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GAY AND LESBIAN LANGUAGE

Don Kulick
Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden; e-mail: kulick@socant.su.se

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■ **Abstract** The past two decades have witnessed a minor explosion in publications dealing with the ways in which gay men and lesbians use language. In fact, though, work on the topic has been appearing in several disciplines (philology, linguistics, women's studies, anthropology, and speech communication) since the 1940s. This review charts the history of research on "gay and lesbian language," detailing earlier concerns and showing how work of the 1980s and 1990s both grows out of and differs from previous scholarship. Through a critical analysis of key assumptions that guide research, this review argues that gay and lesbian language does not and cannot exist in the way it is widely imagined to do. The review concludes with the suggestion that scholars abandon the search for gay and lesbian language and move on to develop and refine concepts that permit the study of language and sexuality, and language and desire.

INTRODUCTION

A recent anthology on postmodern sexualities, entitled (probably inevitably) *Pomosexuals* (Queen & Schimel 1997), begins with a remark on language. The editors recall that at the 1996 Lambda Literary Awards ceremony, a lesbian comic suggested that a new term was needed to replace the "lengthy and cumbersome yet politically correct tag currently used by and for our community: 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Friends'". The word the comic offered was "Sodomites." Why not? the editors wonder: "[i]t's certainly more succinct, and is actually less glib than it seems upon first reflection, for that is what most people *assume* LGBT&F actually means, anyway" (Queen & Schimel 1997:19, emphasis in original).

What to collectively call people whose sexual and gendered practices and/or identities fall beyond the bounds of normative heterosexuality is an unavoidable and ultimately unresolvable problem. For a very short while, in the late 1960s, "gay" seemed to work. But that unifying moment passed quickly, as lesbians protested that "gay" both elided women and eclipsed their commitment to feminism (Johnson 1975, Penelope & Wolfe 1979:1–2, Shapiro 1990, Stanley 1974:391,

White 1980:239). Then, in the early 1990s, it seemed that "queer" might do the trick. Queer, however, has never been accepted by a large number of the people it was resurrected to embrace, and in activist contexts, the word has lately been turning up as just one more identity to be tacked on to the end of an already lengthy list. For example, the latest acronym, which I encountered for the first time at a queer studies conference in New York in April 1999, was LGBTTSQ. When I turned to the stylishly black-clad lesbian sitting beside me and inquired what this intriguing, sandwich-sounding clot of letters might mean, I was informed (in that tart, dismissive tone that New Yorkers use to convey their opinion that the addressee must have just crawled out from under some provincial rock) that it signified "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Two-Spirit, Queer, or Questioning."

The coinage, dissemination, political efficacy, and affective appeal of acronyms like this deserve a study in their own right. What they point to is continued concern among sexual and gender-rights activists over which identity categories are to be named and foregrounded in their movement and their discussions. These are not trivial issues: A theme running through much gay, lesbian, and transgendered writings on language is that naming confers existence. This insistence appears in everything from coming-out narratives ["I have recalled my utter isolation at sixteen, when I looked up *Lesbian* in the dictionary, having no one to ask about such things, terrified, elated, painfully self aware, grateful it was there at all" (Grahn 1984:xii)], to AIDS activism ["The most momentous semantic battlefield yet fought in the AIDS war concerned the naming of the so-called AIDS virus" (Callen 1990:134)], to high philosophical treatises ["Only by occupying—being occupied by—the injurious term can I resist and oppose it" (Butler 1997b:104)]. Zimmerman (1985:259–60) states the issue starkly (see also Nogle 1981:270–71, Penelope et al 1978):

> [C]ontemporary lesbian feminists postulate lesbian oppression as a mutilation of censoriousness curable by language. Lesbians do share the institutional oppression of all women and the denial of civil rights with gay men. But what lesbian feminists identify as the particular, unique oppression of lesbians—rightly or wrongly—is speechlessness, invisibility, inauthenticity. Lesbian resistance lies in correct naming; thus our power flows from language, vision, and culture.... Contemporary lesbian feminism is thus primarily a politics of language and consciousness.

This kind of deep investment in language and naming means that it is necessary to tread gingerly when deciding what to call a review like this one, or when considering what name to use to collectively designate the kinds of nonheteronormative sexual practices and identities that are the topic of discussion here. However, because no all-encompassing appellation currently exists, and because no acronym (short, perhaps, of one consisting of the entire alphabet) can ever hope to keep all possible sexual and gendered identities equally in play and at the fore, I am forced to admit defeat from the start and apologize to all the Ls, Gs, Bs, Ts, TSs, Qs, Fs, and others who will not specifically be invoked every time I refer here, for the

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sake of simplicity, to "queer language." As far as the title of this article is concerned, my inclination was to call it "Language and Sexuality," because the unique contribution of the literature I discuss has been to draw attention to the fact that there is a relationship between language and sexuality (something that has largely been ignored or missed in the voluminous literature on language and gender). In the end, though, I decided to preserve the title assigned me by the editors of this *Annual Review*.[1] Although dry and in some senses " noninclusive," at least it has the advantage of clearly stating what kind of work is summarized here.

So this essay reviews work on gay and lesbian language. Twenty years ago, Hayes (1978) observed that the "sociolinguistic study of the language behavior of lesbians and gay men is hampered...[in part because] important essays have appeared in small circulation, ephemeral, or out-of-print journals" (p. 201). Hayes believed that research could be aided by providing summaries of some of this difficult-to-obtain material [and his annotated bibliography (Hayes 1978, 1979) remains a useful resource even today]. My own view is that no academic discussion can flourish if the material under debate is available to only a handful of scholars; on the contrary, the message conveyed by such discussions becomes one of exclusivity and arcaneness. In the interest of extending and opening up scholarship, this article therefore considers only published and relatively accessible work. This means that the abundance of unpublished conference papers listed in Ward's (2000) invaluable bibliography is not discussed here. I also do not include papers printed in conference proceedings, such as the Berkeley Women and Language Conference, or the SALSA (Symposium about Language and Society at Austin) conference, because those proceedings are not widely distributed, and they are often virtually impossible to obtain, especially outside the United States. Also, with few exceptions, neither do I consider literary treatments of the oeuvres of queer authors nor queer readings of literary, social, or cultural texts, even though many of those analyses have been foundational for the establishment and consolidation of queer theory (e.g. Butler 1990, 1997a; Dollimore 1991; Doty 1993; Sedgwick 1985, 1990). Instead, the focus here is on research that investigates how gays and lesbians talk. How has "gay and lesbian language" been theorized, documented, and analyzed? What are the achievements and limitations of these analyses?

Before proceeding, however, a further word of contextualization: I agreed to write this text under the assumption that the amount of literature on this topic was small. I am clearly not alone in that belief: Romaine's (1999) new textbook on language and gender devotes a total of three pages (out of 355) to a discussion of queer language; and Haiman's (1998) recent book on sarcasm has a two-page section on "Gayspeak," in which he declares that lack of research forces him to turn to *The Boys in the Band* (God help us) for examples (pp. 95–97). A cutting-edge

[1]Actually, that title was "Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered Language," but because the issues raised by the language of transgendered individuals are somewhat different from those I wanted to emphasize here, I decided to review the linguistic and anthropological literature on transgendered language separately (Kulick 1999).

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introduction to lesbian and gay studies has chapters on everything from "queer geography" to "class," but nothing on linguistics (Medhurst & Munt 1997); and textbooks by Duranti (1997) and Foley (1997) on anthropological linguistics and linguistic anthropology have not a word to say about gay, lesbian, or transgendered language. Even recent texts on "Gay English" and queer linguistics mention only a handful of references (Leap 1996, Livia & Hall 1997a). With those kinds of works in mind, imagine my surprise, then, when the literature searches I did for this article turned up almost 200 titles. At that point, I felt compelled to ask myself why there seems to be such a widespread belief that there is so little research on gay and lesbian language?

The obvious answer is because research on gay and lesbian language has had virtually no impact whatsoever on any branch of sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology—even those dealing explicitly with language and gender, as is evidenced by the wan three pages in Romaine's book [a recent exception that does discuss this literature in a wider context is Cameron (1998)]. One might inevitably wonder if this lack of impact is somehow related to structures of discrimination in an academy that, until recently, actively discouraged any research on homosexuality that did not explicitly see it as deviance (Bolton 1995a, Lewin & Leap 1996). Another reason could be the one mentioned above, that work on gay and lesbian language has often appeared in obscure publications. Or it could be because work on this topic has no real disciplinary home. It is done by philologists, phoneticians, linguists, anthropologists, speech communication specialists, researchers in women's studies, and others, many of whom seem to have little contact with the work published outside their own discipline. Finally, much of the research on gay and lesbian language consists of lists of in-group terms, discussion of terms for "homosexual," debates about the pros and cons of words like "gay" and "queer," or possible etymologies of words like "sod," "dyke," or "closet." This is interesting information, but it is hardly the stuff from which pathbreaking theorizing is likely to arise (Aman 1986/1987; Ashley 1979, 1980, 1982, 1987; Bolton 1995b; Boswell 1993; Brownworth 1994; Cawqua 1982; Chesebro 1981b; Diallo & Krumholtz 1994; Dynes 1985; Fessler & Rauch 1997; Grahn 1984; Johansson 1981; Lazerson 1981; Lee 1981; Riordon 1978; Roberts 1979a,b; Shapiro 1988; Spears 1985; Stone 1981).

Although all those reasons for mainstream lack of interest in work on queer language are possible and even likely, in this review I pursue a different line of thought: namely, that research on gay and lesbian language has had little impact because it is plagued by serious conceptual difficulties. One problem to which I return repeatedly is the belief in much work that gay and lesbian language is somehow grounded in gay and lesbian identities and instantiated in the speech of people who self-identify as gay and lesbian. This assumption confuses symbolic and empirical categories, it reduces sexuality to sexual identity, and it steers research away from examining the ways in which the characteristics seen as queer are linguistic resources available to everybody to use, regardless of their sexual orientation. In addition, a marked feature of much of the literature is its apparent

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unfamiliarity with well-established linguistic disciplines and methods of analysis, such as Conversation Analysis, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. That the *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* could refer to sociolinguistics, in 1990, as "an emerging discipline" (Dynes 1990:676) is indicative of the lag that exists in much of the literature between linguistic and cultural theory and the work that is done on queer language.

I structure this text as a critical review, with an equal emphasis on both those words. I also structure it as an argument. This essay makes a strong claim, namely that the object under focus here does not, in fact, exist. There is no such thing as gay or lesbian language. Language, of course, is used by individuals who self-identify as gay and lesbian, and I review a number of dimensions of this language use, including vocabulary and the use by males of grammatically and semantically feminine forms to refer to other males. However, to say that some self-identified gay men and lesbians may sometimes use language in certain ways in certain contexts is not the same thing as saying that there is a gay or lesbian language. My argument is that the lasting contribution of research on gay and lesbian language is that it has alerted us to a relationship between language and sexuality, and it has prepared the ground for what could be an extremely productive exploration of language and desire. By having a clear sense of the limitations of the research on gay and lesbian language, and by pursuing some of its leads and building on some of its insights, future scholarship should be able to move away from the search for the linguistic correlates of contemporary identity categories and turn its attention to the ways in which language is bound up with and conveys desire.

