’ll nod like she knows what the fuck I’m talking about. Ma learned about suspicion from my father, from lies he’d wooed her away from Aldine with, but then he left for a pack of cigarettes and she gave up snooping entirely. We don’t talk about where I go most nights or how I get back, ever, so I head to the freezer to handle the prep” (Washington 95).

It is never discussed why his mom does not attempt to engage with Nic regarding his sexuality; however, it create a divide between his family and his sexuality.

Jan lives on the right side of the expression continuum where she acknowledges Nic's queerness and tries to talk to him about it, though Nic really doesn't engage with her on the topic.

But anyways, she says. How's the queer thing going?

It's going, I say.

Any prospects?

Stop.

I have to ask.

No one has to say anything.

Jan just shakes her head. She's the only one who talks about it. I don't know if Ma told her, or if Jan just put two and two together, but one day she told me it didn't matter who I was fucking. Out of the blue. She said it wasn't here business, or Ma's business, or anyone's business. She said that Javi never asked for permission. I shouldn't have to answer to anyone (Washington 100-101)

Though Jan is unable to engage with Nic on the topic of his queerness, she acknowledges it and encourages Nic to express it without needing permission from other people, the first and positive reception he ever gets from his family in their acknowledgement of his sexuality. Slightly different to his relationship with Ma, it is evident that Nic is uncomfortable with talking to Jan about his sexuality, demonstrating yet again a juxtaposition of Nic's queer identity with his familial identity.

The family member that acknowledges and engages with Nic's sexuality the most, though, is Javi, with him falling further to the left on the expression continuum than Ma. Javi knows of Nic's queer sexuality and outwardly encourages him not to be gay and toward the end

of his life, ignoring Nic's queerness at all to send a message that Nic should not be gay. Javi's first acknowledgement of Nic's queerness came after Rick, a mutual friend of Javi and Nic who they both sold drugs with, was brutally killed. Javi and Nic had gone to the funeral at which point Nic describes Javi's warning about queer sexuality. "When we made it to the body, my brother snatched my hand. He made me touch Rick's face. He told me this was what happened to f\*ags" (Washington 69).

Later on in their relationship, Nic tries to talk to Javi in a letter as Javi was away serving the military about how he was trying to not be gay but how it wasn't working. "I wrote him a letter spelling everything out. I wrote about Ma, and the shop, and the school. I wrote about Jan and the baby. I wrote about the Latina girls from Chavez I'd been meeting and fucking, and how that wasn't working out, or how it wasn't what I'd thought it should be, or that there was something else out there, but what that was I couldn't tell him, until I saw him, until he came back home" (Washington 97). Javi never responded to Nic's letter even though Javi continued to respond to letters to Ma and Jan. It was only when Javi came home for a leave from the military that Nic approached the topic again with Javi in-person.

And it looks like nonsense now, like Santa Claus when you're older, but that's when I told him I'd been sleeping with boys.

I told him about the one from the library. About the one from the coffee shop. I told him these things, how I'd tried it with Cristina and Maribel, with LaShon and her sister; and how it hadn't worked, with any of them, even when they'd stared down, arms crossed. I watched Javi's face for something to click or contort or scrunch itself into oblivion but it did not. It didn't happen.

He said nothing, and I was finished talking.

And I didn't feel it when he slapped me.

I saw his palm coming, but didn't know it until my shoulder hit the ground, until I looked up to see him staring (Washington 113-114)

Javi's blatant rejection of Nic's sexuality is the end of their relationship, pushing Nic further away from his family community. As I touched on in discussing Nic's relationship with Ma and Jan, his relationship with his queer identity is juxtaposed by his relationship with his familial identity. When Javi hits him and dies soon after, Nic loses that familiar tie. He then begins to identify more with his gay identity, never trying to sleep with girls again. After all, he isn't attracted to girls.

