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Truth in Public: Chelsea Manning, Gender Identity, and the Politics of Truth-Telling

[Lida Maxwell \(bio\)](#)

Abstract

This paper examines Chelsea Manning's self-narration of her leaking of government documents. The press has classified her as a would-be whistleblower whose confusion over her sexuality and gender identity keep her from being an authentic truth-teller. I dispute this reading and argue for seeing Manning as an exemplar of what I call "transformative truth-telling": a practice of truth-telling that challenges and seeks to transform dominant public/private distinctions that structure who counts as a proper truth-teller. I argue that reading Manning's act in this way reveals the democratic promise and riskiness of truth-telling and alerts democratic actors and theorists to the importance of cultivating broader and more generous democratic receptivities to truth-telling.

In May 2010, Chelsea Manning¹ was arrested for allegedly leaking troves of American top-secret information to Wikileaks. The key piece of evidence tying Manning to the leaks was a set of chat logs between Manning and Adrian Lamo – a hacker famous for his infiltration of the New York Times website (for which he was arrested and served time) – in which Manning appears to admit to the leaking. Lamo had given the logs to the FBI. At the same time that Lamo gave the logs to the FBI, he gave them to a journalist at *Wired* magazine. That journalist released those logs in abbreviated form, holding back on what *Wired* viewed as "personal" parts of the logs that did not directly reference Manning's leaking. After intense public speculation about what they were hiding, *Wired* released the full chat logs in July of 2011 and revealed that the missing parts of the logs primarily concerned Manning's questions about her gender identity, and her struggles with addressing those questions under Don't Ask Don't Tell. *Wired* had chosen to redact those parts of those logs because they saw them as merely "personal." Yet in the full logs – which I take as my primary text here² – Manning explicitly and consistently links her leaking of government documents with her own struggles with living under Don't Ask Don't Tell and, in particular, with her struggles with her gender identity. For Manning, her struggles with state secrecy were connected with her struggles with the mandated secrecy surrounding her sexual and gender identity.

In this paper, I examine the connections drawn by Manning between her public leaking and her supposedly private struggles on behalf of challenging the dominance of the model of truth-telling through which Manning's actions are usually seen: the model of the "whistleblower." The whistleblower (a term coined in 1970's America) is a figure from within an organization (governmental or corporate), animated by a concern with the public good (not private interest), who reveals truths about corruption or abuses of power on behalf of assuring accountability. This model has productively legitimated forms of truth-telling that aim to expose arbitrariness on behalf of assuring accountability and adherence to rules. However, this model also reifies a distinction between public and private that tends to *de*-legitimate forms of truth-telling that do not fit within dominant norms of publicness. Manning's actions have been attacked on precisely these grounds. If, as one early profile of Manning in the *New York Times* suggested, Manning leaked the documents out of "private" interests – out of revenge for being bullied in the military or for her struggles under Don't Ask Don't Tell, or out of "delusions of grandeur"³ – these "private" motives would undercut the meaning with which she implicitly imbued the documents simply by releasing them: that is, that they reveal objective wrongs that deserve public attention. When public intellectuals and figures step in to defend Manning – notably, Glenn Greenwald and Daniel Ellsberg – they respond to these framings of her leaking by simply ignoring Manning's linkages between her personal struggles and her leaking of documents and contending that Manning leaked documents not out of private interest, but on behalf of the public good.

In contrast, I argue in this essay for acknowledging the connections between Manning's "private" struggles and public leaking, and for reading them not as corruptive of the attempt to speak truth, but as exemplary of an alternative model of truth-telling that I call "transformative truth-telling." Where the whistleblower reveals facts hidden by the state or corporation on behalf of returning each organization to its proper concern with the public good, the transformative truth-teller 1) speaks truth in ways that contest and transform the existing public/private distinction (and the forms of injustice and oppression

that this distinction may entrench); and 2) stakes the fate of their truth on public “vindication”⁴ and response rather than on their own conformity to norms of publicness that structure who counts as a true truth-teller.⁵ In particular, I will argue for reading Manning’s leaking as an attempt not only to reveal facts, but also to articulate herself, as a non-gender-conforming person, as a proper public speaker of truth – an articulation that can be vindicated only through public response to the truths she speaks. Read as an act of transformative truth-telling, Manning’s leaking appears less as a failed attempt to assure governmental accountability and more as a risky (and still active) solicitation to a not yet existent public that would respond to Manning’s truth-telling by transforming the world in such a way that she could appear as a proper truth-teller in it.

My examination of Manning in this essay shifts our theoretical focus from an analysis of truth to an analysis of the act of *truth-telling*. Analyses focused on truth tend to pose questions of validity that abstract from (or simply ignore) the actions and persons that vault that truth into the public sphere. For example, Joshua Cohen has recently argued for a “political conception of truth” that can “serve as common ground” in politics.⁶ Cohen argues that this political conception of truth “needs to avoid asserting any theory about the nature of truth or its lack of a nature” and to offer a basic set of criteria by which we can assess whether truth claims should be viewed as properly public, as part of the exercise of public reason.⁷ Cohen’s approach aims to overcome the problem of truth-telling I mentioned above (that some people, due to particular traits or identities, are taken to not be proper truth-tellers) by offering general criteria by which we might judge an individual’s statements about truth to be properly admissible into public debate. Yet in so doing, Cohen downplays the politicality of truth-telling – that it happens in a public, political context where gendered/raced/classed norms of public comportment inflect and influence public response to, and assessment of, the truth-teller’s speech.⁸

In contrast, an analysis focused on acts of *truth-telling* – and, in particular here, what I am calling transformative truth-telling – attends precisely to the political stakes of how we understand the role and practice of the truth-teller. My focus on truth-telling builds on Michel Foucault’s late work on *parrhesia*. In his late lectures at the College de France and UC Berkeley, Foucault argues for a turn away from “the problem of truth” and toward the “problem of the truth-teller, or of truth-telling as an activity”⁹ – that is, as he puts it in *The Courage of Truth*, toward the project of “analyz[ing] the conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject *manifests* himself when speaking the truth, by which I mean, thinks of himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth.”¹⁰ Writers (like Cohen) focused on “the problem of truth” – or what Foucault calls “the analytics of truth”¹¹ – attempt to articulate “the criteria for true statements and sound reasoning,”¹² while writers interested in the “question of truth from the point of view of truth-telling as an activity” ask questions like: “Who is able to tell the truth? What are the moral, the ethical, and the spiritual conditions which entitle someone to present himself as, and to be considered as, a truth-teller?”¹³ This “critical” approach to truth-telling¹⁴ reveals that no form of veridiction is absolute and that forms of truth-telling are historically and politically conditioned in different ways in different times and places. From this perspective, the analytics of truth, which presents itself as objectively identifying criteria for assessing or speaking truth, appears as itself always partial, since it operates within a historically and politically constrained understanding of the nature of truth and truth-telling.

Focusing on the activity of truth-telling – and who counts as a proper truth-teller – thus allows us to see the partiality of the whistleblower model, as well as the closures this model effects on our political vision of truth and truth-telling. Further, however, placing the activity of truth-telling (rather than the problem of truth) in the center of our analysis allows us see the political productiveness of practices of truth-telling that contravene or challenge this dominant model: that is, that truth-telling may not just *reinstate* or reproduce the status quo (as Cohen assumes, and as Hannah Arendt sometimes suggests¹⁵), but may also transform it. Specifically, I will argue for reading Manning’s truth-telling not *only* as shoring up existing power structures, but *also* as an attempt to construct a new social world where she would be viewed as a proper truth-teller. It is in this sense that transformative truth-telling differs from whistleblowing. The whistleblower seeks to restore the social world by putting an end to deception, while the transformative truth-teller, through challenging our conception of proper truth-telling, seeks – at least in part – to imagine and build a new world.