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THE LAVENDER LEXICON

In 1995, the anthropologist and linguist William Leap edited a book that he called *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon*. This title was chosen, Leap explains in his introductory chapter, because "there is more to lesbian and gay communication than coded words with special meanings, and more to lesbian and gay linguistic research than the compilation of dictionaries or the tracing of single-word etymologies" (Leap 1995a:xvii–xviii). In expressing his desire to move "beyond" this kind of work, Leap succinctly summarized the overwhelming bulk of research that had been conducted on queer language since the 1940s.

Until the 1980s, research on gay and lesbian language was pretty much synonymous with lists of and debates about the in-group terms used by male homosexuals. The reasons behind the gathering of these lists are diverse. In some cases the motivation seems to have been part of a civilizing crusade: "I believe that for the perfectly civilized person, obscenity would not exist," declared Read (1977 [1935]:16), in the introduction to his study of men's room graffiti. [Ashley's (1979, 1980, 1982, 1987) book-length series of articles are more recent examples.] In others, there may have been a desire to crack a mysterious code—as late as 1949, respected academics like the Chicago sociologist E.W. Burgess could assert that

the urban "homosexual world has its own language, incomprehensible to outsiders" (Burgess 1949:234). For a long time, there was also a philological interest in documenting the "lingo" of "subcultural" or "underworld" groups, like hobos, prostitutes, and homosexuals [see the dictionaries listed in Legman (1941:1156) and Stanley (1974:Note 1)]. Finally, more sociologically oriented scholars have examined gay argot in order to be able to say something about "the sociocultural qualities of the group" that uses the words (Sonenschein 1969:281).

Perhaps the earliest documentation in English of words that must have been used by at least some homosexual men was compiled by Allen Walker Read, a scholar who later became a professor of English at Columbia University. In the summer of 1928, Read [1977 (1935)] embarked on an "extensive sight-seeing trip" throughout the Western United States and Canada, during which he took detailed notes on the writing that appeared in public rest-room walls. Read's interest in this "folk epigraphy" was scientific: "I can only plead," he pleaded, "that the reader believe my sincerity when I say that I present this study solely as an honourable attempt to throw light on a field of linguistics where light has long been needed" (p. 29). Worried that his scientific study of men's room graffiti might fall into the hands of "people to whom it would be nothing more than pornography" (p. 28), Read printed the study privately in Paris in a limited edition of 75 copies and had the cover embossed with an austere warning: "Circulation restricted to students of linguistics, folk-lore, abnormal psychology, and allied branches of social science." Read has nothing to say about homosexual language in his book, but many of his entries (such as "When will you meet me and suck my prick. I suck them every day," or "I suck cocks for fun") have clear homosexual themes. As Butters (1989:2) points out, Read's work "sheds light on a number of linguistic issues; for example: the absence of the word *gay* from any of Read's collected graffiti tends to confirm the general belief among etymologists that the term did not exist in its popular meaning of "homosexual" before the 1950s."[2]

The first published English-language lexicon of "the language of homosexuality" was compiled by the folklorist and student of literary erotica Gershon Legman. Legman's (1941) glossary appears as the final appendix in the first edition of a two-volume medical study of homosexuality [Henry (1941)—it was removed from later editions]. The list contains 329 items, 139 of which are identified as exclusively homosexual in use. As Doyle (1982:75) notes in his discussion of this text, some of the words on Legman's list (such as "drag," "straight," and "basket") have not only survived, but have passed into more general use. Others, such as the delightful "church-mouse" ["a homosexual who frequents churches and cathedrals in order to *grope* or *cruise* the young men there" (Legman 1941, emphasis in original), or the curious "white-liver" ("a male or female homosexual who is completely indifferent to the opposite sex"), may well be extinct.

[2]Butters's remark seems refuted by Cory's (1951) assertion that "gay is used throughout the United States and Canada [to mean homosexual]", and "by the nineteen-thirties [gay] was the most common word in use among homosexuals themselves" (pp. 110, 107). Chauncey's (1994:19) research on the origins and spread of the word "gay" supports Cory's claims.

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Although Legman gives careful definitions of the words he lists, he had little to say about "the language of homosexuality," except to note that male homosexuals frequently "substitut[e] feminine pronouns and titles for properly masculine ones" (1941:1155), and that lesbians do not have an extensive in-group vocabulary.[3] The brevity of Legman's (1941) discussion means that the first real analysis of homosexual language appears not to have occurred until 1951, when Donald Cory [a pseudonym of Edward Sagarin (Hayes 1978:203)] included a 10-page chapter on language in his book (Cory 1951:103–13). Cory's main argument about what he called "homosexual 'cantargot'" was that it had been created because homosexuals had "a burning need" (p. 106) for words that did not denote them pejoratively (for more recent instances of this viewpoint, see Karlen 1971:517–18, Zeve 1993:35). Hence, his discussion focused on words that homosexuals invented to call one another, particularly the word "gay". Cory believed that words like "gay" were positive, in that they transcended social stereotypes, and in doing so, they allowed in-group conversation to be "free and unhampered" (1951:113). Ultimately, however, homosexual slang was an attenuated slang; one that had "failed to develop in a natural way" (p. 103) because it could only be used in secretive in-group communication, due to societal taboos on discussing homosexuality at all.

After Cory's text, little was published in English until the 1960s, when Cory & LeRoy (1963) included an 89-word lexicon as an appendix to their book, and when several other word lists were printed extremely obscurely.[4] The 1960s also saw the publication of what appears to be the first lexicon of words used by lesbians: Giallombardo's (1966:204–13) 298-word glossary of terms, many of them referring to lesbian sexuality and relationships, used by inmates in a women's

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[3]Legman (1941:1156) offers two explanations for this: the first having to do with "[t]he tradition of gentlemanly restraint among lesbians [that] stifles the flamboyance and conversational cynicism in sexual matters that slang coinage requires"; the second being that "[l]esbian attachments are sufficiently feminine to be more often emotional than simply sexual"—hence, an extensive sexual vocabulary would be superfluous. Penelope & Wolfe (1979:11) suggest other reasons for the absence of an elaborate lesbian in-group vocabulary. They argue that such an absence is predictable, given that, in their opinion, the vocabulary of male homosexuals (and of males in general) is misogynist. "How would a group of women gain a satisfactorily expressive terminology if the only available terms were derogatory toward women?" they ask. In addition, they note that lesbians "have been socially and historically invisible...and isolated from each other as a consequence, and have never had a cohesive community in which a Lesbian aesthetic could have developed" (1979:12).

[4]A mimeographed pamphlet, entitled "The Gay Girl's Guide to the U.S. and Western World," described as consisting of "campy definitions of coterie terms from the *male* homosexual world of the post-World War II period; includes French, German and Russian terms" (Dynes 1985:156, emphasis in original) has appeared in several editions and seems to have been published as early as 1949 (Hayes 1978:203). The names of the three authors of the text are pseudonyms, and no publisher is given. I have been unable to locate it. I have also been unable to locate two of the lists mentioned by Sonenschein (1969), Hayes (1978), and Dynes (1985); namely Guild (1965) and Strait (1964).

prison. Furthermore, it was not until the 1960s that the study of homosexual slang began to be conducted by researchers who were not philologists or amateur social scientists, like Cory. Giallombardo, for example, was a trained sociologist. And anticipating *Families We Choose* (Weston 1991) by more than 20 years, she devoted an entire chapter to how an elaborate system of named kin relationships organized social and sexual relationships between the female prisoners she studied. Another early analysis of the social functions of gay slang was anthropologist Sonenschein's (1969) article. Sonenschein argued that gay slang is not primarily about isolation or secrecy, as previous writers had suggested (e.g. Cory 1951; also recall Burgess's assertion that the language of homosexuals was "incomprehensible to outsiders"). Instead, homosexual slang serves communicative functions, the most important of which is to "reinforce group cohesiveness and reflect common interests, problems, and needs of the population" (Sonenschein 1969:289).

In light of later work that came to make assumptions about the existence of a gay or lesbian speech community and stress the "authenticity" of lesbian and gay speech (Leap 1996, Moonwomon 1995), it is interesting to note that early claims like Sonenschein's about the supposed group cohesiveness of the homosexual subculture were being challenged even as they were being made. For example, Farrell (1972) analyzed a questionnaire completed by 184 respondents in "a large midwestern city" and provided a list of 233 vocabulary items that he asserts "reflect...the preoccupations of the homosexual" (p. 98). This idea of "the homosexual" was harshly attacked by Conrad & More (1976), who argued that if Kinsey's reckoning that 10% of the American population is gay was correct, there must be enormous variation between homosexuals, and there can be no such thing as "the homosexual" or a single homosexual subculture. To refute Farrell's conclusions, they administered a questionnaire consisting of 15 words from Farrell's list to two groups of students—one gay (recruited through the campus' Gay Student Union), and the other self-defined as straight. The students were asked to define all the words they could. Conrad & More concluded that not only did all the homosexual students not know the entire vocabulary (knowledge seemed to increase with age), there was also no statistically significant difference between the gay and straight students' understanding of the terms. In other words, there is no basis, in the opinion of Conrad & More (1976), to assume that homosexuals constitute a "language defined sub-culture" (p. 25). This point was later stated in even starker terms by Penelope & Wolfe (1979), who begin a paper on gay and lesbian language with the assertion that "[a]ny discussion involving the use of such phrases as 'gay community,' 'gay slang,' or 'gayspeak' is bound to be misleading, because two of its implications are false: first, that there is a homogenous community composed of Lesbians and gay males, that shares a common culture or system of values goals, perceptions, and experience; and second, that this gay community shares a common language" (p. 1).

Penelope & Wolfe base this outright rejection of the notions of gay community or gay language partly on an earlier study that examined gay slang (Stanley

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1970).[5] In that study, Penelope distributed a questionnaire through homosexual networks, in which respondents were asked to define 26 terms and suggest two of their own. On the basis of 67 completed questionnaires, Penelope argued that homosexual slang was not known by all homosexuals—there was, in other words, no homogenous homosexual subculture that shared a common language. Knowledge of homosexual slang varied according to gender and according to whether the respondent lived in an urban center or a rural town. She proposed that homosexual slang should be thought of as consisting of a core vocabulary, known by both men and women over a large geographical distance (Penelope's discussion concerned only the United States), and a fringe vocabulary, known mostly by gay men in large urban centers. Penelope argued that the core vocabulary, consisting of items such as "butch," "dyke," "one-night stand," and "Mary!," is known to many heterosexuals, thereby making it "not so effective as a sign of group solidarity as the slang of other subcultures" (Stanley 1970:50). It is the fringe vocabulary which is "the most interesting from a linguistic point of view" (p. 53), partly because it is generally unknown to heterosexuals and hence qualifies as a true marker of group membership, and also because many terms in the fringe vocabulary arise from particular syntactic patterns [Penelope lists six: compounds (size queen, meat rack), rhyme compounds (kiki, fag hag), exclamations (For days!), puns (Give him the clap), blends (bluff—a Texas lesbian blend of "butch" and "fluff" to signify "an individual who plays either the aggressive or the passive role"), and truncations (bi, homo, hetero)].