In losing his familial community, with his dad and Jan moving out to live with other people, Javi dying, and Ma being beaten down by it all and not interacting with Nic as much, Nic tries to find community with his family still by holding onto the memories and the physical places they all shared – the restaurant. The restaurant is the space his whole family put time and effort into running. The restaurant is the space that allowed for his family to live in an upstairs apartment where Nic spent time with his family and first began sleeping with boys. The restaurant is the space that the neighborhood from its youth before gentrification started pushing people out came to. Though I do not have space in the scope of this essay to elaborate much on gentrification in the detail it deserves, the overlying theme of gentrification present in all of *Lot: Stories* takes away Nic's neighborhood community which he values though to a lesser extent than his family community.

When Nic loses the restaurant when Ma and Jan decide to sell it, he engages more with his sexuality than ever before. He begins to find community in his sexuality. One of the first

recurring sexual partners he has after the selling of the lot is a “whiteboy” who hires Nic to teach him Spanish.

And we’d always, always, always, always end up in bed...Weeks passed, then months.

We moved from greetings to goodbyes. We brushed by commands. We jumped back to directions. I told him about my father living who the fuck knew where. About my brother in the ground. About Ma and I, stuck in the East End, scrambling to keep everything together in a home we no longer owned. The whiteboy told me about his sisters, about his parents in Alamo Heights, and when I asked how many guys he’d been with before me he told me about an ex, some genius over at Rice.

He asked if I was out. I told him I didn’t know what that meant. He asked if I’d thought about abandoning Houston, and I said if I had I’d have done it by now (Washington 138).

This whiteboy he begins sleeping with on a regular basis is exemplary of Nic finally finding community in his sexuality with someone.

This is a common occurrence. In Moore’s research, she found that many queer people turn to other queer people of their own age or social cohorts to take on some of the roles often played by siblings or cousins in traditional blood families – confidants who share similar experiences and who have themselves comparatively recently gone through some of the same benchmarks of experiencing the formation of sexual orientation or gender identity (Moore 222). In more simple terms, Moore’s research revealed that when queer people are left out of community, they find community with people who have similar experiences to them.

Though Nic found community with the unnamed “whiteboy”, he finds true community in his sexuality in Miguel, who knows what it’s like to be left behind, to want community in

something or someone, and to be gay. After a night of discussing their families and going back and forth regarding, Nic and Miguel go home together.

Of course we end up upstairs. Neither of us says shit about it. In my bedroom, the one I used to share with Javi, and I don't know how he ends up on top of me but he does. I'm thinking he'll laugh or smirk or make some kind of crack, but he's got this serious look on his face. And then there's the pressure again. He's shifting his weight, ripping at our sweats.

Esta bien?

No, I say.

Really?

No.

This is not how it usually goes for you.

You asking or telling?

When he slips inside of me I call him something I don't mean to.

Bueno, says Miguel.

It takes a while. He finishes on my chest. He asks me why I'm crying and I tell him I'm not. I tell him to stop bullshitting. Miguel opens his mouth to say something, but he doesn't, just breathes down on my neck, and then I'm hard, again, and then he's back inside of me, but this time it's sweeter, like something that makes sense, but I'm telling him to stop, to leave, to get the fuck out of here, and he's telling me the same, to go, don't come back, and then the words start blending together, and we're saying it in chorus, stop, stop, stop, go on, get out, be gone" (Washington 218)

By the time Miguel comes into Nic's life, Nic has been left behind by everyone in his family in one way or another; Nic has left his childhood home above the restaurant; Nic is surrounded by people at work who treat him poorly and do not invite him into their community of friends. Really, Nic has lost his sense of community that he so valued. But he found community in his sexuality which he pushed to the back because his family, especially Javi, pushed him to not be gay.

Returning to Mignon Moore's work, she found in her background research that "Relative to Whites, Black homosexuals perceive themselves as facing more disapproval from their families and from heterosexual Blacks, and have greater difficulty finding alternative sources of acceptance and support ...' (David and Knight, 2008; Jones and Hill, 1996; Moore, 2008; Stokes and Peterson, 1998)" (Moore 3). With this in mind, Nic could not only have perceived himself as facing disapproval at first, but he was met with disapproval by his family particularly Javi.