In the following, I first briefly discuss the story of Manning's life, her leaks to Wikileaks, and her subsequent arrest. I then discuss the shortcomings of the whistleblower model to adequately describe Manning's truth-telling. In the third section, I argue for reading Manning's truth-telling not simply as an attempt to reveal facts that were hidden, but as a response to (sometimes violent) techniques of secrecy that constructed her as improperly public and not worthy of being heard. In the fourth section, I argue for reading Manning's truth-telling as transformative – that is, as aimed not primarily at governmental accountability, but at soliciting a not yet existent public that would respond to Manning as a proper public truth-teller and freely use the information she leaked to collaboratively chart a new course for addressing governmental corruption and abuses of power. Finally, in the conclusion, I argue for cultivating broader and more generous democratic modes of receptivity to truth-telling.

1. The Story¹⁶

Chelsea Manning grew up in a small suburb of Oklahoma City. Raised as a boy, “Bradley,” Chelsea often felt like an outsider in a world of boys focused on athletics and the pursuit of girls, and spent most of her adolescence on computers and playing video games. She came out to friends as gay when she was thirteen. As an adult, Manning would often share her story, which she had crafted into a hard luck coming out narrative with people upon first meeting them. In the chat logs with Lamo, for instance, Manning launched into her childhood story soon into their encounter:

i was born in central Oklahoma, grew up in a small town called crescent, just north of oklahoma city ... i was a short (still am), very intelligent (could read at 3 and multiply/divide by 4), very effeminate, and glued to a computer screen at these young ages [MSDOS/Windows 3.1 timeframe] ... i played SimCity [the original] obsessively ... an easy target by kindergarten ... grew up in a highly evangelical town with more church pews than people ... so, i got pretty messed up at school ... 'girly boy' 'teacher's pet', etc"

(MLCL, 5–6).

Manning's home life was also difficult. Her mother, who was Welsh (Manning's father had met her when posted abroad with the Army), was lonely and depressed, while Manning's father drank and was verbally abusive. In Manning's words, “home was the same, alcoholic father and mother...mother was very nice, but very needy emotionally... father was very wealthy (lots of nice toys/computer stuff), but abusive” (MLCL, 6). Manning's father ultimately left her mother for another woman, and Manning's mother moved back to Wales when she was about to start high school. Manning went with her, but ended up moving back to Oklahoma (with her father's help) after finishing high school in 2005. Manning moved out of her father's house not long after this (in 2006) after conflicts with her father's new wife, bounced around for a while working low paying jobs before landing in a suburb of Washington, DC, where she stayed with her aunt. Chelsea's aunt offered her a stable home and Manning attended junior college briefly, but ultimately felt stalled in her progress and decided (with her father's advice) to join the Army.

At the same time that she was deciding to join the Army, Manning was creating a gay male circle of friends for herself in the DC area and was also embarking on her first real relationship. In addition, she was making more and more connections in a hacker culture that she admired, but was not totally a part of. Her best friend – Danny Clark – was a big part of this culture, living as he did in the pika house at MIT (a longstanding home of hackers and hacker culture) and working for Richard Stallman's Free Software Foundation. Through Danny, Manning absorbed some of this culture and extended her interest in and knowledge of Stallman's ideas (to which I will return later in the paper). Manning's move into the Army stood in obvious tension with these other strains of her life, which affirmed queer equality (the Army at the time was still governed by “Don't Ask Don't Tell”) and an anti-authority, antiownership outlook within the Free Software movement and pika house.

Manning's tenure within the Army reflected this tension and was tempestuous. She was assigned early on to become an intelligence analyst, which took advantage of her computer skills and intelligence. She liked her job, as she told Lamo during their chat sessions, but she continually found herself in clashes with authority figures. She had angry outbursts several times before she was even deployed to Iraq (leading her supervisor to recommend against deploying her – the supervisor was

ignored) and while stationed abroad. While in Iraq, she ultimately punched her supervisor in the face (for which Manning was severely disciplined and reduced in rank). In addition to Manning's confrontations with authority figures, she was very lonely. Short of coming out to her fellow soldiers, Manning was not particularly closeted about her sexuality – for instance, she kept a fairy wand on her desk and posted fearlessly on her Facebook page about her sexuality and opposition to Don't Ask Don't Tell – and was penalized for it by being generally ignored or disliked by her fellow soldiers.

As we now know,¹⁷ in early 2010, Manning began leaking vast quantities of data to Wikileaks (after first contacting the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*) when she was in the United States on leave. She first leaked what are now known as the “Afghan War Logs” and the “Iraq War Logs.” She went on to send the video footage now known as “Collateral Murder” (of U.S. servicemen shooting civilians from helicopters) and the huge trove of diplomatic cables now known as “Cablegate.” After sending all of this information, but before most of it was released, Manning initiated a chat online in May 2010 with Adrian Lamo. The impetus for the chat was Manning's increasing emotional desperation following her physical assault on her commanding officer and her subsequent demotion in rank. In those chats, Lamo assured Manning that “I'm a journalist and a minister. You can pick either, and treat this as a confession or an interview (never to be published) & enjoy a modicum of legal protection” (*MLCL*, 3). Manning shared everything with Lamo, who almost immediately turned her in to the FBI. Soon thereafter, Manning was arrested and jailed, where she remained for over 1000 days before her trial began. For a period of time, Manning was confined to conditions that could arguably be classified as torture: among them, being forced to sleep naked and kept in solitary confinement for extended periods of time.¹⁸ Manning was ultimately found guilty of violating the 1917 Espionage Act and sentenced to 35 years in prison – a sentence that, as *New York Times* reporter Charlie Savage notes, is “the longest ever handed down in a case involving a leak of United States government information for the purpose of having the information reported to the public.”¹⁹ After her conviction, Manning officially took the name “Chelsea” and (at the time of completing final revisions of this paper) described herself as trans*.²⁰

2. Manning as Whistleblower?

In an essay in *The New Republic*, Harvard law professor Yochai Benkler portrays Chelsea Manning as part of the “long-respected tradition” of whistleblowers in the United States.²¹ Whistleblowers, on Benkler's account, serve the vital constitutional role of assuring “oversight” of institutions otherwise shrouded in secrecy – for example (and especially), institutions within the arena of national security. Whistleblowers “offer a pressure valve, constrained by the personal risk whistleblowers take, and fueled by whatever moral courage they can muster.”²² Benkler argues that Manning should be classed within this tradition – of which Ellsberg is on his account the most notable example – not because of the effects of her actions, but because of the moral “motives” revealed in her statement on her guilty plea.

Benkler's emphasis on Manning's moral motives on behalf of “oversight” of government (or private corporations) resonates with broader American scripts about the figure of the “whistleblower,” a term which was coined in the 1970's by Ralph Nader (Nader hoped to avoid the negative connotations of words like “snitch”; the term whistleblower refers to a referee who blows the whistle on a foul in the course of a game). Nader similarly locates the importance of the whistleblower in assuring oversight of governmental and corporate organizations (Nader compares the structure of organizations to feudalism) which otherwise might go unchecked.²³ Whistleblowing, Nader says, is the “last line of defense ordinary citizens have against the denial of their rights and the destruction of their interests by secretive and powerful institutions.”²⁴ Nader also, like Benkler, emphasizes the importance of individual moral “courage” and care for the public good as the proper motivations of the whistleblower. Whistleblowing, Nader says, depends upon individuals' “professional and individual responsibility,” which consists in “placing responsibility to society over that to an illegal or negligent or unjust organizational policy or activity.”²⁵ For Nader – as for Benkler – in other words, the whistleblower serves an important role in society as a safeguard for the public good when it is threatened by private interest pursued under shadow of secrecy.