While discussions like these about the relationship between gay slang and "the homosexual subculture" were being conducted in scholarly journals, the magnificent, still unsurpassed Mother of all gay glossaries, *The Queen's Vernacular* appeared, first published in 1972 by a small press in San Francisco (Rodgers n.d.). Making all previous attempts to document gay slang look like shopping lists scribbled on the back of a paper bag, Rodgers's magnum opus contains over 12,000 entries. And not only is it lavishly illustrated with enough venomous quips and arch *mots* to last any amply betongued queen at least a weekend ["My dear, your hair looks as if you've dyed" (p. 207); "He was big enough to make a bead on my rosary of life" (p. 173); "Stop pittypooing around and tell me what the bitch said" (p. 149)]; with entries ranging from *anekay* (Hawaiian-English gay slang for "heterosexual man") to *Zelda* (Cape Town queenspeak for "pure-blooded Zulu"), *The Queen's Vernacular* also carefully documents the extraordinary range and variation of homosexual slang that existed throughout the English-speaking world. Although Dynes (1985:156) is correct in noting

[5]During the course of her long career, the lesbian feminist linguist and writer Julia Penelope has published articles under the surnames Stanley, Penelope Stanley, and Penelope. In the references for this review, those articles are listed alphabetically under the names that appeared on the original publications. In the text, I consistently refer to the author as Penelope, since that is the name under which she has been publishing for many years.

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that many of Rodgers's entries "are probably mere nonce expressions, never really in circulation" (see also Murray 1980a:208)[6], his conclusion that *The Queen's Vernacular* is therefore "unreliable for scholarly purposes" is simply not true.

One of the many valuable contributions of Rodgers's volume is his pithy two-page introductory note, in which he trenchantly sums up debates about queer language that remain current today. On the one hand, Rodgers extols the language he documents as a creative strategy of survival and defense. Gay slang is "the street poetry of queens," he says. It "was invented, coined, dished and shrieked by the gay stereotypes. The flaming faggot, men who look like women, flagrant wrist-benders, the women who don't shave their legs, all those who find it difficult to be accepted for what they feel they are even within the pariah gay subculture." [Note the degree to which Rodgers specifies what he means by "queens," even if the inclusion in this list of "the women who don't shave their legs" is fairly incongruous. This precision becomes rarer in later work.] "And they stereotype others because they themselves have been labeled offensively.... They jeer because they have been mocked; they retaliate with a barrage of their own words which ridicule women, male virility, the sanctity of marriage, everything in life from which they are divorced" (Rodgers n.d.). Rodgers maintains that these words "enrich...our language immensely," they promote group cohesion, and they constitute a form of "social protest."

At the same time, however, Rodgers observes that "[s]lang flourishes in the ghetto" and that "[t]hose who struggle to leave the ghetto shake off its language first and then decry its message." In a passage that was to become much quoted in later writing about gay slang, Rodgers comments that "[m]any gay militants are avidly opposed to this contrived lingo with which the oppressed faggot makes himself understood, and then only to a 'sister.' They consider the jargon yet another link in the chain which holds the homosexual enslaved" (Rodgers n.d.).

In these two short pages, Rodgers defines the dilemma that sex and gender rights activists, and queers themselves, have still not resolved: Is gay slang good, or is it bad? Should it be embraced and celebrated, or is it indeed "yet another link in the chain which holds the homosexual enslaved," one which should be abolished and forgotten as soon as possible?

By the time Rodgers's lexicon appeared, the gay liberation movement was under way, and the political implications of gayspeak could no longer be overlooked. So although some researchers were still content with banal observations like "the major function of homosexual argot seems to be that of ordering and classifying experience within the homosexual community" (Farrell 1972), others began to highlight the ways in which gay slang was politically problematic. In a number of influential publications, Julia Penelope argued strongly that gay slang is "sexist,

[6]My guess is that this is true of many gay slang lexicons, in English and in other languages. For example, a large number of the words and expressions contained in two recently published Brazilian Portuguese transgender and gay glossaries (ASTRAL 1996, Junior 1996) are unknown to many of the transgendered and gay readers I queried.

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classist, and racist" (Stanley 1974:386; Penelope & Wolf 1979). Although she acknowledges that gay slang has "functioned as a bond among gays, signalling one's identification as a member of the gay community" (Stanley 1974:385), she laments that "[t]oo much of the lexicon of gay slang is given over to a preoccupation with sexual objectification and social stratification, both economic and racial"—characteristics that she identifies as "typical of relationships in the larger, heterosexual society" (p. 385). In a later paper, Penelope & Wolfe (1979) use examples from *The Queen's Vernacular* to illustrate their argument that "what is usually regarded as "gay slang" consists of quite ordinary (and derogatory) terms for women.... [G]ay males use these terms among themselves for the same reasons straight males coined them, as a way of verbally trivializing and abusing women" (Penelope & Wolfe 1979:10).

With this criticism, Penelope & Wolfe drew attention to the one particularly prominent feature of gayspeak that has continued to gall many, namely, the habitual use by some gay men of female names, pronouns, and address forms to greet and refer to males. This "substitution of feminine pronouns and titles for properly masculine ones" was noted in Legman's (1941:1155) original glossary of homosexual language, and it is still being debated (Cox & Fay 1994:117, Graf & Lippa 1995, Leap 1996:8, Murray 1996:748–49, Pastre 1997). But it was not really analyzed until the 1970s. Aside from Penelope & Wolfe (1979), one of the first papers to attempt such an analysis was Rudes & Healy (1979). Rudes & Healy assert that the use of grammatically and semantically feminine forms to refer to or address males is not a characteristic of the speech of every homosexual male but is restricted to the language of "acculturated Gay males; i.e. males who have 'come-out' in the sense that they spend a significant portion of their time interacting socially with other individuals who are more or less open about their sexual orientation to other members of the Gay community, in local[e]s which are for the most part exclusively gay, e.g., bars, baths, social organizations" (1979:49).

In their discussion of examples gathered from conversations among gay men in Buffalo, New York, the authors argue that although "she" can be used to foreground the positive quality of physical beauty (as in "Oh, she's so cute—sexy too"), the overwhelming function of "she" is to express a negative view toward the referent, "simply by equating him with the concept of femaleness in general" (Rudes & Healy 1979:51). In other words, the very use of the feminine pronoun is derogatory, indexically linking the referent to "lack of naturalness, lack of control, and nastiness" (Rudes & Healy 1979:51). Even in its single positive guise (cuteness), "she" implies that the referent, although attractive, still fails to attain the desired status of "ruggedness" that, according to Rudes & Healy, is the ideal physical type among the men whose linguistic behavior they observed.

Like Penelope & Wolfe (1979) and many other scholars who have commented on the use of feminine terms in gay men's speech (Graf & Lippa 1995, Leap 1996:8, White 1980), Rudes & Healy conclude that this linguistic usage is about women and, therefore, is misogynist. And compelled to come up with an explanation of why gay men, who they think ought to know better, still cling to and circulate

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outdated stereotypes, the authors turn to the idea of the subconscious, arguing that "the concepts of maleness and femaleness manifested by the usage of 'he' and 'she' are acquired at an early age and are solidified and removed from consciousness long before the effects of the Gay Liberation or Women's Liberation Movements are felt" (1979:54). They do not entertain the idea that the uses of "she" they analyze might be a parodic strategy of distancing speakers from stereotypes, or that calling males "she" might be a commentary, not on women but on gender—precisely its lack of naturalness, lack of control, and nastiness. This is an observation that in many ways became enabled by Butler's (1990) analysis of drag. However, it already existed in an embryonic form in work by Blachford (1981:196), Booth (1983:18,59), L Crew (see Hayes 1981a:40), Hayes (1981b:49–50), C Lonc (see Bergman 1993a:7), Millet (1971:343), Murray (1979, 1980a), and Newton (1979). For example, sounding very much like Butler *avant la lettre*, Hayes remarked in 1981 that "[w]hat would appear to be a trivialization of the world, because social Gayspeak is often frivolous, comic, precious, or fleeting, amounts to a trivialization through parody of the dominant culture" (Hayes 1981b:49).

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CAMP

Parodic trivialization, and the use of female names and feminine forms to refer to males, is one of the hallmarks of camp. Camp is the one dimension of queer linguistic behavior that has been subject to wider theorizing, largely due to Sontag's perpetually contested classic 1964 essay, "Notes on 'Camp'." The word itself, which may derive from the French *se camper* ("show off," "engage in exaggerated behavior") was used in English at the turn of the century to mean "actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis" and "pleasantly ostentatious or affected" (for a variety of etymologies, see Booth 1983:30–41, Myer 1994b, Rodgers 1972:40). According to Robertson (1996:3), from the 1920s, "camp" was used in theatrical argot to connote homosexual men or lesbians, and, from about 1945, the associations between camp and homosexuality entered into more general use.

The first English-language text to attempt to dissect camp was a novel [Isherwood 1973 (1954)] in which camp is divided into two categories: Low and High. In the novel, a gay doctor who clarifies these things to the protagonist explains that Low camp is "a swishy little boy with peroxided hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feathered boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich." High camp, on the other hand, is "the whole emotional basis of the Ballet, for example, and of course Baroque art.... [T]rue high camp always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance" (Isherwood 1972:125).

Although Isherwood's distinction between Low and High camp was rejected as a valid division by most subsequent writers, there is nevertheless a tendency in most work to focus either on what Isherwood called High camp, and examine it in

relation to culture and taste in a general way [e.g. Booth 1983, Roen 1994, Ross 1993, Sontag 1966 (1964), or on his Low camp, and use it to develop arguments that specifically pertain to gender (e.g. Butler 1990, Newton 1979, Meyer 1994a, Roberston 1996).

Three major bones of contention structure all writing on camp. The first is how to define it. A typical ploy is to begin by explaining that camp cannot be defined, but then going on to define it anyway. This tone was set by Isherwood (1972), who had his gay doctor lament that camp is "terribly hard to define. You have to meditate on it and feel it intuitively, like Lao-tze's *Tao*" (p. 126). Sontag cemented this dreamy circumvention into a tradition when she penned her aperçu that "to talk about camp is to betray it" (1966:275), and when she voiced her much-quoted anxiety that "[i]t's embarrassing to be solemn and treatise-like about Camp. One runs the risk of having, oneself, produced a very inferior piece of Camp" (1966:277).

The second battle fought over camp is one over politics. Sontag set the agenda here by characterizing camp as being a "sensibility" one that "converts the serious into the frivolous" (1966:276). In her view, camp is about style rather than content; it is, in other words, apolitical ["It goes without saying that Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical" (1966:277)]. Few writers have followed Sontag in seeing camp in this manner (but see Booth 1983:57,180–83; Russo 1979). Feminists who condemn camp do so precisely because they see the use of female pronouns and address forms used to signify males as political—politically retrograde (Jeffreys 1993, Morgan 1976, Penelope & Wolfe 1979). Writers more sympathetic to camp see it as a kind of proto-politics that served a social purpose before Stonewall, but that will (and, some think, should) die as homosexuality becomes more accepted and gay males become more sensitized to the misogynist, racist, and classist resonances of their in-group language [this is the "yet another link in the chain which holds the homosexual enslaved" argument mentioned by Rodgers (1972; see also Cory 1951:113, Harris 1997, White 1980, Hayes 1981a)]. Still others have identified camp and other dimensions of what Newton (1979:103) labeled "the drag system" as an important site of politics and political intervention. Butler is crucial here, and her insistence that drag is not derivative, but fundamentally ambivalent and potentially deconstructive (Butler 1990:136–41, 1993:125–28), is relevant also for an understanding of the political potential of the language of camp. Myer (1994a) has also called attention to the ways in which camp "has become an activist strategy for organizations such as ACT UP and Queer Nation" (p. 1; see also Bergman 1993b, Román 1993).

