

## COMMUNICATION STYLES AND MASCULINE IDENTITY IN GIOVANNI'S ROOM AND THE GREAT GATSBY

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the relationship between communication styles and masculine identity construction in *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Though separated by historical context and thematic focus, both novels explore masculinity as a fragile and performative construct shaped through speech, silence, confession, and narrative control. Drawing on gender theory, discourse analysis, and queer theory, this study argues that communication functions not merely as expression but as a mechanism of power and identity formation. While Fitzgerald presents masculinity through performative dialogue and narrative mediation within a heteronormative and class-conscious society, Baldwin foregrounds confession, repression, and emotional articulation within a context of sexual identity crisis. Through comparative textual analysis, the article demonstrates that communication styles in both works reveal masculinity as unstable, socially regulated, and deeply dependent on recognition and discourse.

**Keywords:** masculinity, communication styles, discourse, narrative authority, queer identity, hegemonic masculinity, performativity, American literature

**Introduction.** Literature of the twentieth century frequently interrogates the stability of masculine identity amid shifting social, economic, and sexual norms. Both *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Giovanni's Room* (1956) depict male protagonists struggling to reconcile personal desire with societal expectations. Although Fitzgerald situates his narrative in the Jazz Age and Baldwin in postwar expatriate Paris, both novels center on

men whose identities are shaped and constrained by how they speak, remain silent, narrate, and confess.

Communication in these works is not neutral. It becomes a medium through which masculinity is constructed, defended, and destabilized. Dialogue, narrative voice, silence, and confession function as discursive tools that either reinforce hegemonic masculine norms or expose their fragility.

This article offers a comparative analysis of how communication styles influence masculine identity in the two novels. By examining narrative authority, emotional repression, performative speech, and silence, the study argues that both authors reveal masculinity as a socially mediated and discursively produced phenomenon.

**Theoretical framework: Masculinity and discourse.** Modern gender theory emphasizes that masculinity is socially constructed through repeated performances and linguistic practices. R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity highlights the culturally dominant ideal that privileges heterosexuality, authority, and emotional restraint. Judith Butler's theory of performativity further suggests that identity emerges through repeated acts and discursive practices.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, communication is not merely descriptive but constitutive: language produces identity. In both novels, male characters attempt to stabilize their identities through speech or silence. However, these strategies often reveal contradictions between internal desire and external expectation.

Thus, communication styles-whether assertive, evasive, confessional, or narrative-serve as mechanisms through which masculine identity is negotiated.

**Communication and performed masculinity in *The Great Gatsby*.** In *The Great Gatsby*, masculinity is shaped through performative dialogue and narrative mediation. Jay Gatsby's carefully constructed speech reflects his aspirational identity. His formal language, repeated phrase "old sport," and rehearsed storytelling function as tools of self-fashioning. Gatsby uses language to fabricate legitimacy and align himself with upper-class norms.

However, his communication style exposes artificiality. His rehearsed anecdotes and exaggerated politeness reveal masculinity as performance rather than authenticity. Gatsby's inability to engage in spontaneous or emotionally vulnerable dialogue with Daisy underscores the limits of his constructed identity.

Tom Buchanan's communication style contrasts sharply. His speech is aggressive, declarative, and often condescending. Through interruptions and authoritative statements, Tom asserts dominance. His rhetoric about race and social hierarchy reflects hegemonic masculinity sustained through verbal control.

Nick Carraway, as narrator, embodies another dimension of communication: interpretive authority. By controlling the narrative perspective, Nick shapes the representation of other masculinities. His reflective and moralizing tone positions him as a mediator of masculine discourse. Yet his selective omissions suggest that narrative authority itself is a subtle form of power.

Thus, in Fitzgerald's novel, communication reinforces class hierarchy and gender norms. Speech becomes a performative display of power, while silence often signals repression or social exclusion.

**Confession, silence, and queer masculinity in *Giovanni's Room*.** In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin centers masculinity within the crisis of sexual identity. The protagonist David narrates his story retrospectively, adopting a confessional mode. Unlike Gatsby's performative speech, David's narration exposes vulnerability, fear, and denial.

David's communication style is characterized by oscillation between confession and evasion. He articulates his love for Giovanni yet simultaneously distances himself through rationalization. His fragmented narration reflects psychological instability and internalized homophobia.

Giovanni, in contrast, communicates with emotional directness. His expressive language challenges David's restrained masculinity. Giovanni's openness destabilizes David's attempt to conform to heteronormative expectations.

Silence in Baldwin's novel is particularly significant. David's inability to openly declare his identity illustrates how hegemonic masculinity polices emotional and sexual expression. Silence becomes both a defense mechanism and a source of alienation.

Where Fitzgerald critiques class-based masculine performance, Baldwin interrogates heteronormative masculinity and its suppression of emotional authenticity. Communication in *Giovanni's Room* becomes a battlefield between desire and societal norms.

**Comparative analysis: power, vulnerability, and narrative control.** Both novels employ first-person narration, yet the function of narrative authority differs significantly. Nick Carraway narrates from a position of relative social stability, shaping events with reflective distance. David narrates from a position of existential crisis, using confession as self-examination.

In Fitzgerald, masculine identity is threatened by class mobility and economic competition. Communication serves as performance aimed at social validation. In Baldwin, masculinity is threatened by forbidden desire and internalized shame. Communication becomes an intimate struggle between truth and denial.

Despite contextual differences, both novels reveal that masculine identity depends on recognition by others. Gatsby seeks Daisy's affirmation; David fears societal condemnation. In both cases, failure of communication leads to tragedy—Gatsby's death and Giovanni's execution symbolize the destructive consequences of unstable masculine identity.

Importantly, both authors depict masculinity as constrained by rigid social codes. Whether rooted in capitalism or heteronormativity, these codes dictate acceptable forms of speech and silence.

**Historical context and masculine anxiety.** The 1920s in America celebrated wealth and consumption, reinforcing masculinity as economic success. By contrast, the 1950s were marked by strict sexual norms and Cold War anxieties.

Fitzgerald critiques the emptiness of materialistic masculinity, while Baldwin challenges the repression embedded in mid-century sexual ideology. In both cases, communication reveals cracks in dominant masculine ideals.

The male characters' struggles illustrate broader cultural anxieties: fear of social displacement, fear of emotional vulnerability, and fear of sexual difference. Through discourse, both novels expose masculinity as historically contingent and ideologically regulated.

**Conclusion.** Communication styles in *The Great Gatsby* and *Giovanni's Room* function as central mechanisms in the construction and destabilization of masculine identity. Fitzgerald portrays masculinity as a performative display mediated through class-coded language and narrative authority. Baldwin presents masculinity as a conflicted and vulnerable identity shaped by confession, repression, and sexual anxiety.

Both novels ultimately reveal masculinity as neither innate nor stable but discursively produced. Speech, silence, narration, and confession become tools through which power operates and identity is negotiated.

By foregrounding communication, Fitzgerald and Baldwin demonstrate that masculine identity depends not only on social structures but also on language itself. In both texts, the failure to reconcile inner truth with external performance leads to personal and moral catastrophe. Masculinity, therefore, emerges as a fragile construct sustained by discourse yet constantly threatened by contradiction.

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