We can see this whistleblower script echoing throughout the many articles and opinion pieces written not only by Benkler, but by Manning's other defenders. For example, Glenn Greenwald – a prolific defender of Manning writing for *Salon.com* and *The Guardian* – continually refers to Manning as a “whistleblower” and stresses Manning's morally pure motives. For Greenwald, the Lamo-Manning chat logs show that “the private decided to leak these documents after [s]he became disillusioned with the Iraq war. [S]he described how reading classified documents made [her], for the first time, aware of the breadth of the corruption and violence committed by [her] country and allies...When asked by the informant why [s]he did not sell the documents to a foreign government for profit, Manning replied that [s]he wanted the information to be publicly known in order to trigger ‘worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms.’”²⁶ While Manning's biographer, Denver Nicks, claims that Manning may not be a traditional whistleblower simply due to the vast scope of documents she released – unlike the traditional whistleblower, who releases documents targeted at revealing a specific injustice – he nonetheless stresses that “[Chelsea] Manning's decision to leak state secrets was clearly made with altruistic motivations.”²⁷

By portraying Manning as a whistleblower, Manning's defenders reveal an important part of her story. As Benkler, Greenwald, and Madar argue, the chat logs between Manning and Lamo and Manning's guilty plea statement show that Manning was motivated by a concern with the public good. Manning tells Lamo, for example, that she would not have sold her data “because its public data” (*MLCL*, 37); “it belongs in the public domain...it should be a public good” (*Ibid.*).²⁸ Yet Manning's chats with Lamo also reveal a narrative of her acts that connects her struggle with state secrecy to her struggle with living under Don't Ask Don't Tell, and with her gender identity. In her introduction of herself to Lamo, Manning identifies herself in terms of these two aspects of her life: “hi...how are you?...im an army intelligence analyst, deployed to eastern Baghdad, pending discharge for ‘adjustment disorder’ in lieu of ‘gender identity disorder’ ... im sure you're pretty busy ... if you had unprecedented access to classified networks 14 hours a day 7 days a week for 8+ months, what would you do?” (*MLCL*, 2) For Manning, the thread that ties these two aspects of her life together is clear: mandated secrecy. As she says after referring Lamo to the wikileaks website (without directly identifying herself yet as the leaker), “living such an opaque life, has forced me never to take transparency, openness, and honesty for granted” (*MLCL*, 4). Manning's negative experiences of having to hide parts of herself under Don't Ask Don't Tell are not distinct from her motives for leaking information; rather, they are part of why she feels the need to ensure transparency of military actions.²⁹

When Manning's supporters efface these connections between her personal struggles and her leaking of documents, they do so in order to justify her actions as in service of the public good (rather than private interest or revenge). Yet in so doing, they also unintentionally repeat rather than remedy the injury done to Manning by the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy – namely, by constructing her struggles with gender identity as “secrets” that must be kept if she is to serve the public good. This seems to do a specific injustice to Manning. It also, however, blocks from view a story implicit in Manning's self-representation: namely, a story about how supposedly “private” aspects of Manning's motivations to leak documents may themselves have been formed by Manning's public experiences of failing to fit into public norms of gender comportment in the Army.

In the next section, I read Manning's narrative of her motivations to leak documents not as an expression of prepolitical “private” feelings, but rather as a narrative that reveals how publicness and privateness are constructed through norms of public comportment that frame Manning's non-gender-conformity *and* non-conformity to the Army's construction of the proper soldier as necessarily “private.” Specifically, I will argue that Manning's experience of state mandated secrecy is not simply of a prohibition – of being forced to *hide* information (about herself and the state) – but of a set of techniques of secrecy (commands, shaming, harassment, ridicule) that publicly construct her as an improper public speaker. In this argument, I build on Michael Warner's dual insight: first, that the supposedly private sphere is always publicly constructed – as we can see in the gay and lesbian experience of the “closet” as private (even though it is publicly constructed by heteronormative discourse)³⁰; and second, that supposedly public, neutral, universal forms of comportment are always defined by partial (masculine, white, educated, justificatory) forms of comportment that we

tend to define as private.³¹ Focusing on the public construction of norms of public and private, I will suggest that the public/private distinction upon which the whistleblower model relies is itself the product of techniques of secrecy, enforced through practices of domination and subordination.

3. Secrecy

In the narrative of her leaking that she offers to Lamo, Manning identifies two key turning points which sparked her desire to tell the truth about herself and governmental actions abroad: first, the moment that she identifies as leading her to question American actions in Iraq (and her part in it) and, second, the moments when she begins to question her gender identity. In both turning points, Manning confronts her “failure” to fit into norms of publicness in the Army. Following Judith Halberstam, I do not assume that such experiences of failure simply reveal a lack of success.³² Rather, I see Manning’s experience of failure as also revealing problems with the disciplinary norms inherent in dominant notions of “success” – here, with dominant notions of who counts as a proper truth-teller. I first discuss Manning’s failure to fit into the norm of what I call the “docile soldier” and then turn to her failure to fit into norms of gender and sexuality.

In her chats with Lamo, Manning identifies the moment that she says she began to have doubts about American actions in Iraq (and the secrecy surrounding them). This moment occurred following an incident where the American military supported Iraqi forces in detaining and perhaps torturing individuals who had distributed “anti- Iraqi literature.” This happened during the first weeks of Manning’s deployment to Iraq (in October or November of 2009). Manning says:

i think the thing that got me the most... *that made me rethink the world more than anything...* was watching 15 detainees taken by the Iraqi Federal Police ... for printing ‘anti-Iraqi literature’... the iraqi federal police wouldn’t cooperate with US forces, so i was instructed to investigate the matter, find out who the ‘bad guys’ were, and how significant this was for the FPs [Federal Police] ... it turned out, they had printed a scholarly critique against PM Maliki ... i had an interpreter read it for me ... and when i found out that it was a benign political critique titled ‘Where did the money go?’ and following the corruption trail within the PM’s cabinet ... i immediately took that information and *ran* to the officer to explain what was going on ... he didn’t want to hear any of it ... *he told me to shut up and explain how we could assist the FPs in finding *MORE* detainees ...*

(my emphasis, *MLCL*, 23–24)

The most obvious thing that jumps out at the reader from this story is American hypocrisy: Manning realizes that the United States says that it is promoting democracy and free speech, when in reality it is helping the Iraqis restrict free speech and democracy on behalf of stability. However, there is another important part of this story – namely, that Manning is told that the form of speech she exercises here (essentially, whistleblowing) is not properly public. She is told to “shut up” and instead to “explain” to her commander how she can help further restrict free speech and democracy. It would be a mistake, though, to read this moment as a simple *silencing* of Manning. Rather, her commanding officer also commands her to *speak differently* – to speak in the register of American interests rather than in terms of right and wrong, true and false. The officer’s command is not prohibitive, in other words, but productive: it disciplines (or attempts to discipline) Manning into a particular form of subjectivity – to construct her as a proper soldier, whose speech can be properly heard only when it follows commands and identifies with the national interest.

Manning tells Lamo that, after this moment, “everything started slipping” and that she “saw things differently” (*MLCL*, 24). In what way did she “see things differently”? Despite her officer’s command to speak differently – to simply obey orders – that command did not turn Manning into a fully docile soldier. Instead, it produced a soldier who saw her public persona – and the public persona all soldiers were disciplined into adopting – as complicit in governmental wrongs, as itself a corrupt figure. As Manning tells Lamo, “i had always questioned the [way] things worked, and investigated to find the truth...but that was a point where i was a *part* of something ... i was actively involved in something that i was completely against ...”; “i was part of it ... and completely helpless ...” (*MLCL*, 24). Manning was “helpless” to address her own corruption because the only way she could be heard was *via the public persona* of the docile soldier – a persona which could not question orders or her

superiors' view of the national interest. The proper public speech that Manning had been disciplined into adopting had no language with which she could question or change American behavior.