The third controversy over camp is in many ways the most pertinent for thinking about the theoretical issues involved in trying to delineate an object such as gay or lesbian language. For the third battle still being fought by everyone who writes about camp is the struggle over possession. To whom does camp belong? Whose is it? Sontag enraged subsequent generations of queer writers when she declared that camp has no enduring ties to homosexuals or homosexuality.

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Although she acknowledges that there is a particular "affinity and overlap" (1966: 290) between camp taste and homosexual taste, she also comments that "if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented Camp, someone else would" (1964:291). Ross (1993) is one of the many authors who criticizes Sontag for this kind of interpretive move. He observes that it is important for Sontag that no one really "own" camp, because that way, the role of the cultural critic as the arbiter of taste (that is, Sontag's own role) is protected and enhanced: We don't need homosexuals to define or analyze camp for us, what we need are cultural critics like Sontag. However, Ross ultimately agrees with Sontag, concluding that "it would be wrong to see camp as the privileged expression of any...group..., even the pre-Stonewall, gay male culture for which the most legitimate claim can be made" (1993:56).

A number of other writers agree with Sontag and Ross that camp is detachable from homosexual men (Darsey 1981:62, Dollimore 1991:312, Harvey 1998:298, Roen 1994:9, Russo 1979:206). Booth (1983) and Robertson (1996) go farthest here and appear unwilling to grant even Sontag's concession that homosexuals invented camp ("camp's origins are far from being so humble," camps Booth). Most gay and lesbian scholars, however, insist on maintaining a link between camp and homosexuality. Long ago, Newton (1979) defined camp as "a *relationship between* things, people, and activities or qualities, and homosexuality (p. 105, emphasis in original). In this sense, "camp taste...is synonymous with homosexual taste." Echoing Newton, Babuscio (1994) saw camp as "those elements in a person, situation or activity that express, or are created by, a gay sensibility" (p. 20). Myer (1994a) accuses Sontag of "detaching [camp's] signifying codes from their queer signifieds" (p. 5) and insists that camp is solely a queer discourse: "There are not different kinds of Camp. There is only one. And it is queer" (Myer 1994a:5). Most recently, Medhurst (1997:290–91) has declared that

> Camp is not an infinitely stretchable piece of elastic.... In some ways it's flattering that lesbians, heterosexuals, everybody else, are so envious of this gay male cultural strategy that they all want to muscle in on it. It looks like fun, and yes, it can be a screaming great laugh. (It can also be intensely serious, though its straightened varieties usually miss this aspect, and at its best it fuses the two). But it can't be transplanted, because it isn't just any way of savouring the ironies of gender. It is the way gay men have tried to rationalize, reconcile, ridicule and...wreck their own specific relationships to masculinity and femininity. It's ours, all ours, just ours, and the time has come to bring it back home.

The slippages in Medhurst's declaration of ownership [camp is inherently gay, but it has "straightened varieties"; it is (a never exactly specified) "ours, all ours and just ours," but it has strayed away and needs to be brought back home] are symptomatic of tensions that underlie most contemporary research on queer language. Since the 1980s, work on gay and lesbian language has been conducted in the spirit of William Leap's call to move "beyond the lavender lexicon," and it

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has investigated intonational, interactional, and discursive patterns that might be said to characterize queer language. So rather than simply looking at vocabulary, researchers have measured frequencies, examined turn taking, and analyzed the coconstruction of topics and narratives. They have also expanded the scope of enquiry, so that even sign language (Kleinfeld & Warner 1997, Neumann 1997, Rudner & Butowsky 1981), nonverbal codes such as the famous "hanky code" used by American gay men in the 1970s (Levine 1998:66, Patton 1990:46–49), the British gay argot "Polari" (Cox & Fay 1994, Lucas 1997), and languages other than English, such as Brazilian Portuguese (Dynes 1995, Kulick 1998:210–21), Burmese (van Driem 1996), Finnish (Nevis 1984/1985), French (Conner 1997, Harvey 1998, Pastre 1997), Greek (Demakopoulos 1978, 1982), Hausa (Gaudio 1997, 1998), Hindi (Hall 1997, Hall & O'Donovan 1996), Japanese (Long 1996, Lunsing 1995, Ogawa & Smith 1997, Valentine 1997), Latin American Spanish (Murray 1980b, Murray & Arboleda 1995, Murray & Dynes 1995), Philippines languages (Hart & Hart 1990, Johnson 1997, Manalansan 1995), and Yiddish (Sweet 1997) have been examined.[7] There is also a substantial body of literature on gay and lesbian "coming out" narratives (e.g. Bacon 1998, Liang 1997, Rust 1993, Vargo 1998, Wood 1997).

All this research has greatly expanded our knowledge about how homosexual relations and identities are labeled, how some "out" gays and lesbians talk about themselves and others, and how grammatical and semantic gender can be creatively utilized by speakers to refer to self and other. However, it has failed to come up with any structural, morphological, or phonological features that are unique to gay men or lesbians. Certain words, phrasings, topics, and morphological/syntactic constructions (such as noun plus "-ette" or noun plus "queen" constructions) may well be more common in the speech of some gay men and lesbians than they are in the talk of speakers who are not gay or lesbian. But the problem is that not all people who engage in same-sex sexual practices, or who self-identify as gay or lesbian, use those words, or even know them. And people who do not engage in same-sex sexual practices, or self-identify as gay or lesbian (such as the immortal fag hag), may be masters of the code. For these reasons, it is important not to confuse symbolic resources that anyone can appropriate to invoke stereotypical images of homosexuality with the actual language practices, much less the identities, of individual gays and lesbians. There is a difference (for a similar view on "women's language," see Gal 1995, Cameron 1998:953). Unfortunately, much of the work on gay and lesbian language during (and since) the 1980s elided that difference and proceeded as though there were such a thing as a particular linguistic variety somehow grounded in and unique to gay and lesbian sexuality.

[7]There are also a large number of lexicons in various languages. These vary widely in academic ambition and scope, ranging from the light and humorous (e.g. Junior 1996) to the solid (e.g. Castelo 1979). Dynes (1985:154–57, 1987:359–62) provides a helpful, annotated bibliography of non–English-language glossaries.

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RESEARCH SINCE THE 1980s

As noted above, it was in the 1960s that researchers first began viewing the vocabulary of gay men as more than an exotic lingo or a mysterious argot. Contrast the title of Legman's 1941 paper, "The Language of Homosexuality,"—which suggests that the condition or state of homosexuality comes complete, like a package, with a certain vocabulary—with Sonenschein's 1969 title, "The Homosexual's Language," in which some measure of agency is implied, even if differences between homosexuals are eclipsed by the definite article (which is especially odd, since one of Sonenschein's points is that different groups of homosexuals use slang differently). Although the work done in the 1960s and 1970s still focused mostly on vocabulary, at least the step had been taken toward seeing that vocabulary as embedded in a matrix of affective, social, and political relations and therefore constituting a linguistic code in the more usual sense of the word. A question that later pervades the literature is what to call this code. A number of names have been proposed: Gayspeak (Hayes 1981b, Cox & Fay 1994), lgb talk [for "lesbian/bisexual/gay" (Zwicky 1997)], Gay male language, gay and lesbian language, gay male speech (Barrett 1997:185,192,194), lesbian speech (Moonwomon-Baird 1997:203), Gay speech (Zeve 1993), lesbian language (Queen 1997:233), lavender language (Leck 1995:327, Leap 1995), gay English (Goodwin 1991), Gay English (Leap 1996, 1997), queerspeak (Livia & Hall 1997a), and my personal favorite—Faglish (Rodgers 1972:94).

It was not until 1981 that the first scholarly volume entirely devoted to this linguistic code appeared, *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication* (Chesebro 1981a). The editor and the majority of contributors worked in "speech communication"—an interdisciplinary field that sees "speech" primarily in terms of "rhetoric," rather than "conversation," and that understands "communication" in the broadest possible sense. This means that most of the contributions, like the contributions to a later volume also edited by a speech communication scholar (Ringer 1994), do not concern how gays or lesbians talk so much as they examine rhetorical dimensions of gay and anti-gay political movements, representations of homosexuality in film, television, and literature, educational issues concerning homosexuality, and how sex and gender stereotypes are invoked to justify hate crimes against homosexuals.

Despite an emphasis on rhetoric, and representations of homosexuality, a few chapters in Chesebro (1981a) did attempt to make generalizations about the actual speech practices of gay men and lesbians. For example, regarding patterns of verbal communication in a gay disco, Chesebro & Klenk (1981) assert that "[c]onversations in gay discos are...likely to deal in what most would consider emotional topics (feelings, moods, sentiments, personal experiences)" (p. 99), but the empirical basis of such assertions is never made clear. Painter (1981) discussed lesbian communication, and although her main argument was that "lesbians do not possess a repertory of verbal and nonverbal cues they can explicate or knowingly use to interpret lesbianism" (p. 73), she did suggest that certain verbal conventions,

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such as the dropping of hints or the use of nonspecific gender reference, allow lesbians to check their "intuitive sense" of another's lesbianism.

The most ambitious papers in Chesebro (1981a) are by Hayes (1981a,b). In them, he suggested that "Gayspeak" [his name for "the language used by gay men" (1981b:45)] has three specific functions or dimensions: (*a*) It is a secret code developed for protection against exposure (characterized linguistically by use of innuendo and by the avoidance or switching of specific gender reference when discussing one's partner or friends); (*b*) it is a code that enables the user to express a broad range of roles within the gay subculture [characterized by camp and an extensive vocabulary defining sexual roles and behaviors—this dimension of Gayspeak, notes Hayes, is the one best known to the general public (1981b:50)]; and (*c*) it is a resource that can be used by radical-activists as a means of politicizing social life, for example, when they "make over" pejorative terms like "fag" or "dyke," and "turn them back" as symbols of defiance (1981b:53).

In essence, Hayes' claim was that Gayspeak was characterized by the use of argot, innuendo, categorizations, strategic evasions (such as omitting or changing gendered pronouns), and, in the case of activist language, conscious revaluation of formerly derogatory terms. These observations seemed insightful, but in his response to Hayes' paper (in the same volume), Darsey (1981) pointed out that nothing on that list, in itself, was "in any way uniquely employed by gay persons" (p. 63). Darsey criticized Hayes for having "stumbled into larger areas of behavior [such as using language to equivocate about the nature of one's relationships, or to forge a political movement] with no compelling evidence that they are in any way uniquely employed by gay persons" (1981:63). Hayes simply assumed that because many gay men used language in the ways he described, the features he identified as typical of Gayspeak were characteristic of how gay men talk—even though, as Darsey notes, many of those features were "not exclusively a product of the gay subculture, nor universal within that subculture" (p. 63).

Darsey condenses his main objection to Hayes' generalizations about Gayspeak into one tight sentence: "[A] study that uses gays as a source of data does not necessarily say much about gays" (1981:59). This is a kind of axiom or logical proposition that expressed in different language means the following: The fact that gays do X does not make X gay.