Relating this conversation back to Ross and Sedgwick's conversation about the closet paradigm, Nic's story rejects the Sedgwick's theorization of the closet. There are moments that would appear to be Nic "coming out of the closet" such as when Nic brings up his sexual encounters to Javi; however, Nic is using this as a means to gain acceptance from his brother who already knew of his sexuality and had been trying to turn him away from expressing it.

*Lot: Stories* changes the narrative about what it means to be gay and not need a closet in order to be gay and express queerness, like Marlon Ross called on his audience to do. Washington offers through Nic a tangible and clear example of queer sexuality that rejects the closet paradigm and that gives a different expression of queer identity in relation to other social identities.

## Discussion and Conclusion

*Another Country* by James Baldwin and *Lot: Stories* by Bryan Washington evidently fall in line with Marlon Ross's criticism of Sedgwick's theorization of the closet, showing how Sedgwick's theorization lacks considering about how race and class influence coming out. Rufus and Nic both have outside societal factors influencing their performance of sexuality and identity. *Lot: Stories* pushes Ross's critique forward showing how Nic does not fall into the closet paradigm both in his experiences and in the experience of the readers. Readers are able to understand and reflect on Nic's story because his queerness is not left up to interpretation. There is not a need to reinforce the closet paradigm in order to understand Nic's story. On the other hand, because Rufus and Baldwin by extension, is not straight forward in expressing his sexuality, the closet paradigm has been reinforced through scholarly arguments over Rufus's true sexuality.

There is evidently still work to be done to rewrite the narrative about queerness generally speaking in a way to not necessitate the existence of the closet paradigm, particularly on groups when the closet paradigm is too simple – being focused only on white, middle-class men – and does not factor in the differences among white, middle-class men and marginalized racial and class groups.

My work here is limited to two novels when there is a wide variety of queer literature. Nonetheless, my basic premises in analyzing if a piece of queer literature falls into Sedgwick's theorization of the closet, followed by an analysis of if the piece of queer literature promotes Ross's critique of Sedgwick and makes the move toward changing the narrative that a closet is necessary are premises that can be used for future research to review the direction queer theory is moving in. Is queer theory moving toward a more inclusive analysis of different identities or is it

remaining centered in white, middle-class identities? Is queer theory still centering the closet or is it moving toward new concepts, such as the expression paradigm, to explain how an individual expresses their sexuality? Is it moving to a point where one day Baldwin's rejection of identity in his writing won't be implicated by the closet paradigm? Future research and trends on this topic will give insight to these questions.

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## Appendix A: Project Proposal

Bryan Washington's *Lot: Stories* displays a recurring narrator who is revealed to be named Nicolas. Throughout all the segments of Washington's novel where Nicolas is the narrator, it is revealed that not only is he gay, but his family and those important to him are already aware of his sexuality without him "coming out". In fact, Nicolas does not truly understand the concept of coming out either. An encounter Nicolas has with a white partner displays his confusion about the coming out. "He asked if I was out. I told him I didn't know what that meant" (Washington 138). After reading *Lot: Stories*, I was deeply intrigued by the differences in how coming out is viewed and acted upon in different marginalized communities, particularly communities of color. James Baldwin's *Another Country* is a book that takes place approximately sixty years earlier than *Lot: Stories* but shows many of the same premises of coming out, in that, it does not happen for Rufus and for Vivaldo, and is treated as not liberating but dangerous for LeRoy, Eric's black love from his youth. All these premises are exemplary of the ideas presented by Marlon Ross in his essay in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* entitled "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm". Ross argues that the concept of "coming out" has been derived from the white experience and white queer theory. The closet paradigm, as created by Sedgwick in her essay "The Epistemology of the Closet", neglects to consider the racial and social differences between white people and marginalized racial groups. While "coming out" is liberating for white queer folks, it adds another layer of oppression to marginalized racial groups, such as black people. Ross claims that "Sedgwick's preference for the method of close readings, in other words, is intimately related to the closet set of male European texts that exemplify the closet binary as formative to a closed-off modernity and modernism. The claustrophobia lurking in this method — that is, the fascination with the closet