At the same time that Manning was struggling with the command to become the docile soldier that she felt to be corrupt, she was realizing her failure to fit into another norm of proper public comportment in the Army: conformity to a traditionally masculine gender and hetero-sexuality. Chatting with Lamo in May 2010, she says, "8 months ago [at the beginning of his deployment], if you'd have asked me whether i wanted i would identify as female, i'd say you were crazy ... that started to slip very quickly, as the stresses continued and piled up ..." (*MLCL*, 39). Those stresses included continual mocking and at least low-level harassment. As Manning says in an earlier set of chat logs with Zinnia Jones (a transgender activist and blogger): "being around my platoon for 24 hours a day ... it took them awhile, but they started figuring me out, making fun of me, mocking me, harassing me, heating up with one or two physical attacks ... which I fended off just fine, but it was scary."³³

Just like her commander's demand that Manning speak differently – as a docile soldier – this ongoing harassment, ridicule, and ostracism by her fellow soldiers was not just prohibitive (leading Manning to "hide" her sexuality and non-gender-conformity), but productive. It was not productive, however, in leading Manning to behave in a more "heterosexual" and/or "masculine" manner. Instead, this harassment worked, first, to simply make Manning see herself as her ridiculers did – as improperly gendered, queer, out of place. Manning says to Lamo that her gender identity is "clearly an issue ... i mean, i don't think its normal for people to spend this much time worrying about *whether they're behaving masculine enough, whether what they're going to say is going to be perceived as 'gay'*... not to mention how i feel about the situation ... for whatever reason, im not comfortable with myself ... i mean, i behave and look like a male, but its not 'me' :L" (my emphasis, *Ibid.*). Second, this harassment made Manning feel, in her words, like a "ghost" (*MLCL*, 3, 28, 42) – visible (as improperly gendered) and invisible (as who she feels she is) at the same time. As Manning says, "its just such a disconnect between myself, and what i know ... and what people see" (*MLCL*, 12). What is it that people do not see about Manning? Manning does not mean that people do not see her non-conformity to norms of gender and sexuality. Indeed, that is precisely the problem – they see it all too well, ridicule and shame it. Rather, she seems to mean that they misunderstand this non-conformity – that they see it as revealing her unimportance, her triviality. As Manning puts it, "im way way way too easy to marginalize ... i don't like this person that people see ... no-one knows who i am inside" (*MLCL*, 26). Just like the norm of the docile soldier led her to feel powerless – unable to speak truly and be heard – so too with the norms of masculinity and heterosexuality (enforced through harassment and ridicule) that construct Manning as someone who, because she appears queer and improperly gendered, has nothing important to say and cannot be heard as a meaningful, proper public speaker. As Manning says, "ive been so isolated for so long ... i just wanted to be nice, and live a normal life ... but events kept forcing me to figure out ways to survive ... smart enough to know whats going on, but helpless to do anything ... *no-one took any notice of me*" (my emphasis, *MLCL*, 10).

Manning's narrative of how she came to feel unheard and powerless illustrates Warner's claim that some attributes are coded as unfit to appear in public (especially non-conforming sexuality and gender identity) not *before* public discourse, but *through* it: for example (and as in Manning's case), through ridicule, ostracism, harassment, and denial of some of the right to speak.³⁴ To put the point differently, the disconnect felt by Manning – between who she is and who others see – is not produced by the actual invisibility of her sexuality and gender, but rather by others' construction of that sexuality and gender performance as illicit, deviant, and best kept to herself. This is the "open secret" of sexuality described by Eve Sedgwick – where queer persons' sense of invisibility is actually the product of their *visibility*, and their vulnerability to the constructions of their identity by others.³⁵ The logic of the "open secret" in Manning's case – where her sexual and gender identity is coded as purely "private," but which at the same time is constructed and ascribed by others and in their terms rather than practiced or revealed on the terms of the queer individual – renders Manning always improperly public insofar as she is always articulated by others as bringing the properly private into the public.

If we were evaluating Manning's acts according to the traditional whistleblower model, her struggles with the secrecy mandated by Don't Ask Don't Tell would appear irrelevant at best and, at worst, as problematic for Manning's attempt to tell the truth about governmental bad acts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this model, if Manning's personal struggles influenced, or were linked with, her whistleblowing in any way, then the act of truth-telling appears no longer as an act that simply renders facts visible that were being kept hidden – on behalf of the public good – but as a possibly biased attempt to (mis)use facts on behalf of private interest.

Yet Manning's narrative of her experience reveals, as I have suggested, that this public/private division does not denote a pre-political distinction between two spheres, but is actually constructed through public discourse, norms, and experiences. In Manning's narrative, techniques of secrecy (sometimes violent) *produce* our understanding of the proper distinction between public and private, between what can appear in public and what should be hidden. The public/private distinction upon which the whistleblower model relies thus does not appear as a set of criteria that can validate the truth spoken by the truth-teller, but instead as a disciplinary norm that marginalizes and casts as "inauthentic" would-be truth-tellers who seek to contest techniques of secrecy that classify them as improperly public – marginal, unimportant, not worthy of being heard.

Rather, then, than attempting to fit Manning into the mold of the classic whistleblower (a mold which hides and is complicit in the disciplinary techniques which cast him as improperly public), what if we read Manning's truth-telling precisely as a response to the techniques of secrecy – the public shaming, ostracism, ridicule, and discipline – that constructed her as an improper soldier and public person, unworthy of notice? Read in this way, we can identify an alternative, and more compelling, interpretation of her claim that she leaked documents on behalf of the public good: not as a failed attempt to serve a public good that excludes her as a proper public speaker, but rather as an enactment of herself, as a non-gender conforming person and as a person resistant to the Army's articulation of the national interest, as a proper speaker and defender of that public good. Indeed, in a telling (and light-hearted) moment of her chat with Adrian Lamo, Manning herself links together her non-conformity to Army norms of pursuing American interests to her gender non-conformity: Manning tells Lamo that she "listened and lip synced to Lady Gaga's Telephone while exfiltrating possibly the largest data spillage in American history" (*MLCL*, 37). Here, not only does Manning say that she lip synced to the music of a female singer while leaking data – thus performatively, if also pseudo-privately, enacting gender non-conformity; she also says that she lip synced to the music of a singer who herself constantly plays with gender and gender norms. Manning's leaking, as portrayed in the scene she describes here, does not consist in her moral appeal to the public good on behalf of governmental accountability, but rather in a creative performance of *non*-conformity to dominant models of publicness.

Read in this way, Manning's practice of truth-telling reveals an alternative way of conceiving the import of truth-telling more generally: not simply as a practice of revealing facts, but also as a political practice that challenges and seeks to transform the disciplinary techniques of secrecy that classify some individuals as improperly public, not worthy of being heard. I suggest that we call this model of truth-telling "transformative truth-telling" – a practice of truth-telling that does not simply state facts, but that also seeks to transform, in part through its own enactment, the norms of publicness that structure who counts as a proper truth-teller.

In the next section, I further develop the model of transformative truth-telling by examining how Manning understands the goal of her truth-telling. Specifically, I will show – through putting together Manning's narratives of her personal transition (from male to female) and her desire for public transformation in response to her leaks – that Manning was not primarily interested in assuring official accountability, but in public engagement with, and use of, the information she leaked. Manning hoped the public would use the information she leaked to freely collaborate, discuss, and debate how to best address the abuses of power and techniques of secrecy Manning revealed. While Manning knew this public response was uncertain, I argue for nonetheless seeing her solicitation of such a public as meaningful and important. Addressing two authors (Cornelia Vismann and Michel Foucault) whose work suggests that modern truth-telling inevitably shores up existing power structures and norms, I

argue, drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, that to read Manning's act as *only* reflecting existing power structures prevents us from attending to how she narrates and performs her act *also* as a solicitation: a risky attempt to construct a new social world, not just repeat our old one.

4. Transformative Truth-Telling

In her chats with Lamo, Manning consistently connects her goal of personal transition to her goal in leaking national security documents. For example, she says, "i don't know what im going to do now ... well, wait ... obviously ... i guess i could start electrolysis as soon as im back in the states ... even before im outprocessed ... *still gonna be weird watching the world change on the macro scale, while my life changes on the micro*" (my emphasis, *MLCL*, 19). Similarly, Manning says at another point in the chat: "im just kind of drifting now ... waiting to redeploy to the US, be discharged ... *and figure out how on earth im going to transition ... all while witnessing the world freak out as its most intimate secrets are revealed ... its such an awkward place to be in, emotionally and psychologically*" (my emphasis, *MLCL*, 9-10). What, if anything, ties the two forms of "transition" together? I will suggest below that, for Manning, her truth-telling in both cases resists expert control over information on behalf of a more creative, communal, and collaborative use of information.