Once this insight—we can call it "Darsey's theorem"—is fully appreciated, we realize that any discussion that wants to make claims about gay or lesbian language must proceed through three steps. First, it must document that gays and lesbians use language in empirically delineable ways. Next, it must establish that those ways of using language are unique to gays and lesbians. Finally, it must, at some point, define gay and lesbian. To whom exactly do these labels apply? Either this definitional decision can be taken before beginning an enquiry—so that we investigate the language practices of people who are known to self-define as gay or lesbian—or it can emerge from an investigation of language: In a constructionist vein, we can explore how certain linguistic practices performatively materialize speakers as gay or lesbian. In the first instance, sexual categories are assumed,

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not interrogated, and we are faced with the problem of circularity (and banality) to which Darsey alludes (gay speaker does X, therefore X is gay). We are also faced with the not-inconsiderable difficulty of offering some account of why and how a range of diverse sexual orientations ("gay," after all, is not just one thing or identity) should come to manifest itself in linguistically specific ways. In the second instance, we are confronted with the possibility that speakers who might not self-identify as gay or lesbian might nevertheless use language that indexes them in that manner, which raises the fundamental problem of determining in what sense language can then be said to be gay or lesbian.

Both before and after Chesebro (1981a) was published, research on gay and lesbian language has sidestepped the latter problem by overwhelmingly opting to examine only the language of individuals known by the investigators to self-identify as gay or lesbian, in the belief that if there is a queer language, then it will be found in there. The best that can be said about results of these investigations is that they have been, as Zwicky (1997:28) generously phrases it, "inconclusive."

Studies of intonation and pitch are a good example of this inconclusiveness. A widespread stereotype about gay men [but not, interestingly, about lesbians (Moonwomon-Baird 1997:204)], is that they "sound gay," i.e. their pitch and intonational patterns broadcast their homosexuality, whether they like it or not. A dependable wellspring of this caricature is popular culture, which seemingly never tires of the lisping fag, whose roller coaster intonation and high-pitched shrieks mark him as an object of comedy or contempt and allow everyone who interacts with him to come off sounding comfortingly gender appropriate. The stereotype of the campy poof also has some currency among gay scholars: Goodwin (1991:16), for example, asserts that "playing with pitch and stress [and] exaggeration of tonality...is basic to gay English" (see also Booth 1983:67).

A number of studies have attempted to determine whether this indeed is the case. Gaudio (1994) provides both an insightful critical review of the literature on intonation and sex stereotyping and a small experimental study of what it might mean to "sound gay." He recorded eight men (four gay, four nongay, all of them university students, all but one of them white) reading two passages: a nonfiction text about accounting, and an excerpt from Harvey Feirstein's play *Torch Song Trilogy*. He played 15-second excerpts from these readings to 13 listeners (10 women, 3 men, all undergraduate students). Listeners were told that the study concerned gay men's speech, and they were asked to rate the speakers on criteria such as gay/straight, reserved/emotional, masculine/effeminate, and ordinary/affected. Gaudio found that the listener ratings corresponded to the speakers' actual sexual orientation in all but one case (one gay speaker was rated as "somewhat straight" and "neutral"). Why? What were listeners hearing that allowed them to make their judgments?

To discover this, Gaudio tested his data for correlations between the speakers' sexual orientations and their pitch range (i.e. the range between the highest and the lowest sounds they made) and pitch variability (i.e. whether they consistently spoke in a high or low voice or fluctuated between the two). Gaudio

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found some indication that the gay speakers made use of a greater pitch range than straight speakers did, but this difference was not statistically significant and it only applied to readings of the nonfiction text. Likewise, there was also some indication that the four gay speakers varied in their pitch more than the straight speakers did, but this correlation, once again, only applied to the nonfiction text. What this means is that even though there were slight intonational differences between the gay and straight speakers when they read the text about accounting, there were none when the speakers read the dramatic text. The fact that the listeners correctly evaluated the speakers as straight or gay, even when they heard the dramatic text, remained mysterious and can only be accounted for by assuming that listeners' evaluations were based on criteria other than intonation alone.

Moonwomon-Baird [1997 (1985)] conducted a similar experiment to determine whether listeners could identify lesbians simply by hearing them speak. She played 30 seconds of recorded, naturally occurring speech by 6 heterosexual women and 6 lesbians to 21 undergraduates (no data are provided on the gender of these listeners). The listeners heard the taped segments and answered a questionnaire designed to elicit judgments about the speakers' social identities [age, class, educational level, region, sexual preference, and ethnicity (this last question consisted rather oddly of only two options: Jewish or non-Jewish)] and their voice characteristics (speed, pitch, loudness, and force).

Unlike Gaudio's study, in which listeners correctly identified the sexual orientations of the speakers with almost 100% accuracy, the listeners in Moonwomon-Baird's (1997) experiment were correct only "about half" of the time (exact statistics are not provided). This difference between her findings and Gaudio's might be because there simply were no correlations between intonation and sexuality in the female speakers' voices (Moonwomon-Baird did not analyze her speakers' voices for pitch range and variability in the way Gaudio did), or because listener evaluations of speakers as lesbian might depend on more than intonation. Moonwomon-Baird, however, elected to see the fact that lesbians were not recognized as such by the listeners in her study as symptomatic of a more general "unwillingness to acknowledge lesbian presence" (1997:209).

In his summary of Gaudio's and Moonwomon-Baird's papers, Jacobs (1996:52–53) remarks that "[t]hese two studies provide some tentative support that some lesbians and gay men in some circumstances do in fact 'sound gay.'" Jacobs's bland conclusion is about as far as one is likely to get in this field, as other studies also have shown (Avery & Liss 1996, Linville 1998, Lerman & Damsté 1969; see also Fellegy 1995).

A basic conceptual difficulty that is not resolved in studies like these is that even if listeners had correctly identified the gay and lesbian speakers with 100% accuracy, we would still not know exactly what it was that was being identified. Is it sexual orientation as such, and therefore applicable to all (most? some?) gays and lesbians, even those who are not "out"? Or is it a particular presentational style that is stereotypically indexical of homosexuality and that only certain gays and

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lesbians command, and that, furthermore, anyone wanting to convey "queerness" could employ? This conclusion would imply that the style identified by listeners as gay has little if anything to do with a speaker's actual sexual orientation, even if it sometimes happens to correspond with it.

Once again, however, this latter possibility is dodged by study designs that equate gay or lesbian language with the linguistic practices of individuals who are openly gay or lesbian. Gaudio informed his listeners that his study concerned gay language, and he specifically asked them to try to identify the gay speakers among the voices they heard. But what would have happened, one wonders, if Gaudio had conducted the same experiment, involving the same directions to listeners, only this time using the voices of speakers who all self-identified as straight? Might the directive to find the gays compel listeners to identify some of the "straight" voices as gay? And if this happened, what would it tell us about "gay language?"

Because studies investigating queer language expect to find that language only in the speech of queers, the question of queerness in language is usually a foregone conclusion, and anything said by speakers we know to be queer can be taken as evidence that their language is queer. At its most problematic, this can result in investigations like Moonwomon-Baird's, in which her listeners are criticized for refusing to acknowledge a "lesbian presence" that she is convinced ought to be apparent simply because she knows that some of her speakers are lesbian. Or it can result in unintentional non-sequiturs, as when Penelope & Wolfe (1979:15) argue that humor is an important element in lesbian relationships, enabling lesbians to identify one another and bond as lesbians. There is a problem with this argument, however, Penelope & Wolfe admit: "Our difficulty in approaching Lesbian humor is that few Lesbians appear to be aware of its existence" (1979:15; see also Penelope Stanley & Robbins 1978:299).

Another analytical move that frequently occurs in the literature is to invoke commonplace interactional features as evidence of queerness. For example, Morgan & Wood (1995) discuss a conversation that occurred between six lesbian friends. Their argument is that lesbians use language to "co-construct a unified temporary lesbian identity" (p. 238). In their framework, every topic spoken about by this group of women is definitionally either an "overt" or "covert lesbian topic" (p. 248). From this perspective, the conversational extract below is analyzed as follows:

1. Kathy: What else do you pack in lunches?
2. Mandy: (laughs)
3. Linda: Weeell...
4. Kathy: chips.
5. Mandy: bananas.
6. Linda: fruit.
7. Tonya: and a sandwich.

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> Linda extends her attempt to hold the floor and signals her intent to respond to Kathy's question in line 1...Kathy begins the image construction (chips) by contributing a single word. Mandy follows Kathy's lead with, "bananas," also contributing a single word. Linda then adds, "fruit" to the conversation image of the sack lunch, also indicating her sense of the rules of this co-authored sequence, i.e. only contribute one sack lunch word, and do it with rhythm. Finally, Tonya completes the image using an intonation and construction, "...and a..." which indicates the last item in a series, both of which signalled the end of the sack-lunch sequence and the completion of the sack lunch image.

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In other words, the speakers in this extract are coconstructing a conversation through conventional turn-taking moves and sequential tying techniques. Confronted only with this transcript, an analyst might be hard pressed to identify its specifically lesbian content. However, because Morgan & Wood know the participants to be lesbians, they interpret this conversation specifically as lesbian talk: Their conclusion is that Tonya's contribution in line 7 "supports to an even greater extent the way in which these lesbians worked with unrehearsed precision to support the fiction of a cohesive group." And their ultimate point is that "[c]onarration and conversational collusion function to bind us together in a temporary conversational community, allowing us to strengthen our identity as lesbians and promote the idea of a cohesive community" (Morgan & Wood 1995:248). Because the ones doing this conversational colluding are lesbians, the authors also see this kind of conversation as "challeng[ing] the hegemonic discourse" of heterosexuality (p. 237) (for other examples, see Moonwomon 1995, Painter 1980, Queen 1998).

Discussion of the tendency in post-1980s work on gay and lesbian language to proclaim commonplace interactional features to be characteristic of queer language leads us to the extensive work of Leap (1990, 1995a,b, 1996, 1998). Leap's publications on gay English constitute the most comprehensive body of research on queer language compiled by any single researcher, and Leap himself is a leading figure in the study of gay and lesbian language, having founded the annual Lavender Languages and Linguistics Conference at the American University in Washington D.C. Leap's work is extremely wide ranging. He has written on the expressive and inferential strategies for ascertaining whether others are gay (Leap 1996), the linguistic choices made by speakers when talking about AIDS (Leap 1990), the way in which gay graffiti on men's room walls transforms those places into "gay spaces" (Leap 1997), and, most recently, how gay men in Washington D.C. use narrative and a range of activities to create private spaces in ostensibly public domains (Leap 1998).

Despite occasional disclaimers that labels such as "Gay English" (Leap's own term) are actually misleading, and that the language of gay men in fact cannot be defined by lists of structural features (Leap 1996:159), Leap's research is concerned with an empirical delineation of the structure and functions of what he sees as a

"distinctive, gendered[8] approach...to oral, written and signed text making" (1996: xii). His arguments about the characteristic features of Gay English are very similar to those presented by Hayes (1981b). Like Hayes, Leap asserts that Gay English serves two main functions: one secretive, the other social (Leap has little to say about gay political rhetoric, which was Hayes's third category of analysis). He labels the secretive function "language of risk" and explains that this language consists of euphemism, code words, and innuendo that both signal a man's own gay sexuality and ascertain the sexuality of other men in settings in which a question like "Are you gay?" would be inappropriate and even dangerous. The social function of Gay English is labeled "cooperative discourse" in Leap's framework. Cooperative discourse is characterized by "carefully negotiated styles of turn taking, the use of descriptive imagery and metaphor, inference strategies, and a range of additional techniques ensuring listener—as well as speaker—involvement in each exchange" (Leap 1996:16).

