

THE XITH ANNUAL AMERICAN UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE ON LAVENDER LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

February 13-15, 2004

THE CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

Note: Abstracts are coded to indicate type of presentation (w = workshop, s = presented paper) and location in the conference program.

WORKSHOPS AND TOPICAL SESSIONS

Text Analysis Workshops Friday, February 13, 2004

Baker, Paul (Lancaster University) and Frank Bramlett (Univ. of Nebraska, Omaha) **W2**
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The ABC's of Corpus Linguistics: Methods, Examples, Pitfalls and Ways to Avoid Them

This workshop examines how the corpus linguistics methodology can be used in the study of language and sexual identities - particularly looking at discourses of sexual identity. No prior knowledge of corpus linguistics is necessary. Some of the questions that will be considered include: "Is a corpus linguistics approach compatible with research on discourse or sociolinguistic topics?", "How do I get or create a corpus?" and "What analytical techniques can be performed on a corpus and how effective are they?" The workshop will contain examples of analysis from a range of corpus data focussed around the subject of gay men, including political debates, tabloid news, safer sex documentation and personal adverts. Techniques such as collocation analysis, keywords, concordances, dispersal plots and frequency lists will be analysed.

Hoffman, Craig (Georgetown University Law Center) **W3**
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Divining Homophobic Language in Hardwick and Lawrence

As a pair of windows onto the social discourse about homosexuality in the years 1985 and 2003, respectively, the U.S. Supreme Court's majority opinions in *Bowers v. Hardwick* and *Lawrence v. Texas* present differing looks at homophobia in our legal system and in our society. Looking at the juxtapositions of images used by the authors of these opinions reveals how "mainstream" legal minds viewed the gay men who were their subjects. In our discussions in this session, I want to focus on the images that readers are invited to construct about the litigants and similarly situated gay citizens.

Leap, William (American University) **W1**
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Locating Queerness in Gay Men's English

Among the objections to "identity-centered" studies of language and sexuality is the claim that such research refuses to examine linguistic material outside of a domain narrowly defined, identity-driven interpretive paradigm. Queer linguistics, the preferred alternative, promises to bring broader vistas to the analysis of text. For example, the queer paradigm ensures that references to experiences and understandings shared broadly across the sexual margin will be identified and examined as queer themes when they appear within specific texts, and will not be assumed to be unique to a particular category of text-makers.

Life story narratives I collected during recent research in Cape Town, South Africa, provide rich opportunities to reflect on this claim. In these narratives, (homo)sexuality intertwines with race, ethnicity, class, politics of transportation, mediated economic opportunity privilege, and other legacies of apartheid control. Focusing on "gay identity" to the exclusion of the other issues addressed in these texts is foolish. Yet, the struggle to claim a sexual identity within the context of these broader intersections and in spite of them, is a dominant theme in these narratives, just as it is in the everyday experiences on which these narratives are based. In this presentation, I review (and invite discussion of) efforts to identify queer themes in these gay English texts, and to trace how textual queerness reflects narrator constructions of sexual identity within the narrative moment and beyond it.

Shulman, Jeffrey (Georgetown University) **W3**
The U.S. Supreme Court's "Closeted" Narrative in Lawrence

The majority opinion in *Lawrence v. Texas*, like many postmodern narratives (and Supreme Court cases), is a story that is deeply--perhaps fundamentally--at odds with itself. It purports to be a story about liberty. The narration rings with a kind of moral triumphalism, the expansive rhetoric proclaiming that this story should be situated within a much broader narrative--the country's march down the road to new freedoms. But within this "prevailing" story lies what I would call a "closeted" narrative. Set in motion by the prevailing narrative, this story (a story about the normativeness of homosexuality) must be contained. It frightens the narrator, and *Lawrence* is a story scared of its own characters and determined to avoid its own conclusion. So Kennedy makes a number of choices designed to avoid any slippery narrative slopes. By situating this case within a genre of privacy narratives, by making this a story about personal autonomy and not equal rights, Kennedy tells a story about sexuality, not homosexuality. Same-sex relations are out of the closet but contained within the bedroom, and the happy ending of marriage is put off, perhaps permanently. Fearful of its own power and possibility, *Lawrence* may well turn out to be an open and shut case.

TOPICAL SESSIONS

Hablando Sobre SIDA
(Saturday, February 14, 2004)

Session coordinators: Maria Viteri (American University) and Sammy Colon (American University) **S1**
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"Hablando sobre SIDA" es un taller que busca crear un espacio en donde las diferentes perspectivas alrededor del VIH/SIDA y salud sexual y reproductiva permitan comprender formas de sociabilidad que inhiben la inclusión de un discurso no homofóbico, multicultural, analizando los principios que gobiernan el discurso relacionado con VIH/SIDA en el material educativo en español utilizado con la población hispana.