In her discussion of her hope to transition (from male to female), Manning sometimes portrays her goal as primarily physical – changing her physical appearance to match her inner identity.³⁶ Yet Manning more often portrays her goal of transition as a more open-ended *practice* of truthfulness with no guaranteed end-point: that is, of experimenting with, discussing, and using information about herself differently. In particular, Manning values the prospect of being able to freely experiment with her self, with who she is, without being monitored by the Army: "i just wanted enough time to figure myself out...to be myself...and not be running around all the time, trying to meet someone else's expectations" (*MLCL*, 9). Manning pursued one such experiment when she came home on leave from Iraq: "i mean, 99.9% of people coming from iraq and afghanistan want to come home, see their families, get drunk, get laid ... i wanted to try living as a woman, for whatever reason" (*MLCL*, 40). Manning dressed as a woman – "crossdress[ing], full on ... wig, breastforms, dress, the works ... i had crossdressed before ... but i was public ... for a few days" – and "took the Acela from DC to Boston ... whatever compelled me to do that ... idk ... but i wanted to see my then-still-boyfriend ... i rode the train, dressed in a business casual outfit" (*MLCL*, 39). Manning says that she "blended in" (*MLCL*, 39), didn't "think ... all the time about how im perceived" (*MLCL*, 40), and "really enjoyed the trip," with the exception of an encounter with a transphobic conductor, who loudly said "Thank you, MISTER Manning ..." when he clipped Manning's ticket (*MLCL*, 39). This experiment clearly does not resolve Manning's questions about her gender identity – she still felt that she needed to figure things out – but she felt pleasure in her ability, beyond the reach of the military (even if only momentarily and uncertainly), to experiment in her public self-presentation.

In addition to experimentation with living as a woman, Manning pursued her goal of transition through talking about her situation with friends and those she considered equals (for example, Lamo).³⁷ In this sense, Manning's approach to her transition is collaborative rather than deferential. Indeed, Manning consistently portrays her desire to "figure herself out" as standing at odds with experts' attempts to help her do so. She says, for example, that she is "an awkward patient" for her therapist: "i had an hour session with my therapist ... i didnt say word for like 30 minutes ... i just sat there, and he took notes ... im an awkward patient ... its difficult to communicate with therapists ... i try to explain something, and they twist it around ... and then they ask why i dont want to say anything" (*MLCL*, 30). In a similar vein, she expresses a skeptical view of the DSM as a way of categorizing and controlling people: "i don't believe a third of the DSM-IV-TR" (*MLCL*, 30); "so many Disorders that so many people fall into ... it just seems like a method to categorize a person, medicate them, and make money from prescription medications" (*MLCL*, 31). Manning sees her therapist and the DSM as blockages rather than aids to identifying the truth of herself because, like the officer who commanded her to speak differently in the Army, they seem to inscribe her into categories and narratives with which she does not identify – categories and narratives that render her, as in his therapist's office, powerless to speak ("then they ask why i dont want to say anything").

This is not to say that Manning's discussions with friends about her transition – as in the “confession” she offers to Lamo and the coming out story that she tells to people when she meets them – and her experiment of cross-dressing are not constituted by the expert-driven genre of truth-telling that Michel Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* as “the confession.”³⁸ There, Foucault argues that the modern demand that individuals transform their desires into discourse actually constitutes the subjectivity that they believed they were merely confessing. In particular, the modern subject formed by the practice of confession sees her sexual desires, rather than her sexual behavior, as expressing the truth of herself and she believes that she can only discover that truth through endlessly speaking those desires and submitting them to the expertise, and expert categories, of others (the doctor, the psychiatrist, the teacher, etc.). Read through this Foucauldian lens, Manning's resistance to expert definitions does not mean that she is free of power, or of management by expertise. Indeed, her attempt to fully articulate and speak the truth of herself through the activity of confession suggests that her truth-telling is constructed by a disciplinary technique (confession to experts) that she sees herself as resisting.

However, to see Manning's resistance to experts *solely* through this Foucauldian lens keeps us from attending to the inaugural and productive power of Manning's own narration and interpretation of her experiences.³⁹ As Jacques Rancière argues in his important depiction of workers' dreams and writings in 19th century France, *Proletarian Nights*, approaches to politics that view people's words as “symptoms of social reality” (Rancière is worried about Althusserian Marxism) blind us to how those words may also be “*writing and thinking at work on the construction of a different social world.*”⁴⁰ That is, even if workers' dreams and writings do not completely escape the world in which they are dominated, these dreams and writings have power nonetheless in creating the living possibility of another, freer social existence, and of the political action that might bring it into being. Indeed, even if Foucault's analysis productively shows us the techniques of power that are reflected in Manning's act – that is, how her truth-telling may shore up rather than challenge an expert-governed understanding of truth-telling, identity, and sex – we should also ask what reality Manning seeks to *construct* in her speech and deeds. What social world does she hope her actions will bring into being? What possibilities might her deeds open up that are not captured by the categories and constraints of the existing social and political reality?

As we have seen, Manning's depiction of her personal transition opens up the possibility of, and holds out hope for, a world where she could creatively experiment with the truth of her self, in collaboration with others who are her equals, without being defined and managed by experts. Manning similarly depicts her leaking of government documents as an attempt to subvert expert control over information – a control that renders not just Manning, but the public, powerless to speak about and use it. She says:

hypothetical question: if you had free reign over classified networks for long periods of time...say, 8-9 months...and you saw incredible things, awful things ... *things that belonged in the public domain, and not on some server stored in a dark room in Washington DC ... what would you do? ... things that would have an impact on 6.7 billion people ... say ... a database of half a million events during the Iraq war ... from 2004 to 2009 ... with reports, date time groups, lat-lon locations, casualty figures ... ? or 260,000 state department cables from embassies and consulates all over the world, explaining how the first world exploits the third, in detail, from an internal perspective?*

(my emphasis, *MLCL*, 8)

Manning's depiction of state secrecy is not focused here on a particular wrong that has been covered up, but instead on the forms of oppression and control constructed by techniques of secrecy. The state's control over information renders the public subservient to state officials – who claim to possess important information that the public does not – and leaves the public less able to freely form its own opinions and to chart a meaningful political course.⁴¹

Yet could Manning's truth-telling really challenge the state's control of information and truth? As Cornelia Vismann argues in *Files: Law and Media Technology*, society's demand for disclosure of files in modern regimes (constituted through filing) does not challenge the state's authority to record and be arbiter of truth, but rather shores up a regime of validity structured by state filing practices –

that is, that those practices indicate and constitute truth. ⁴²As Vismann puts it, “[t]he state compiles records, society demands their disclosure.”⁴³ Through the lens of Vismann’s work, Manning’s act appears to challenge the state’s claim to secrecy while at the same time reinforcing the validity of techniques of filing that enshrine the state as the proper arbiter of truth. In this sense, even if Manning performs truth-telling transformatively – creating space for non-gender-conforming individuals to speak truth and act politically – her enactment of truth-telling as a practice of leaking documents recorded and filed by the state seems to render her truth-telling ultimately deferent to the state’s authority, or the authority of its file-keepers, to say what is and is not true.