As Murray (1996) points out in his review of Leap's 1996 monograph, no one familiar with discourse analysis or Conversation Analysis would be surprised by any of the features listed by Leap (1996) because euphemism and innuendo occur in all kinds of conversations—not just ones involving gay men. Furthermore, the features Leap identifies as specific to cooperative discourse are the mechanisms through which coherence and involvement in conversation are generally built [see also Johnsen & Kristoffersen (1997:75) and Ward (1998:694), who make a similar point about Leap's work]. In other words, and similarly to Morgan & Wood (1995), all Leap really demonstrates is that gay speakers of English employ the same kind of discursive and pragmatic strategies that other speakers of English use when they talk. The only thing "gay" about the language analyzed by Leap is the fact that it is employed by individuals who self-identify as (or who Leap believes to be) gay. Hence, a circular argument emerges. If we ask "What is Gay English," the answer is "English spoken by gay men." What makes it gay? The fact that gay men speak it. Why do gay men speak it? Because they are gay men. And so on, round and round.

This circular argument is compounded by Leap's repeated appeals throughout his work to what he calls "authenticity" in Gay English (Leap 1995a,b, 1996). Following Herdt & Boxer (1993:3), Leap defines authenticity as those features of a culture that are "optimal, valuable and life-cherishing" (1996:5). What he seems to mean by this is that he is interested in gay language as spoken by gay people, language that maintains "close connections to gay experience" and that constitutes "affirmation of gay presence and gay distinctiveness" (1996:8,9); see also Moonwomon (1995), Moonwomon-Baird (1997:203). In a homophobic society like the contemporary United States, there are certainly valid political reasons for foregrounding the "optimal, valuable and life-cherishing" dimensions of gay

[8]Leap uses the term "gender" in unconventional and idiosyncratic ways in his work, asserting, for example, that there are such things as "lesbian and gay genders" (1995:vii, 1996:xii). Murray (1996) discusses this problem in his review of Leap (1996).

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men's language. What is theoretically damaging about this agenda, however, is that it, first of all, forces Leap to assume the adjudicating role of someone who must somehow differentiate "authentic" gay speech from "inauthentic" gay speech. Second, his view that "authentic" Gay English is somehow the property of gay men blocks all inquiry into the ways in which the linguistic features that comprise it are resources that are available to anyone for any purpose, regardless of their sexuality. Leap feels that the importance of Gay English is diminished if it can be appropriated by just anybody (Leap 1996:4–5). But what language is not available to be appropriated by just anybody?

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PERFORMATIVELY QUEER

It is useful to read Leap's work on Gay English as a kind of culmination or epitome of the past two decades' research on gay and lesbian language. During that time, research on gay and lesbian language made the definitive move beyond the lavender lexicon. However, as research became more sophisticated and began to investigate a wider range of linguistic phenomena, it often did so with a weak theoretical grasp of relevant branches of linguistics. It is striking, for example, that although researchers like Hayes and Leap mention variety and discuss different functions of gayspeak, they do not turn to key sociolinguistic concepts such as "variation," "register," and "context" to analyze the language they describe.[9] Instead, it seems that the politically motivated desire to envisage gays and lesbians as a "community" along quasi-ethnic lines, with its own culture and language, led many scholars to conceptualize that culture and language in an unusually reified manner. Thus, research was often propelled along by the idea that there was a more or less common gay and lesbian language that must have its locus in gay and lesbian identities (Leap goes so far as to suggest that there may be such a thing as gay-specific grammatical competence [1996:4]). This was assumed even though studies as old as Legman's (1941) had emphasized the overlap between gay slang and the argot of other groups, and studies as early as Conrad & More (1976) and Stanley (1970) had shown that not all homosexuals were familiar with gay slang. However, because gay language was thought to arise from or adhere to gay identities, the only people whose language was analyzed were speakers who explicitly self-identified as, or were thought by the researcher to be, gay or lesbian. What this means is that we started out by "knowing" the identities whose very constitution ought to have been precisely the issue under investigation. It resulted in commonplace interactional features, such as successful turn taking or the coconstruction of topical coherence, being identified as characteristic of gay and lesbian language, because people we already know to be gay or lesbian use them in their speech, and this queerness was thought to be reflected in their language.

[9]To be sure, these concepts do occur, especially in Leap's work. But they are not systematically applied to or theorized through the linguistic data that are analyzed.

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The most recent work on gay and lesbian language has begun to criticize these earlier preoccupations and assumptions. With greater linguistic sophistication and versed in post-structural theories of language and identity, recent authors have challenged the idea of a homogeneous gay or lesbian speech community (in many cases, unfortunately, seemingly without awareness that such challenges have been issued before), and they have shifted the focus of research from "being" queer to performatively "becoming" queer, that is, materializing oneself as queer through particular ways of using language.

Barrett (1995, 1997) has published several important papers in which he argues against the idea of a gay or lesbian speech community. Barrett argues that the whole idea of a "speech community" is hoary and dated, building, as it does, on many problematic assumptions about shared norms and delineable boundaries. The concept is especially unhelpful when it comes to thinking about the language of gays and lesbians, because racial and ethnic diversity, being "in" or "out" of the closet, and overlap between, for example, middle class white gayspeak and the speech patterns of members of other groups (such as heterosexual women, or African Americans) make the idea of a homogenous and bounded gay, lesbian, or transgendered speech community untenable.

Instead, Barrett proposes that we might be better served by imagining a "homogenius speech community": a queer speech community in which "the very notion of community cannot be taken for granted" (1997:189), and where analytic focus is placed on the ways in which linguistic features of queer speech overlap with those of other groups. He suggests that the idea of a "linguistics of contact" (Pratt 1987) "offers the starting point for the formation of a queer linguistics" (Barrett 1997:192). Pratt's (1987) concept is essentially a Bakhtinan critique of structuralist presumptions of abstract, bounded systems and stable grammars (see, for example, Vološinov 1986). It highlights the way in which language operates across lines of social differentiation, indexing multiple identities and positions, and it encourages an exploration of the ways in which speakers appropriate, penetrate, and co-opt the linguistic resources of other groups.

In his own research, Barrett (1995) draws on Pratt's ideas to examine the speech of African-American drag queens who perform in Texas bars. He focuses on how these drag queens convey queerness not through a reliance on a clearly delineable set of linguistic features, such as high pitch or lexical choices. Instead, speakers index queerness by skillfully switching between a number of linguistic styles and forms that stereotypically tend to denote other identities, such as those of white women or African-American men. This means that queerness is not located in specific identities, or even in discrete linguistic codes, as much as it is located in the cooccurrence of linguistically incongruous and socially contradictory forms and registers in the same stretch of discourse, for example hypercorrect pronunciation while uttering obscenities. [For further detailed and insightful observations about the structural characteristics of what he calls "camp talk," see also Harvey (1998).]

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Queen (1997) has argued something similar in relation to lesbian language. She suggests that "one of the primary ways in which lesbians may index themselves (and are thus able to identify one another) is through the decidedly marked combination of a number of linguistic styles. In other words, it is not membership (assumed or imposed) in the abstract conception of the lesbian community that makes the language of lesbians unique but rather the fluid contact between a number of styles to which lesbians have access and that carry various 'conventionalized' meaning that can be exploited in uniquely 'lesbian' ways" (1997:239). Queen identifies four styles that lesbians use to construct lesbian language (1997:239–41): stereotyped women's language (e.g. hypercorrect grammar, tag questions, "empty" adjectives), stereotyped nonstandard varieties that are often associated with working class urban males (e.g. cursing, contracted forms like "gotta" and "gonna"), stereotyped gay male language (e.g. specific lexical items), and stereotyped lesbian language (e.g. flat intonation patterns, cursing).

These critiques by Barrett (1995) and Queen (1997) of the idea of a gay or lesbian speech community, and their insistence that researchers abandon the search for specific structural features that might characterize gay or lesbian language, constitute a major step forward in research on language and queerness. However, their arguments that there nevertheless exists a "queer" or "homo-genius" speech community do not necessarily solve the problems to which they draw attention. In their work, it is not easy to see exactly how "queer" differs from "gay and lesbian," especially because the research of both Barrett and Queen once again focuses exclusively on speakers already known to be gay or lesbian. This problem becomes especially highlighted in Queen's recent attempt to define "queer community." She does this by first explaining that she uses "queer" as a kind of synonym to refer to lesbians and gay men. But then she adds that she understands the term "to refer potentially to any gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered people who see themselves as having their sexual orientation in common and who see that commonality as influential for their sense of culture and identity" (Queen 1998:203). So even though Queen, like Barrett, argues that the focus of research on queer language should be displaced from identity categories to signifying practices, her understanding of "queer" rests precisely on identity categories, and it definitionally excludes anyone who identifies as straight, including, apparently, straight-identified men and women who have same-sex experiences or relationships, and straight-identified transsexuals and transvestites. This means that the important implication of Queen's and Barrett's arguments that the position "queer" might be filled by a subject who is not gay, lesbian, or bisexual remains, unfortunately, unpursued.

Another line of criticism of earlier work on gay and lesbian language is developed in a seminal, state-of-the-art introductory essay by Livia & Hall (1997a). Like both Barrett and Queen, Livia & Hall are dissatisfied with past research, and with past assumptions about a gay and lesbian community. But whereas Barrett and Queen appeal to Pratt's idea of a "linguistics of contact" to reconsider queer language, Livia & Hall turn to the Austinian concept of performativity.

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Livia & Hall (1997a) begin with the Foucauldian axiom that our contemporary understandings of sex, and our contemporary sexual categories, are historically generated and culturally specific. This means that categories like "gay language" are meaningless outside particular Western contexts, because it is far from certain that elsewhere people like "gays" even exist as a social and ontological category in the way they have come to do here. However, rather than see this limitation as a possibility to be exploited (after all, one can wonder whether the theoretical insights produced and the empirical data examined might not have been much richer in the field of language and gender if researchers had explicitly recognized and continually insisted that the data they were analyzing were not "women's language" so much as they were usually the language of white, middle class professional women produced in particular contexts), Livia & Hall regard Foucault's caution about projecting our own sexual categorizations onto others as a difficulty to be overcome. In other words, even though they recognize the problem of studying gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual discourse cross-culturally or transhistorically (because those very concepts and identities are modern North American and northern European ones), Livia & Hall want to be able to stake out a field of inquiry that can do exactly that.

The solution to this dilemma, they claim, lies in the notion of performativity, as it was proposed by Austin (1997 [1962]) and developed by Butler (1990, 1993). By looking at the way in which language performs actions on the world and calls identities into being through its own felicitous pronouncement, Livia & Hall (1997a) suggest that linguists can "bring performativity back to its disciplinary origins"[10] and use it to examine the ways in which the language used by sexually and gender-variant people calls them into being, creating, in this process, "its own object of research" (p. 12).