El taller estará enmarcado bajo un marco referencial que busca analizar cómo el discurso escrito de materiales educativos sobre VIH/SIDA adquiere distintos significados sociales, políticos y culturales sobre el cuerpo, la enfermedad, el género y la sexualidad, explorando las diferentes representaciones del VIH/SIDA y los conceptos sobre salud sexual y reproductiva. Representantes de organizaciones clave dentro del Distrito Metropolitano de Washington que trabajan en programas educativos sobre VIH/SIDA con la población inmigrante de habla hispana formarán el panel introductorio. Acto seguido se abre el espacio para el análisis de materiales educativos disponibles, buscando nuevas formas de hacer discurso, considerando que un análisis discursivo develará aquellos lugares en donde se inscriben las representaciones convertidas muchas veces en estigma, los valores otorgados a grupos latinos con diferentes orientaciones y prácticas sexuales.

Este taller no tiene costo alguno por inscripción o similar. Únicamente requiere su interés en el tema. Para mayor información puede contactarse con los organizadores del taller: Maria Amelia Viteri y Samuel Colon a los correos electrónicos: mariamelia32@hotmail.com, sc8935a@american.edu.

Brown bag luncheon roundtable: *LGBT Linguistics in the Classroom*
(Sunday, February 15, 2004)

Discussion leader: Smith, K. Aaron (Illinois State University) **S6**
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Over the past year, I have been involved as the sole linguist on a committee whose task it is to create LGBT courses within an English Department that actively promotes literary, cultural, rhetorical, pedagogical and linguistic interdisciplinary study. Since most linguists working on such courses, or course modules, likely feel a certain amount of institutional isolation, professional organizations/conferences that have as their focus LGBT languages are a much-needed resource for the development of such coursework.

In the first part of the paper, I give an overview of our Committee's work, including a brief history of such courses in our Institution. In the second, I share syllabus drafts and readings and I discuss our solutions to integrating various disciplinary approaches. Finally, I present a list of questions/issues to the audience participants as a means of generating substantive discussion concerning the development of LGBT coursework which I hope will result in sustained professional discourse.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Anderson, Shea Michael (Temple University) **S2**

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Speech of Desire: Online Cruising as a New Site for Gay Sex

Personal ads on the website M4M4Sex.com offer stimulating images that follow conventions of "traditional" pornography as found in magazines and videos. These ads offer men the possibility of connecting in cyberspace and arranging to meet for "real-time" sex, making the website analogous to a physical cruising site. Men on this website find sexual partners via uploaded images on the website from the relative privacy of their computers and then are able to communicate their desires to each other via online messaging and chat before sex occurs. M4M4Sex.com subverts cruising locations by offering an alternative online space that enables men have sex in a location of their choosing. The site also subverts the action of cruising by inserting written and verbal communication into a previously non-verbal activity. Altogether, M4M4Sex.com supplements and possibly replaces physical cruising sites as a place and means of connection, making physical cruising locations unnecessary for sexual interaction.

Baker, Paul (Lancaster University) **S2**

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Gendered Discourses in Gay and Lesbian Erotic Narratives

Corpus Linguistics has the potential to advance research into language and gender/sexuality, although it is generally an under-utilised methodology. This paper aims to demonstrate how CL techniques can be gainfully employed in order to uncover evidence for gendered discourses in text.

An analysis of two corpora each consisting of one million words of gay and lesbian erotic narratives was carried out. Frequency lists for both sets of data were obtained and were then compared against each other, with log likelihood tests used to calculate words that occurred significantly more often in one set of data when compared to the other (e.g. grinned is a gay keyword while blushed is a lesbian keyword). These keywords were then examined in more detail, using collocational techniques and concordances in order to understand how these words contributed towards gendered discourses within their respective corpus.

Barat, Erzsebet (U Szeged) **S3**

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Homophobic consequences of the Labrisz project

I examine here the various documents that emerged two years ago in relation to the initiative of the Hungarian Lesbian NGO, Labrisz, that approached the various secondary schools in the Hungarian capital and offered their help to come round and organize discussions with the pupils about the different enactments of sexual orientation. They meant this to be a subversive act insofar as the national curriculum requires the institutions to have a series of so called "sexual enlightenment discussions" integrated into their programme. The NGO proposal divided the Hungarian public to the point where there were parliamentary debates around it, with the Ombudsman of Education and that of Human Rights interpellated together with the Ministers of Education and Family Matters. Through my ideology critique I shall try to insert the available textual accounts into their social context of production and see the limits of the NGO's subversion.