Vismann’s work rightly presses us not to overestimate the emancipatory potential of truth-telling, but like Foucault’s analysis of “the confession,” it may overdetermine how we view Manning’s truth-telling and lead us to ignore or be inattentive to the meaning that Manning ascribes to her own actions, and to the possible (unexpected or contingent) effects of those actions. To follow Vismann, in other words, might lead us to approach Manning’s truth-telling undemocratically – viewing its meaning and effects as *only* pre-determined and constrained by material techniques rather than *also* opening possibilities for revision and transformation through political action. How might we understand Manning’s truth-telling if we attended to the contingent possibilities that she sees as opened up by her act – possibilities that may not have come to fruition, but which may have meaning anyway as a solicitation to a future public?⁴⁴

In the chat logs, Manning tells Lamo that she hopes for a public response to her leaking. Specifically, she claims that the point of her leaking is to encourage public discussion and ownership of information that may shift some political agency from the state to the public. For example, Manning tells Lamo that “god knows what happens now” once cables are released (*MLCL*, 32) – “*hopefully worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms*” (my emphasis, *MLCL*, 32). Manning’s emphasis here is on the public – albeit an uncertain public – taking up and using the information she released to transform their social world.

Manning’s focus on the public is also present when she tells Lamo that the data she leaked to Wikileaks “belongs in the public domain” not only because it is a “public good,” but also because “*information should be free*” (my emphasis, *MLCL*, 37) – a phrase derived from the hacker culture in which Manning found a partial home. As Denver Nicks notes, “[i]n quipping ‘Information should be free,’ [Chelsea] was aligning [her]self with the hackers’ free software ideal.” The free software ideal is an ideal of collaborative, creative, public freedom in the use of information: an ideal that posits, in Nicks’ paraphrase, that “[w]hether it be the source code to a computer program, scientific data, or basic facts about the conduct of a country’s foreign policy, information ought to be widely available and exchangeable in the spirit of open, transparent mass collaboration and competition.”⁴⁵ Specifically, the free software movement, in the words of its guru Richard Stallman (with whose work Manning was familiar), promotes free software “not like free beer” (indeed, “free software” might have a pricetag), but “as in freedom.” By “freedom,” Stallman means the freedom to share the software with others – a freedom that sustains and enhances community, rather than dividing it through creating lines of ownership – and to use it freely, by being able to change it, use it differently, or modify it.⁴⁶ The ideal of free software does not suggest that *everything* must be up for grabs,⁴⁷ but it does suggest that the “source code” of systems – information about how they function – that affect us and our capacity to act freely and creatively should be freely available, modifiable, and changeable through use.

While Manning does not go into much depth about the free public she imagines, her interest in collaboration, her focus on the importance of public debate (rather than elite accountability), her reference to the importance of freeing information, and her resistance to expert control of information coheres with, and gestures toward, the free software ideal. Indeed, in both her description of her own transition and her hopes for a public transition, Manning depicts truth-telling as part of the practice of building a free community – not because it ensures accountability of leaders, but because it spurs collaborative creativity and experimentation with alternative ways of living, with creating new worlds rather than staying in our current one.

This appeal to an experimenting, creative public differentiates the transformative truth-teller (as I am theorizing it via the example of Manning) from the whistleblower. The whistleblower surely solicits a public, too. Yet where the whistleblower focuses on the import of using revealed facts to check private interest and restore the government to a concern with the public good, the transformative truth-teller foregrounds the import of the public transforming itself and the social world it inhabits – a transformation that cannot be controlled (or assured) by the act of truth-telling, itself.⁴⁸ While acts of whistleblowing may actually partake of the features of transformative truth-telling I have laid out here – challenge to norms of publicness, staking its fate on the response of an uncertain public – the whistleblower model hides those features from view and portrays the act of truth-telling as constative and conservative, merely restoring the status quo, rather than performative and productive. In contrast, the model of transformative truth-telling I have been developing draws attention to how truth-telling, under certain conditions, sparks public transformation, not just repetition, of our social and political world.

5. Conclusion: Pluralizing Modes of Receptivity to Truth-Telling

Of course, Manning's hopeful vision of her own transition and of the transformation of the public are undoubtedly ideals to which reality may (and did) fail to conform. In leaking information, Manning, we might say, solicited a self-transforming, non-conformative, creative public that ultimately failed to appear. Yet it is the contention of this paper that Manning's transformative truth-telling holds value nonetheless. It holds value, first, in its challenge to the dominant model of the whistleblower and the public/private distinction on which it relies – a model that marginalizes would-be truth-tellers who do not fit into its mold. Second, Manning's truth-telling also holds value in its risky turn to the public (rather than the state) to vindicate her act through creatively and collaboratively using the information that Manning released. This solicitation draws attention to the importance of (an always uncertain) public response to the truth-telling – that is, to the fact that, as Linda Zerilli has argued, truth does not become politically meaningful on its own, but only when the public acknowledges it as such through public debate and contest.⁴⁹ Manning's solicitation of a public also draws attention to how public responses to truth-telling are important not only in acknowledging truth, but also in vindicating the *truth-teller* as a proper public speaker. In sum, understood as an act of transformative truth-telling, Manning's act offers a powerful precedent for other marginalized would-be truth-tellers *and* reveals the democratic promise and riskiness of truth-telling: that under certain conditions, truth-telling productively challenges exclusive norms of publicness, but is at the same time dependent on an uncertain public to redeem or vindicate that challenge.

However, transformative truth-telling contains other risks and limits. Acts like Manning's do not operate on only one register, and will not be heard in just one way. As I noted in my discussion of Foucault and Vismann, Manning's act certainly reveals and is parasitic on, even as it also seeks to challenge, expert-driven discourses of confession, as well as the state's authority as the proper arbiter of truth. Thus, even when we engage in or respond to transformative truth-telling, the risk remains that such acts of truth-telling will be publicly received as forms of whistleblowing that re-trench the authority of the state, or of discourses of expertise, as the proper arbiters of truth.

One way to respond to this problem of public reception would be to try to control it by returning to the "analytics of truth" that I discussed at the outset of this essay – that is, by offering criteria for what constitutes proper truth-telling or valid truth. Yet such an approach would obscure rather than respond to the problems revealed in Manning's failure to fit into the whistleblower model: namely, problems not of assessing the truth of her statements (no one has denied they are true), but rather of how norms of publicness constitute who counts as a proper truth-teller.

In the remainder of the conclusion, I will gesture toward and start to develop a more promising response to this problem: namely, to thematize, encourage, and call for forms of public receptivity to truth that are more open and generous to novel performances of truth-telling like Manning's. It is, after all, the assumption of Manning's advocates that her truth-telling can only be defended as a form of whistleblowing that leads them to ignore the ways in which her act of disclosure productively

challenges conventional models of truth-telling. Rather, then, than assuming that practices of truth-telling can be easily ascribed as legitimate or illegitimate – as the act of a whistleblower or not – what if we instead decentered such categories of truth-telling, and allowed ourselves to listen to and be challenged by forms of truth-telling that seek to make room for new (and perhaps freer) ways of acting and speaking in public? Further, while we should remain attentive to how drives to disclosure in contemporary politics shore up the authority of the state and experts, what if we were also attentive to how such drives may perform truth-telling with a difference – that is, as a practice that enacts non-conformity to the dominant vision of the “public” and encourages diverse, plural, and non-conforming forms of truth-telling?

One way to encourage such a broader receptivity to truth-telling is to foreground exemplars of transformative truth-telling – such as Manning’s self-narration of her acts – through which democratic actors may become attuned to alternative or dissident forms of truth-telling as democratically productive. By attending to how Manning’s failure to fit into the dominant model of truth-telling – the whistleblower model – creates precedents and spaces for other marginalized individuals to transformatively tell the truth, democratic actors may become more able to see other supposed “failed” truth-tellers as potentially enlivening figures for democratic politics, or they may be better able to embark on an attempt to tell the truth, themselves, even with the prospect of potential failure and risk.

