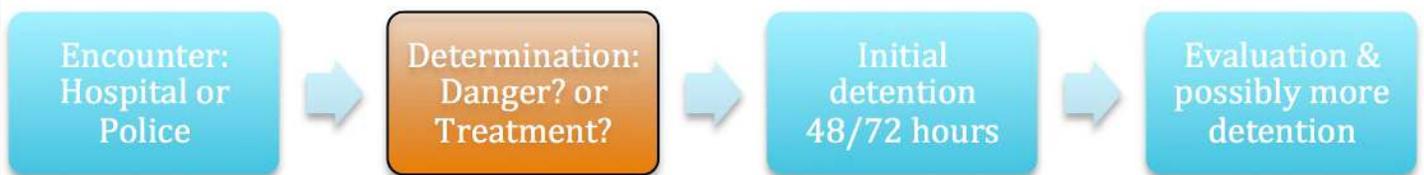


Bipolar Rhetorics: Using Genre Theory to Reconcile Rhetoric From and Rhetoric About Psychiatric Disability | CCCC 2014

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After the Washington Navy Yard shootings in Sept. 2013, there was a public outcry to ease the **standard** of emergency involuntary commitment to prevent violence by mentally ill people. **Current**: “Danger to self or others.” **Proposed**: “Need for treatment.”

Diagram 1: Emergency involuntary commitment process



The public debate took many generic forms, from breaking news reports to opinion columns to political speeches. As a rule, the psychiatrically disabled were **excluded from these public genres**.

Table 1	Authors and Venues	Conventions of Documents	What's It For?
Early reports breaking news of Alexis's mental illness	Authors are journalists for major news sources incl. unattributed pieces for AP/Reuters. Venues are CNN.com, CBS.com, Washington Post, USA Today, AP & Reuters via Huffington Post, i.e., major news outlets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Headline emphasizing craziness of Alexis - Lede summarizing how delusions drove Alexis, proof from his own writings and inscriptions on his gun - Evidence emphasizing the failure of military and gun-purchase background checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To pinpoint a motive for the killings (i.e., the delusions) - To place blame for the killings (e.g., on mental health care failures, gun control failures, or gov't background check failures)

From the breaking news reports, arguments circulated and genre networks formed. (See Table 1.) **Three main sub-genres of opinion pieces** arose from this network, each arising out of different exigence, each written by a different set of authors. (See Diagram 2.)

Diagram 2: Genres across networks



The opinion sub-genre arguing for easing the emergency commitment standard from “dangerousness” to “need for treatment” followed **predictable conventions**. (See Table 2.)

Table 2	Authors and Venues	Conventions of Documents	What’s It For?
Opinion pieces arguing for easing the civil commitment standard	Authors of these pieces include politicians, ¹ psychiatrists, ¹ and authors who have published books about mental illness. ¹ One author published a major memoir in 1998 in the about his recovery from depression; he also has a doctorate in psychology. ¹ Venues include major news outlets such as the <i>Washington Post</i> and <i>USA Today</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link together the tragedies leading up to Navy Yard (e.g. Tucson, Aurora, Newtown) to point out a trend of violence and mental illness - Insist that mental illness is just like any other illness and needs treatment, but most mental illness goes untreated - Point out that most mentally ill are not violent, but also imply or openly state a connection between untreated mental illness and spree killings - Argue that “dangerousness” standard is too high, and we should adopt “need for treatment” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentally ill people need greater access to medical treatment - They will not seek this treatment for themselves - Involuntary commitment must be easier or the mentally ill will “slip through the social fabric,” (as Solomon puts it) or commit more spree killings (as others put it)

Psychiatrically disabled authors were still excluded from participating in the mainstream public debates using these mainstream genres. Instead, they employed “mirror genres,” genres that used similar conventions to borrow the authority of these mainstream genres but deployed in shadow venues, such as internet forums, where they can voice their opinions. **Using mirror genres, disabled authors borrow the conventions of the mainstream genres and bend them to suit the needs of their arguments.**

Table 3 Mainstream Opinion Genres	Mirror Genre by User on PsychForums
- Link together the tragedies leading up to Navy Yard (e.g. Tucson, Aurora, Newtown) to point out a trend of violence and mental illness	- Linked together articles together that drew connections between voices-schizophrenia-violence-forced treatment to point out a trend of connecting hearing voices to forced medication
- Insist that mental illness is just like any other illness and needs treatment, but most mental illness goes untreated	- Expressed “nervous[ness]” and “fear” of “forced medication” upon people for whom such treatments might not be necessary or beneficial
- Point out that most mentally ill are not violent, but also imply or openly state a connection between untreated mental illness and spree killings	- Pointed out that mentally ill people are not more likely to be violent; expressed “fear” about the common misunderstanding that “voice hearing” is “an emergency in need of treatment”
- Argue that “dangerousness” standard is too high, and we should adopt “need for treatment”	- Pointed out the practical consequences of this legal change in plain terms: “So a police officer who encounters someone who’s hearing voice[s] could detain him and take him to a hospital for evaluation.”