The appeal by Livia & Hall to performativity is a significant analytical move that not only firmly situates all enquiry into queer language in the semiotic processes through which it is produced and heard (and not in the identities from which it is thought to emerge), it also aligns research on queer language with recent developments in social theory. But like both Barrett's and Queen's appeal to a "linguistics of contact" and a "homo-genius" speech community, it is not without its own difficulties, of which I briefly note two.

The first is that, in the notion of the performative favored by Livia & Hall, Austin's [1997 (1962)] distinction between felicitous and infelicitous performatives plays no role. All the examples they discuss in their essay are of successful, happy performatives, ones that always work. This lack of attention to the ways in which performatives can fail, coupled with their focus on how language calls queers into being, leads them to make the claim that queer language is inherently intentional. "An utterance becomes typically lesbian or gay only if the hearer/reader understands that it was the speaker's intent that it should be taken up that way.

[10]Something of a misnomer since, strictly speaking, the disciplinary origins of "performativity" lie in philosophy, not linguistics.

Queerspeak should thus be considered an essentially intentional phenomenon..." (Livia & Hall 1997a:14).[11]

This is a problematic argument to find in an essay that freely invokes Derrida and Butler to argue some of its principal points. It is problematic because the principal point of Derrida's criticism of Austin (Derrida 1995 [1972]) is that performatives work not because they depend on the intention of the speaker, but because they embody conventional forms of language that are already in existence before the speaker utters them. Performatives work, and language generally works, because it is quotable. This is the meaning of Derrida's famous example of the signature [Derrida 1995a (1972)]. For a signature to count as a signature, Derrida observed, it has to be repeatable; it must enter into a structure of what he calls "iterability," which means both "to repeat" and "to change." Signatures are particularly good examples of iterability, because, even though one repeats them every time one signs one's name, no two signatures are ever exactly the same. The main point, however, is that in order to signify and to be authentic, one's mark must be repeatable: If I sign my name "XCFRD" one time, "CWQITHF" the next time, "LHYGMP" the next time, and so on, it won't mean anything; it will not be recognized as a signature, as a meaningful mark. To be so recognized, the mark has to be repeated. If something is repeatable, however, it simultaneously becomes available for failure (e.g. if I am drunk, my signature may not be recognized, and my check will not be cashed). It also becomes available for misuse and forgery. This availability for quotation without my permission, untethered to any intention I may have, is what Derrida means when he says that failure and fraud are not parasitical to language, exceptions, and distortions [as Austin maintains (1977:22)]. On the contrary, quotability is the very foundational condition that allows language to exist and work at all. The fact that all signs are quotable (and hence available for misrepresentation) means that signification cannot be located in the intention of speakers, but, rather, in the economy of difference that characterizes language itself. In this sense, failure and misuse are not accidental—they are structural (Lucy 1995:26). Derrida's point, one that Butler relies on extensively in her own work (see especially Butler 1997a), is that a speaker's intention is never enough to anchor meaning, to exhaustively determine context. Language constantly evokes other meanings that exceed, contradict, and disrupt the language user's intentions. What all this means is that any attempt to define a queer linguistics through appeals to intentionality is hopelessly flawed from the start because it is dependent on precisely the fallacy of intention that Derrida definitively dispensed with 20 years ago.

The second difficulty with the use by Livia & Hall (1997a) of the notion of performativity is that it elides the specifically sexual dimension of the language under scrutiny. After all, granting that language is performative, queers are not the only

[11]The idea that queer language is intentional language is already present in Leap's work (1996:21–23). I also wonder if it doesn't implicitly ground the analyses of Barrett (1995, 1997) and Queen (1997, 1998), since the only examples they analyze are utterances by gay- and lesbian-identified speakers who explicitly intend queer inferences to be made.

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ones to use language performatively. The language of numismatists, sommeliers, and oncologists certainly calls individuals who use the language into being as coin collectors, wine waiters, or medical experts on cancer. But are those individuals doing exactly the same thing as gays or lesbians or hijras or mollies? If they are not, then in what ways is their language different? If it is not different, in what way is the original observation that language constitutes identity not simply a platitude?

Livia & Hall (1997a) do not broach this question, and I believe that, given the language they use to delineate their field of inquiry, they cannot broach it. The main problem is that, despite the fact that the goal of their article is to draw up an agenda for research on "language, gender, and sexuality," (the subtitle of *Queerly Phrased*), Livia & Hall nowhere have even a word to say about what "sexuality" might be. Indeed, at the precise moment in their text when they would seem forced to define their object of inquiry, they vaporize sexuality into gender.

This moment occurs when they have explained that we cannot assume that gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals exist everywhere, but that we still want to be able to think about sexuality and language. At this juncture, when a definition of sexuality becomes unavoidable, the authors invoke Judith Butler and tell us that "[w]ith the theory of gender performativity we move away from the social construction of sexuality [i.e. we move away from the vexing problem of projection that Foucault identified] to the discursive construction of gender" (Livia & Hall 1997a:11). This is the move that the field of language and sexuality must make, Livia & Hall tell us, in order to be able to constitute an object of inquiry. But note the *glissement*, the semiotic slippage, that occurs in that short sentence. "We move away from the social construction of sexuality to the discursive construction of gender." Note how sexuality here collapses into gender, becomes gender. Now one of the foundational insights of queer theory, first articulated with clarity in the classic essay by Rubin (1984), is that sexuality is importantly different from, and not reducible to, gender (Rubin 1984, 1994). Livia & Hall invoke queer theory throughout their essay. But in stark opposition to it, they do not separate sexuality and gender; instead, in that key passage, they amalgamate them.

Once sexuality becomes gender, we are back to where Rubin (1984) started. We are back to a view of sexuality that sees it as analyzable in the same terms as gender. And because gender has a strong tendency to be analyzed in terms of mutually exclusive identity categories (namely "man" and "woman"), the risk looms large that an analysis of sexuality will also be framed in terms of mutually exclusive identity categories—only this time the categories will be "gay" or "lesbian" or "bisexual," instead of "man" and "woman." And instead of naive generalizations about "men's language" and "women's language," there is a real danger that what we will produce instead are naive generalizations about "gay English" or "lesbian language." What is noticeably left out of this picture, what is nowhere mentioned by Livia & Hall (1997a), or indeed by the overwhelming majority of the other authors I have read, is everything that arguably makes sexuality sexuality—namely, fantasy, desire, repression, pleasure, fear, and the unconscious.

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LANGUAGE AND DESIRE

I conclude this review by suggesting that it is precisely these phenomena that research on gay and lesbian language must find a way to confront if it is ever to move beyond not just the lavender lexicon, but also beyond the constraint of conceiving of gay and lesbian language as being grounded in and exclusive to intentional, self-proclaimed gay and lesbian identities. For it is precisely phenomena like fantasy, desire, repression, pleasure, fear, and the unconscious, however one ultimately wishes to explain them, that in many senses make up sexuality. Or do we think we are explaining sexuality if we restrict our analysis to overtly claimed identities and explicitly intended expressions? If we limit ourselves to an analysis of what these different individuals say and overtly intimate about their sexuality, we would surely be describing something. But is that something the sum total of "sexuality"? As Butler (1997b:144–45) has recently commented:

> It is not enough to say that gender [or sexuality, we can safely add throughout this passage] is performed, or that the meaning of gender can be derived from its performance, whether or not one wants to rethink performance as a compulsory social ritual. Clearly there are workings of gender that do not "show" in what is performed as gender, and to reduce the psychic workings of gender to the literal performance of gender would be a mistake. Psychoanalysis insists that the opacity of the unconscious sets limits to the exteriorization of the psyche. It also argues—rightly, I think—that what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be preformed.

As already noted, the inattention to sexuality by Livia & Hall (1997a) is by no means exceptional. On the contrary, the single most curious thing about research on gay and lesbian language is that even though it ostensibly is concerned with understanding the relationship between sexual orientation and language, it has no theory of sexuality. That is to say, it has no real understanding of what sexuality is, how it is acquired, and what the relationship is between its "literal performance" and its unconscious foreclosures. In the same way that sociolinguistics has been shown to have a shallow grasp of social theory (e.g. Cameron 1990, Woolard 1985), and studies of language and gender have been criticized for having an unsophisticated command of gender theory (e.g. Cameron 1992, 1997a; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Gal 1991; Kulick 1993; Romaine 1999:xiii), research on gay and lesbian language can be faulted for having a virtually nonexistent understanding of sexual theory.

A main reason why research could continue for so long without this being identified as a problem is because "gay" and "lesbian" have been conceived primarily in terms of identity categories, like "woman," or "African American." In other words, research has focused on how language conveys identity, not on how

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it conveys sexuality, or desire.[12] In such a framework, sexuality becomes almost incidental; the real issue is how people convey their sense of who they are, and how they recognize others who are like them. So what is important is that the people being studied have a clear sense of who they are and of what group they identify with. This conceptual need for clear-cut, quasi-ethnic identities is why gay and lesbian language has only been studied by examining the speech of self-identified gay and lesbians. It is why researchers such as Leap and Moonwomon could imagine that there might be such a thing as "authentic" gay and lesbian language.[13] And it is why the language of bisexuals has not been studied at all—researchers seem to have little consensus about what a bisexual identity actually entails; hence they have no idea what they would study if they were to look for "bisexual language."[14]

The most recent research on queer language crucially shifts the focus from gay and lesbian identities to the way in which language is employed to produce those subject positions. However, it is not clear that this new work will not simply replace one kind of identity category ("gay and lesbian") with another ("queer"), or that it will not continue to bypass sexuality by ignoring it or enshrouding it in gender.

I propose that if research on gay and lesbian language is to ever actually move beyond its unhappy fixation on identity, it will need to reorient and develop theories and methods to account for the relationship between language and sexuality. However, in doing this, phrasing the enquiry in terms of language and sexuality might be counterproductive, especially because "sexuality" can easily segue into "sexual categories," which can lead us right back to "sexual identity." To forestall and avoid that slippage, it might be helpful to declare a moratorium on "sexuality," at least until we do some conceptual airing and housecleaning, and to phrase inquiry, instead, in terms of "language and desire."

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[12]There is a subgenre of literature that uses statistical analysis to analyze the content of personal ads, usually comparing homosexual and heterosexual, and usually coming to the conclusion that gay men place most importance, and lesbians least importance, on physical characteristics in their ads. Heterosexual women tend to offer physical attractiveness, and heterosexual men offer information about their occupations (e.g. Deaux & Hanna 1984, Gonzales & Myers 1993, Shalom 1997). This is interesting ethnographic information, but it reduces desire to lexical choices, and it does not adequately address problems of genre and expectations in the different kinds of source material that is analyzed. Similar problems inhere in studies like Bolton's (1995b), in which he tallies the anatomical terms used in gay pornography, arguing that information on sex talk is crucial to the formulation of safer sex information (see also Mays et al 1992). Once again, desire becomes slimmed down to vocabulary. [See also Patton (1996:112–17, 145–47), who forcefully argues that this line of thought is premised on linguistically nonsensical and patronizing assumptions.]

[13]All of the problems I discuss here are crisply summarized in the conference motto of the annual Lavender Languages and Linguistics conference: "If we can't say it, how can we be it?"

[14]The few articles on bisexuality and language that I have found all focus on the question of categorization, i.e. on what the category "bisexual" signifies and who is and isn't included (for example, see Murphy 1997, Ripley 1992, Rust 1992).