art the primary epistemological device defining sexual modernity — results in a sort of racial claustrophobia, the tendency to bind both intragender desire and modernity within a small but deep closet containing elite European men maneuvering to find a way out. Beyond the claustrophobic closet, these men’s discourses — and the closet that functions in them — are shaped by cultures whose deeply embedded and thus invisible racial identifications play a large unanalyzed role in the conceptualization of desire and sexuality, knowledge and normatively” (Ross 171). Here, Ross is arguing that the experience of the closet as experienced by white European queer men is vastly different than the closet that black queer men experience as a result of the intersection of queer and racial identities, the latter an identity that is significantly discriminated against.

As a result of taking in the information in these three pieces that are foundational to my research in understanding “coming out”, I have become enthralled with analyzing the stories of being queer in *Lot: Stories* and *Another Country* on an individual level — as in looking at how they come to know or accept their queerness — as well as what real life societal factors influence how the authors wrote their stories and what factors have shaped the circumstances in which each of the characters come to accept, understand or exist with their queer identities. My thesis seeks to explore all of these pieces of a queer narrative or a coming out narrative in the context of queer men — black and white— in *Lot: Stories* and *Another Country*. I feel that analyses of queer stories in marginalized racial communities in different time periods to show differences over time is lacking, though research in James Baldwin is not. True and accurate representation of black queer characters with understanding how they as characters come to be within the confines of different societies is utterly important for deconstructed harsh binaries of queer characters. As Ross presented his case for Sedgwick’s lack of integration of race into her

analysis of the closet paradigm, I found too when I began this project as a white heterosexual woman that I was missing key components of intersectionality in my initial perceptions of where this project would go. I was only looking at *Lot: Stories* and *Another Country* through that white queer theory perspective like Sedgwick. This project became that much more important when I realized this because how can we hope to break down harsh binaries of the white queer theory closet paradigm if scholars and theorists cannot see why the closet paradigm is faulty? My hope with this paper is to introduce two examples of queer stories that do not fit into this closet paradigm to demonstrate how we must rethink coming out within literature and within society.

This project could be drastically larger than my timeline allows for. As a result, I will only be looking at *Lot: Stories* and *Another Country* solely on the white and black queer men that are characters in the aforementioned books listed as follows: Nicolas, Rick, Rufus, Vivaldo, Eric, and LeRoy. Rick and LeRoy will be used to contextualize the other characters. I will also only be looking at societal implications in the 1960 and 2010 decades as to not spend time looking at what has changed between the two decades. My interests in these texts as outlined above are indicative of a combined Cultural Materialist and New Historicist approach to looking at these texts.

## Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography

Baldwin, James. *Another Country*. New York City: Vintage International, 1960. Print.

*Another Country* by Baldwin is a fictional story of the demise and death of Rufus and how his suicide affects the lives of those around him simply put. The story tackles interracial couples, queerness, race relations and conflict, and many more. The depiction of coming out in *Another Country* is vastly different to those in *Lot* by Bryan Washington. Therefore, I will be using *Another Country* as one of my primary texts in my thesis to compare coming out in the United States in 1960's to that of modern times.

---. *The Fire Next Time*. New York City: Vintage International, 1962. Print.

*The Fire Next Time* by Baldwin is comprised of two sections: "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind" and "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation". In both of these pieces, Baldwin discusses the ideas of identity with the black community. In "My Dungeon Shook", Baldwin discusses what society does to black men specifically with the results of what society does by comparing himself to his brother and father. "Down at the Cross" analyzes why young black men are flocking to the Nation of Islam, laying out the attributing factors and how they cohesively work together to push young black men toward that religion. Both of these will be useful in analyzing Rufus's demise as a young, queer, black man in Harlem in the 1960's.

---. *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955. Print.