There are risks to such a project, as well – risks that my interpretation and framing of Manning’s act as one of transformative truth-telling may itself be “untrue” to its subject. Indeed, while I have gleaned my reading of Manning’s public act from her narration of it in her chats with Adrian Lamo, she understood those chats as private, or secret, and they were only released publicly by *Wired* when Lamo turned him in to the FBI. In addition, Manning’s self-understanding continues to evolve.⁵⁰ Indeed, in the chat logs, she expresses a reluctance to become a public figure if she is revealed as the source of the documents – not because she is afraid of punishment, but because she feels that she has not yet figured herself, and her gender, out. She says, “i just ... don’t wish to be a part of it ... at least not now ... im not ready ... I wouldn’t mind going to prison for the rest of my life, or being executed so much, if it wasn’t for the possibility of having pictures of me... plastered all over the world press ... as a boy” (my emphasis, *MLCL*, 9). While one could read my analysis here as another betrayal – on top of Lamo’s, and the Army’s – of Manning’s desire for the space and freedom from surveillance so as to figure herself out, my hope is that this essay has actually served as a complex rejoinder to the very reification of her self feared by Manning: that her picture would be plastered all over the world as a boy. By attempting to do justice to her self-depiction, rather than attempting to fit it into existing models of truth-telling (as most of her defenders have done), I hope I have practiced a generous receptivity to her act, that the essay has unsettled the kinds of static depictions of Manning that do the injustice to her that she feared, and that it has revealed the value of her transformative truth-telling.

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Notes

1. At the time, Chelsea was known as Bradley Manning. I refer to Pfc. Manning as “Chelsea Manning” throughout this paper, even though it deals with events when Chelsea was still known as Bradley, to respect and affirm Chelsea Manning’s current self-understanding. As she said in a recent statement, her new name is “a far better, richer, and more honest reflection of who I am and always have been: a woman named Chelsea” (“A Statement on

My Legal Name Change,” in *The Huffington Post*. Posted April 23, 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chelsea-manning/astatement-on-my-legal-name-change_b_5199874.html. Accessed April 28, 2014).

2. *Wired* released the full transcript of the chat logs, in a piece entitled “Manning-Lamo Chat Logs Revealed,” on July 13, 2011 (<http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/07/manning-lamo-logs>; Accessed January 30, 2013). Throughout this essay, I will cite them parenthetically as *MLCL*, with page numbers that refer to the page numbers of my print-out of the chat log.

3. Ginger Thompson. “Early Struggles of Soldier Charged in Leak Case,” in *New York Times*. Published August 8, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/09/us/09manning.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed March 14, 2013.

4. I draw the term “vindication” from Bonnie Honig’s “Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory,” in *American Political Science Review* 101(2007):1, pp. 1–17. She draws the term from Oakeshott, who distinguishes vindication – which occurs via response to persuasive argument – from rational justification, which precedes and secures an argument.

5. This is different from Foucault’s *parrhesiastes*, who stakes his claim of truth on himself, on his status and reputation. See Foucault’s *Fearless Speech* (ed. Joseph Pearson. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001). Hereafter cited in the text as *FS*.

6. Joshua Cohen. “Truth and Public Reason,” in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 37(2009):1, 2–42, p. 41. Cohen is contesting John Rawls’ view that public reason cannot involve a conception of truth – because such a conception of truth would be exclusive rather than providing a shared ground for reasonable debate without recourse to metaphysical justification. Cohen argues in contrast that the reasonable debate presupposed in Rawls’ conception of public reason necessarily involves a conception of truth.

7. Cohen argues that this political conception should “include at least four commonplaces about truth” (26): that believing something means “believing (asserting, judging) true”; 2) that “[t]rue beliefs present things as they are..., and in that uncontroversial sense correspond to how things are”; 3) “[t]here is a distinction between truth and warrant or justification”; and 4) that “truth is important; and, given that truth is different from warrant, that truth is important in away different from the way that warrant is important” (27).

8. Here, my critique of Cohen’s (and others’) focus on the problem of truth (rather than truth-telling) echoes Iris Marion Young’s critique of deliberative democratic ideals of rational discourse, which assume that “people’s ways of speaking and understanding will be the same” – an assumption which holds true “only if we also eliminate their cultural differences and different social positions” (“Communication and the Other,” in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 122–123).

9. Michel Foucault. *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001, p. 169.

10. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 2–3.

11. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, p.170.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

15. Arendt says that, under “normal circumstances,” truth-telling tends “toward the acceptance of things as they are” (Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1968, p. 251). For Arendt, the truth-teller’s only political act can be to reveal facts in the face of deception, much like the traditional whistleblower model: “Where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truth-teller, whether he knows it or not, has begun to act; he, too, has engaged himself in political business, for, in the unlikely event that he survives, he has made a start toward changing the world” (*Ibid.*).

16. Unless otherwise noted, my knowledge of Bradley Manning’s life comes from Denver Nicks’ thorough biography, *Private: Bradley Manning, Wikileaks, and the Biggest Exposure of Official Secrets in American History*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012.

17. Manning admitted to the leaking in his guilty plea to some of the charges leveled against him by the Army. For this paper, I have used Alexa O'Brien's transcription of his guilty plea statement (2/28/13), which can be found here:http://www.alexao'Brien.com/secondsight/wikileaks/bradley_manning/pfc_bradley_e_manning_providence_hearing_statement.html; Accessed 2/28/13.

18. In her decision to reduce Manning's ultimate sentence by 112 days due to the treatment she received while in military prison, the trial judge, Denise Lind, "said Manning's confinement was 'more rigorous than necessary.' She added that the conditions 'became excessive in relation to legitimate government interests.'" (David Dishneau, "Bradley [Chelsea] Manning Ruling: Judge Reduces Sentence for Army Private in WikiLeaks Case," in *The Huffington Post*, January 18, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/bradley-manningruling_n_2432946.html. Accessed April 28, 2014.)

19. Charlie Savage, "Manning Sentenced to 35 Years for a Pivotal Leak of U.S. Files," in *The New York Times*, August 21, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/22/us/manning-sentenced-for-leaking-governmentsecrets.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed April 28, 2014.

20. See Manning's "A Statement on My Legal Name Change." The article notes that Manning prefers to use "trans*" with an asterix, so as to include those who do not feel that they fit into the gender binary.

21. Yochoai Benkler. "The Dangerous Logic of the Bradley Manning Case," in *The New Republic*.<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112554#>; published March 1, 2013; accessed March 15, 2013.

22. Ibid.

23. Nader says, "Today, arbitrary treatment of citizens by powerful institutions has assumed a new form, no less insidious than that which prevailed in an earlier time. The 'organization' has emerged and spread its invisible chains. Within the structure of the organization there has taken place an erosion of both human values and the broader value of human beings as the possibility of dissent within the hierarchy has become so restricted that common candour requires uncommon courage. The large organization is lord and manor, and most of its employees have been desensitized much as were medieval peasants who never knew they were serfs. It is true that often the immediate physical deprivations are far fewer, but the price of this fragile shield has been the dulling of the senses and perceptions of new perils and pressures of a far more embracing consequence." ("The Anatomy of Whistleblowing" in *Moral Rights in the Workplace*, ed. Ezorsky, p. 89)

24. Nader, p. 92.

25. Ibid.

26. Greenwald also repeatedly stresses that public oversight of corrupt powers has been triggered by Manning's revelations (oversight also continually referred to by Manning's other supporters): for instance, that the revelation of Tunisia's leaders' corruption in Cablegate was one catalyst of the Arab Spring, that revelations of American support for Iraqi practices of torture have sparked debates about torture in the United States, and that the possible criminality of the actions of American servicemen as shown in the 2007 video "Collateral Murder" triggered official investigations into the incidents. For this, Greenwald argues – like another of Manning's defenders, Chase Madar – that Manning deserves not to be treated like a traitor, but rather given a "medal." Glenn Greenwald. "Bradley Manning deserves a medal," in *The Guardian*.<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/14/bradleymanning-deserves-a-medal>; Published December 14, 2011. Accessed March 15, 2013.