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Reformulating questions about gay and lesbian language in terms of "language and desire" would compel us to do several things. First, it would compel us to shift the ground of our inquiry, firmly, decisively, and once and for all, from identity categories to culturally grounded semiotic practices. The desire for recognition, for intimacy, for erotic fulfillment, is not in itself specific to any particular kind of person. What are specific to different kinds of people are the precise things they desire and the manner in which particular desires are signaled in culturally codified ways. For example, the sexual desire of a man for a woman is conveyed through a range of semiotic codes that may or may not be conscious, but that are recognizable as conveying desire because they are iterable signs that continually get recirculated in social life. The iterability of codes is what allows us to recognize desire as desire. This means that all the codes are resources available for anyone—whether straight, gay, bisexual, shoe fetishists, or anything else—to use. It also means that desire cannot best be thought of in terms of individual intentionality. Because it relies on structures of iterability for its expression, desire is available for appropriation and forgery, as we know from cases where men invoke the desire of the Other to claim—ingenuously or not—that they thought the woman they raped desired them, or that they thought the man they killed was coming on to them. Researchers interested in language and desire need to be able to explain this too—they need to explain not only intentional desire, but also forged desire (for an interesting case-study of one kind of forged desire, see Hall 1995).

Second, a focus on desire rather than sexuality would move inquiry to engage with theoretical debates about what desire is, how it is structured, and how it is communicated. These same kinds of questions are related to, and could be asked within, a framework of sexuality: After all, Foucault focused on sexuality precisely in order to examine it as a social construction whose history, organization, and workings could be charted. In research on gay and lesbian language, however, what all too often happens in practice is that key concepts, like "gay," "lesbian," or "sexuality," are not problematized or even defined—it is simply assumed that college undergraduates who listen to tapes, informants who participate in ethnographic studies, or scholars who read published articles all share an understanding of what "gay" and "lesbian" signify. Furthermore, sexuality, especially when it is linked to identity, tends to be conceptualized as intransitive (one has a sexuality, is a sexuality); hence, research comes to concentrate on how subjects reveal or conceal their sexuality (and hence, once again, the centrality of intentional subjects in this literature). An advantage with the concept of desire is that it is definitionally transitive—one can certainly be said to "have" desire, but that desire is always for something, directed toward something. This means that research is impelled to problematize both the subject and the object of desire, and to investigate how those relationships are materialized through language. Because desire, in any theoretical framework, both encompasses and exceeds sexuality, research will, furthermore, be directed toward investigating the ways in which different kinds of desires, for different things, become bound up with or detached from erotic desire.

Finally, a focus on desire rather than "gay" or "lesbian" or even "queer" language would allow analysis expanded scope to explore the role that fantasy, repression, and unconscious motivations play in linguistic interactions. It would encourage scholars to develop theories and techniques for analyzing not only what is said, but also how that saying is in many senses dependent on what remains unsaid, or unsayable. Here we enter unfamiliar terrain, because even though the unconscious has played a significant role throughout the history of modern linguistics—indeed, I think it could be easily argued that the unconscious is the very resource of all linguistic analysis—this unconscious tends to be seen entirely in terms of cognition, of knowing. It is more accurately thought of as a "nonconscious." The foundational psychoanalytic concepts of desire, or repression—the "pushing away" of thoughts from conscious awareness—have not been theorized within linguistics. Even research that explicitly takes its cue from Freud [such as the work by Fromkin (1973, 1980) and others on parapraxes, or slips of the tongue] looks only at what language reveals about underlying grammatical knowledge and brackets out all concern with repression. And even though linguists and anthropologists might feel a certain squeamishness about approaching such frighteningly psychoanalytic territory, a number of scholars are currently developing models and methods that encourage us to do precisely that.

For example, in the nascent branch of scholarship called "discursive psychology," ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis are crucial theoretical and methodological tools (for a detailed discussion of this, see Billig & Schegloff 1999). In a recent overview article, Billig (1997:139–40) explains that discursive psychology "argues that phenomena, which traditional psychological theories have treated as 'inner processes', are, in fact, constituted through social, discursive activity. Accordingly, discursive psychologists argue that psychology should be based on the study of this outward activity rather than upon hypothetical, and essentially unobservable, inner states." A concrete example of this is developed extensively in Billig's (1999) newly published monograph, which reconsiders the Freudian concept of repression in terms of language. Billig agrees with Freud that repression is a fundamental dimension of human existence. But he disagrees with the idea that the roots of repression lie in biologically inborn urges, as Freud thought. Instead, repression is demanded by language: "[I]n conversing, we also create silences," Billig observes (1999:261). Thus, in learning to speak, children also learn what must remain unspoken and unspeakable. This means two things: First, that repression is not beyond or outside language but is, instead, the constitutive resource of language; and second, that repression is an interactional achievement.

Billig's approach to Freudian repression is readily recognizable to anyone familiar with Foucault's arguments that silences "are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (1981:27), Derrida's assertions that "silence plays the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge" (1978:54, emphasis in original), and Butler's continual insistence that the subject emerges through the repeated enactment of repudiations and foreclosures—foreclosures that are generated through

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language (1990, 1993, 1997a,b). Billig's contribution to this discussion is to focus attention on the mundane ways in which these kinds of foreclosures are accomplished in everyday conversation, through avoidances, topic changes, and direct commands. For example, in discussing the socialization of polite behavior, Billig remarks that "each time adults tell a child how to speak politely, they are indicating how to speak rudely. 'You must say *please*'...'Don't say *that* word'. All such commands tell the child what rudeness is, pointing to the forbidden phrases.... [I]n teaching politeness, [adults] provide...a model of rudeness" (1999:94,95, emphasis in original). For anyone interested in sexuality, is it necessary to add that the same applies to parents and others who warn children not to feel *that* desire for someone of their own sex?

Another recent example of how a particular kind of repudiation haunts language and structures talk is Cameron's (1997b) analysis of how heterosexuality is performed in a conversation between five white male American college students sitting at home watching a basketball game. This conversation was recorded by one of the participants, who used it in a class Cameron taught to discuss sports talk. On examining the tape, however, Cameron noticed something else: Apart from talk about the basketball game, the single most prominent theme in the conversation was gossip about men who the speakers identify as "gay." Cameron concludes that this kind of gossip is a performative enactment of heterosexuality, one structured by the presence of a danger that cannot be acknowledged: the possibility of homosexual desire within the speakers' own homosocial group. In order to defuse this threat and constitute a solidly heterosexual in-group, the speakers localize homosexual desire outside the group, in the bodies of absent others, who become invoked as contrasts. What is most ironic about this enactment of heterosexuality is that in order to convey to one another that the males under discussion really are "gay," the students engage in detailed descriptions those other males' clothing and bodily appearance, commenting extensively, for example, on the fact that one supposedly gay classmate wore "French cut spandex" shorts to class in order to display his legs, despite the fact that it was winter. Discussing this aspect of the students' talk, Cameron observes that the five young men "are caught up in a contradiction: their criticism of the 'gays' centres on [the 'gays'] unmanly interest in displaying their bodies.... But in order to pursue this line of criticism, the conversationalists themselves must show an acute awareness of such 'unmanly' concerns as styles and materials ('French cut spandex' ...), what kind of clothes go together, and which men have 'good legs'. They are impelled, paradoxically, to talk about men's bodies as a way of demonstrating their own total lack of sexual interest in those bodies" (Cameron 1997b:54). In other words, the students' desire in this homosocial context to distance themselves from the specter of homosexual desire leads them to structure their talk in such a way that it is not only similar to stereotypical "women's language" (besides topics, Cameron also analyzes how the speakers engage in a variety of "cooperative" discourse moves usually associated with women); in its fine-tuned attention to the bodies and sexualities of other men, the talk is also not unlike the kind of language that in the past has been called Gayspeak.

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A final example of recent work that has begun to broach the empirical investigation of language and desire is an anthology entitled precisely that: *Language and Desire*. In their introduction to that volume, Harvey & Shalom (1997a:3) assert that "the encoding of desire results in distinct and describable linguistic features and patterns," and they challenge linguists to extend their theories and methodologies to be able to account for how erotic desire is expressed and negotiated in situated interactions. Two contributions in particular provide fine examples of how such accounts might proceed in practice. Channell (1997) uses Conversation Analysis to track how intimacy is accomplished (through the transgression of verbal taboos and of shared conventions for closing a conversation, for example) in the infamous "Tampax" telephone conversation that allegedly took place between the Prince of Wales and his companion Camilla Parker-Bowles. And Langford (1997) examines Valentine's Day personal messages in *The Guardian* newspaper to discover some of the linguistic means through which "a love relationship is partly...negotiated through the adoption of alternate personalities who play out their interactions within a mutually constructed imagined world, safe from the dangers of and conflicts which beset 'real' relationships in the 'real' world" (Langford 1997:120). The messages Langford analyzes are ones in which the authors of the personal ads adopt the name and the voice of a cuddly animal for themselves and their partner, for example "Flopsy Bunny I love you, Fierce Bad Rabbit." Langford draws on psychoanalytic theory to argue that the development of these alternate animal personalities may be related to the desire to create an attachment to an object that is reliable and unchanging, and which stands outside the emotional traumas of everyday adult life. (There seems also to be a particularly British preoccupation at work here, uncommented on by Langford, that appears amenable to a more thoroughgoing anthropological analysis.) Whether or not one agrees with Langford's interpretation of this phenomenon, her analysis does point the way to how psychoanalytic understandings might be helpful in thinking about why and how desire comes to be expressed in specific sociocultural settings.

Work like that by Billig, Cameron, Channell, Langford, and a range of other scholars[15] demonstrates that it is possible to explore the relationship between language and sexuality without departing from identity, without folding sexuality into gender, and without losing sight of the fact that sexuality is composed of

[15]Another place where I think research on language and desire is occurring is in the work done on language and transgenderism (for a summary, see Kulick 1999; for examples, see Hall & O'Donovan 1995, Livia 1995, 1997a) and on language and "passing" (e.g. Bucholtz 1995). This research moves us resolutely beyond any concern with authenticity, it highlights the ways in which linguistic resources are fundamentally expropriable, and it highlights how desire (to be, or be seen as, a woman; to be, or be seen as, Hispanic) is structured linguistically. Work in these areas also reminds us that desire has many layers, directions, and modalities and that erotic desire is necessarily imbricated with and implicated in other desires. Also highly relevant here are studies in language socialization that show how specific desires and fears are conveyed and acquired through recurring linguistic routines (e.g. Capps & Ochs 1995, Clancy 1986, Ochs et al 1996).

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more than what people consciously say or consciously avoid saying about their sexual identities. By focusing on the ways in which repressions and silences are constituted through language, on how those silences play a structuring role in the way in which interactions are organized, and on how specific linguistic conventions are used to structure and convey desire, this research opens up new lines of inquiry that promise to engage linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists in exciting and mutually enriching ways. And although it ought to be clear that I am critical of much of the work on gay and lesbian language, I also believe that the discussions that have taken place in that literature were probably a necessary stage in research on language and sexuality. Despite their general lack of attention to sexuality or desire as theoretical problems, studies of how gays and lesbians talk have demonstrated that sexuality is a dimension of linguistic interaction that can be documented, and they have raised issues, revealed possibilities, and uncovered problems that must be addressed before we can move forward to more insightful analysis. What needs to be done now is to acknowledge that debt, develop what is valuable, and go on from there.

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