*Notes of a Native Son* is a collection of essays by Baldwin about a variety of topics, but all interconnected around the idea of being black. The following essays I think will be of value to me for different reasons in my research: "The Harlem Ghetto" discusses life and identity in Harlem, which will be beneficial in my analysis of queer characters in Harlem in *Another*

*Country*; then, "Notes of a Native Son" and "A Question of Identity" also discuss black identity which will help with my analysis of black queer characters specifically in *Another Country*.

Brim, Matt. "After Queer Baldwin." *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*. Eds. Tyler Bradway and E. L. McCallum. Cambridge University Press, 2019. 87-101. Print.

This chapter focuses on Baldwin within the context of black queer studies. Brim discusses how Baldwin has been centered in black queer studies, though it partially goes against Baldwin's ideology of categorization, which is nothing should be categorized. There is a lot of well thought out ideas about Baldwin both in and out of black queer studies which offer insight into how his characters in *Another Country* have been developed as queer characters resisting categorization but also offers critiques that I will need to consider when writing about my thesis.

---. "Conclusion: The Queer Imagination and the Gay Male Conundrum." *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*. University of Michigan Press, 2014a. 152-175. Print.

Brim's conclusion to his book on Baldwin and the Queer Imagination offers a final push in questioning why Baldwin does not include black lesbian women in his work, rather objectifying and perpetuating patriarchal systems. He also criticizes Baldwin's irrational queer imagination, which questions the integrity of the coming out and queer narratives depicted in Baldwin's work, including *Another Country*, thereby complimenting the other chapter of this book I read in the sense that Brim critiques Vivaldo's character because he perpetuates systems of oppression rather than subverting them like he was supposed to do. This chapter really brings into question two topics for me: is Baldwin an accurate and viable

source to analyze the coming out narrative of the 1960's? Secondly, if he is, why does he exclude black lesbians and black women in his work? How does this compare to *Lot*, which also does not include black lesbians or black women much at all?

---. "What Straight Men Need: Gay Love in *another Country*." *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*. University of Michigan Press, 2014b. 92-122. Print.

This essay tackles a few large points of interest: queer theory in *Another Country*, the relationship between racial and sexual power dynamics, and what the novel seeks to do compared to what it actually does. The most prominent overlaying theme to this essay is that *Another Country* reinforces existing power dynamics and hierarchies with gender, sexual orientation + sexuality, and race rather than subverting them. This piece of criticism challenges who and what I viewed as "coming out" and being queer in *Another Country* which is something I need to dig deeper into in my research and writing.

Henderson, Bruce. *Queer Studies: Beyond Binaries*. New York City: Harrington Park Press, 2019. Print.

Henderson's *Queer Studies: Beyond Binaries* is a large book that discusses queer theory in many facets, with the large categories of content being the following: Queering Language; Queering Identity; Queering Contexts; and, Queering Imagination. Though there are many extremely fascinating sections in this book, I will be using the subsection entitled "The Closet and Coming Out" to contextualize my definition of coming out and the closet, applying that to both *Lot: Stories* and *Another Country*. I will be comparing it to Marlon Ross's essay to give that full understanding of my definition of the closet and coming out.

Johnson, E. Patrick. "Queer Epistemologies: Theorizing the Self from a Writerly Place Called Home." *Biography* 34.3 (2011). Web.

Johnson's lively self-analysis of his queer identity, he discusses not only his life experience but also the idea of performance of gender and sexuality, though those are not to be confused. Examples of his performance and interrogation with his gender identity come from wearing his mom's wigs to playing football. In playing football, he had to perform like he was straight for his protection because he would have been hated and ostracized on the team for being gay and presenting femininely. This informs how I read *Another Country* and *Lot*. How do the queer characters in this story perform their sexual orientation? Does it affect their coming out narrative?

Manalansan, Martin F. "Queer." *Keywords for Asian American Studies*. Eds. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Vo, and K. Scott Wong. NYU Press 197-202. Print.

The first half of Manalansan's essay maps the etymology and changes of meaning of the word "queer" in the United States. I will use this history and the loose definitions to locate my study of "coming out" within the context of queerness and queer theory.