27. Nicks, *Private*, p. 184.

28. Manning also claims in her chats with Lamo that she was motivated by feelings of sympathy with those being harmed by American actions in Iraq and elsewhere. For instance, in her discussion of the footage that would become the "Collateral Murder" video with Lamo, Manning says that after figuring out what had happened, "it was unreal...i mean, i've identified bodies before...its rare to do, but usually its just some nobody...it humanized the whole thing...re-sensitized me...i dont know...im just, weird i guess...i cant separate myself from others...i feel connected to everybody...like they were distant family...i... care?" (*MLCL*, 25–26). And in her guilty plea statement, Manning stressed that it was only after releasing the information that she felt at ease with her conscience: "Although the information had not yet been publicly released by the WLO, I felt this sense of relief by them having it. I felt I had accomplished something that allowed me to have a clear conscience based upon what I had seen and read about and knew were happening in both Iraq and Afghanistan everyday." (Manning's guilty plea statement (2/28/13),http://www.alexao'Brien.com/secondsight/wikileaks/bradley_manning/pfc_bradley_e_manning_providence_hearing_statement.html; Accessed 2/28/13.)

29. Indeed, at the same time that she was leaking documents to wikileaks, Manning was starting to tell the truth about her struggles with gender identity to her commanding officer: “i already got myself into minor trouble, revealing my uncertainty over my gender identity...which is causing me to lose this job...and putting me in an awkward limbo” (MLCL, 7).

30. “No one,” Warner says, “ever created a closet for him- or herself. People find themselves in its oppressive conditions before they know it, willy-nilly. It is experienced by lesbians and gay men as a private, individual problem of shame and deception. But it is produced by the heteronormative assumptions of everyday talk. *It feels private. But in an important sense it is publicly constructed*” (“Public and Private,” in *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Verso, 2005, my emphasis, 52). Warner’s work builds on Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

31. As Warner puts it, the traditionally liberal notion of the proper public speaker is one who possesses “[t]he ability to bracket one’s embodiment and status” and thus is able to make “public use of one’s reason” – a use that will be of concern to everybody, not just to those who share your identity. The problem with this classical liberal notion of the proper public speaker is that it masks the partiality of the forms of comportment that are accepted as properly public in the guise of neutrality. For Warner, the ability to bracket one’s status and identity is not actually a universal human capacity – even though we often take it to be so – but “a strategy of distinction, profoundly linked to education and dominant forms of masculinity” (51).

32. Judith Halberstam. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

33. “Bradley Manning’s internet chats with Zach Antolak,” in *The Guardian*. Published July 6, 2011; accessed February 28, 2013; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/07/bradley-manning-chat-logs-zach-antolak>.

34. Warner, “Public and Private,” in *Publics and Counterpublics*. On the problems with supposedly “neutral” standards for judging proper public speech, also see Iris Marion Young’s “Communication and the Other” in *Democracy and Difference*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

35. As Sedgwick puts it in a contrast between the practice of “coming out” as gay and Esther’s famous “coming out” as a Jew to Assueres so as to save her people, Esther’s “confident sense of control over other people’s knowledge about her” (she knows that Assueres does *not* know) stands “in contrast to the radical uncertainty closeted gay people are likely to feel about who is in control of information about their sexual identity.” Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 79. For Sedgwick, gay individuals lack control not only over what others “know,” but also over the evidence for their own claims to be gay – or in Manning’s case, gay and non-gender-conforming: “In the processes of gay self-disclosure...in a twentieth-century context, questions of authority and evidence can be the first to arise.” (Ibid.) For a recent important use of Sedgwick’s framework on behalf of challenging its usefulness in terms of immigration, see Demetra Kasimis’ “The Tragedy of Blood-Based Membership: Secrecy and the Politics of Immigration in Euripides’ *Ion*” (*Political Theory* 41 [April 2013]: 2, 231–256).

36. Manning tells Lamo, for example, that she hopes she “can live a less ambiguous life soon” (MLCL, 43) through undergoing the process of transition, from male to female. He tells Lamo that he is already creating an online presence for “Breanna Manning” and that he has considered many of the practical issues of transition: “i wish it were as simple as ‘hey, go transition’...but i need to get paperwork sorted...financial stuff sorted...legal stuff...and im still deployed so i have to be redeployed to the US and be outprocessed” (MLCL, 7).

37. On this point, see Denver Nicks’ *Private*.

38. Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality, Volume One*. New York: Vintage, 1990.

39. Foucault’s own late work, as I suggested at the outset, similarly resists any neat categorization of truth-telling as *only* reinstating expert-driven discourses of power. On this point, see especially *Fearless Speech, The Government of Self and Others* (trans. Graham Burchell. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), and *The Courage of the Truth*.

40. Jacques Rancière. *Proletarian Nights: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth Century France*, trans. John Drury. New York: Verso, 2012, my emphasis, p. xi.

41. This is why Manning herself tries to have access to as much information as possible. She tells Lamo that she tries to be “aware of who’s making decisions that affect me” – people like “Commanders, Politicians, Journalists, the works...i try to keep track...i have sources in the White House re: DADT and the disaster that keeps going on with

that" (*MLCL*, 41). Manning's attempt to understand how decisions about DADT are made and implemented allowed her (she believed) to carve out a small circle of permissible behavior within a hostile terrain.

[42.](#) In *Publicity's Secret* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), Jodi Dean similarly suggests that acts of disclosure may support rather than unsettle existing structures of power. Yet Dean also suggests that acts of disclosure are more contingent than Vismann suggests – that is, that they need not participate in, and need not be read as participating in, the ideology of publicity that she rightly critiques. Dean argues, for example, that theorists do not have to abandon the internet as a possible site of democratic potential, but rather should “politicize” rather than “romanticize...the connections it [the Web] enables,” “investigating and challenging the practices of linking that are employed in issue networks” (170). Read as an act of “transformative truth-telling,” we could read Manning’s act precisely in this way – namely, as troubling the notion of publicness that his detractors and defenders take as an ideal and problematizing “practices of linking” that rely on gendered norms of publicness, or on the state’s authority as the proper arbiter of truth.

[43.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[44.](#) On the meaningfulness of solicitations to publics even when they fail to elicit the public they desire, see Lida Maxwell, *Public Trials: Burke, Zola, Arendt and the Politics of Lost Causes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2014). Also see Kathi Weeks’ *The Problem with Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) on the importance of making utopian demands, even if those demands are never fully met.

[45.](#) Nicks, 183, 183–184.

[46.](#) Richard Stallman. *Free Software, Free Society: Selected Essays of Richard M. Stallman*. Boston: GNU Press, Free Software Foundation, 2002. As Stallman puts it, “[t]he term “free software” is sometimes misunderstood—it has nothing to do with price. It is about freedom.” For him, “a program is free software, for you, a particular user, if: You have the freedom to run the program, for any purpose; You have the freedom to modify the program to suit your needs. (To make this freedom effective in practice, you must have access to the source code, since making changes in a program without having the source code is exceedingly difficult.); You have the freedom to redistribute copies, either gratis or for a fee; You have the freedom to distribute modified versions of the program, so that the community can benefit from your improvements” (20).

[47.](#) As Stallman says, “[a]s a general rule, I don’t believe that it is essential for people to have permission to modify all sorts of articles and books. For example, I don’t think you or I are obliged to give permission to modify articles like this one, which describe our actions and our views.” *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[48.](#) Sonali Chakravarti offers an important critique of the assumption in whistleblower defenses that outrage about disclosure will necessarily translate into reform. See her “Every Generation Fails Its Whistleblower: Ellsberg, Manning, and the Stubbornness of Democratic Debate” (presented at *Western Political Science Association Meeting*, March 2013).

[49.](#) In “Truth and Politics,” Linda Zerilli turns our attention from the problem of how we cognitively assess truth (our “knowledge” of truth) to the question of how democratic actors acknowledge truth and stage truth as an occasion for democratic action. (*Theory and Event* 9:4 DOI: 10.1353/tae.2007.0015, 2006.)

[50.](#) Indeed, as I was finishing revisions of this essay, Manning released a statement where she embraces a trans* identity that she did not discuss in the chat logs – an identity that may well complicate my analysis here that is more focused on her gender non-conformity (although I cannot say for certain, in the absence of texts that explicitly discuss how she understands her trans* identity). On this point, see Manning’s “A Statement on My Legal Name Change.”