McBride, Dwight A. "Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin and Black Queer Studies." *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. 68-89. Print.

McBride's article dives into the history of black queer studies within the context of cultural studies, literary studies, gender and sexuality studies, and the complexity of the intersection of all of these different fields of studies. He critiques where this intersection has been neglected in previous scholarship, using Baldwin and his work as exemplifying this critique. Moreover, in using Baldwin, McBride discusses the intersectional nature of Baldwin's work bringing up topics of identity that is presented, identity that is kept out of sight, assumed identity, and a lack of categorization of identity. I will use this exploration of identity of

Baldwin to explore identity struggles and categorization (or lack thereof) in *Another Country*, also using this to discuss ideas of identity in *Lot: Stories*.

Muhammad, Ismail. "Southern Discomfort: Bryan Washington's stories of Houston's underclass." April/May 2019. Web. <<https://www.bookforum.com/print/2601/bryan-washington-s-stories-of-houston-s-underclass-20810>>

Muhammad offers a simple yet elegant reading of *Lot* in discussing what the story is about with major emphasis on its major themes. He argues that "Washington's queer men are often in the closet or relegated to the margins, and the collection masterfully conveys the atmosphere of mingled dread, exuberance, and defiance that pervades their lives", which I feel is contradicted by an earlier statement where Muhammad says "One of the hallmarks of urban poverty is the decomposition of the illusion of privacy" because though I would said there is a veil to closets, by which I mean some of the gay characters may be "in the closet" but everyone can see them behind the veil because there is not a door. An example of this is Nicolas, who everyone knows is gay and can see "in the closet" but doesn't address out in the open per se. I want to use this article to further dive into this concept of a lack of privacy with being in the closet and coming out.

Reddinger, Amy. "'Just enough for the City': Limitations of Space in Baldwin's *Another Country*." *African American Review* 43.1 (2009)Print.

Reddinger's Essay breaks down some of the major criticisms of Baldwin's *Another Country*, offering her alternate views on a specific piece of the texts. Her sections are broken down as follows: Introduction (not labeled as such) which offers background info on novel with historical context; "An 'Attempt at Domestic Life'" which offers an analysis of how the characters characterize and maintain their ideas of "home"; "Sexual/Racial Haunting and

The Space of Seventh Avenue" which offers an analysis on the use of female characters as well as black characters and how they are portrayed and treated by other characters; and "The Phantom City and Spectral Suburb" which offers a comparison of the usage of the suburbs between white and black characters. I am most interested for the purpose of this project in the second section on "Sexual/Racial Haunting" because it discusses the homosexual and interracial couples with how they interact with each other, who views themselves as "out" or "straight" and other such factors that lead back to my central theme of the depiction of coming out.

Ross, Marlon B. "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm." *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. 161-189. Print.

Ross's essay analyzes Eve Segdwick's essay on the epistemology of the closet, demonstrating how Segdwick houses her essay's framework solely in the context of the white race. Ross dives deeper into ideas of intersectionality particularly between race and sexuality, claiming the concept of the closet does not make room for intersectionality. This text is foundational to developing my arguments about the "coming out" or lack thereof in black and minoritized communities in *Another Country* and *Lot: Stories*.

Washington, Bryan. *Lot: Stories*. New York City: Riverhead Books, 2019. Print.

*Lot* is a collection of short stories with different narrators, one recurring one named Nicholas, that depict many different themes, but notably queerness and how that is discussed and depicted. *Lot* will be one of the primary texts in my thesis, serving as the contemporary piece to how coming out is portrayed now.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns*. New York City: Vintage Books, 2010. Print.

The Warmth of Other Suns is a work of creative nonfiction discussing the Great Migration between 1915 and 1970. One of the sections in this novel is entitled "Harlem" and discusses homosexuality. I will use this to contextualize a perspective of homosexuality in Harlem at the end of the Great Migration.

Appendix C: Visual of Expression Continuum