Barat, Erzsebet (U Szeged) **S5**

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Les-being and identity politics

I wish to advance a dialogue about the implications of the various theorizations of the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality, assuming as its basic premise that these categories come to mean different things in different disciplines. I want to argue that we need to destabilize the non-productive dichotomy between feminist vs. queer theorizations of "women's everyday life." In other words, queer theorists' knowledge production becomes a helpful criticism when it comes to expose feminist theories of separation and silencing of biological/anatomical sex and social gender but without arguing for the queer non-foundationalist celebrations of sexualities as playful, de-centered apolitical performative acts.

Brua, Chas (Pennsylvania State University) **S3**

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Homophobic bullying as a convergence point

In this paper, I examine bullying--in particular, the sustained verbal harassment of junior high and high school students who are portrayed by the harasser as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. The analysis draws on the work of theorists who have used activity theory and related traditions to study communication as a shaper of social relationships and identity (Rommetveit, Wells,

Bakhtin). In addition, I draw on Scollon's conception of nexus analysis. The paper looks at several episodes of harassment involving written texts--blackboard graffiti; a paperback guidebook for teenage girls; a letter mailed to a student's home. (Note: The data consist of episodes I personally experienced as a secondary student; thus, that information is narratively reconstructed.) I argue that to understand school bullying--and possibly attempt interventions to reduce bullying--it is necessary to examine the convergence of multiple activity systems, including communication in the larger community.

Carnes, Michelle (American University) **S2**

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Outing Girlz Nite Out: Queer Strip Club Visibility

Girlz Nite Out is a strip club located in Hyattsville, Maryland, just outside of the metropolitan Washington DC area. Girlz Nite Out markets itself to women of color as its primary audience, featuring women of color as performers, limiting its entrants and calling itself the "first ever women only strip club. No men allowed..." (stripclubs.lapdance.com: 2003) and proclaims itself a "gentleman's club for women" (girlzniteout.org: 2003). My current research explores the sexual geography of the club, the surrounding area and dynamics within the club through a queer theoretical lens. In this presentation, I focus on the club's marketing materials and the website, all of which are targeted toward women of color who wish to be entertained by women of color... without mention of the word "lesbian." How does this club set itself apart through marketing and website advertising? How does current strip club research address (or, as I show here) the sex/gendered/queer implications of this club's marketing strategies?

Echols, Jason Brandon (Mary Washington College) **S5**

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Epistemology of the closet: The lesbian letter and the textual embodiment of the lesbian

A recurring trope in lesbian literature is the love letter written by a lesbian character. Because this letter expresses the lesbian's desire, it may be called the "lesbian letter" of the work. Three examples of the lesbian letter are found in Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908), Helen Rose Hull's "Separation" (1920), and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). In exploring the letter's role in these texts, I argue that the lesbian letter works in very similar ways and is governed by specific characteristics including the following: the letter's text means less than its effect and is often read by an interloping party who is hostile towards the lesbian expression. By examining those characteristics within the works cited above, I will argue that as the textual embodiment of lesbian desire, these letters act as a trope for both the joys and troubles inherent in lesbian life and literature.

Etz, Rebecca (Rutgers University) **S5**

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The problem with no name

As a moment in women's history, Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* was pivotal for giving voice to the "problem with no name." She, in conjunction with women like O'Reilly, Steinam and Morgan, developed an argument and a language that would define a generation and how they experienced themselves as women. With this paper (or session) I explore the effect of both language absence and acquisition on the development of lesbian sexual identity. This paper concentrates on 'coming out' as a life moment (or process) of profound significance. In it I consider the creation of generational differences based not on age but on the relationship between language presence/absence during coming out and the subsequent affect on New Zealand women and how they experience themselves as lesbians.

Hamilton, Jennifer (Saint Mary's University) **S2**

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"Where Are All the Lesbians?": Educating 'Difference' Through Mainstream Television

In recent years, there have been substantial increases in the number of gay and lesbian characters introduced and portrayed on mainstream television programmes. From *Friends* to *The L Word*, more and more images of lesbians and/or lesbianism are broadcast into homes across North America and beyond. While the increase in portrayals of lesbians on mainstream television suggests that homophobic and lesbophobic barriers are eroding, these images of lesbianism are limited in their illustrations of lesbian identity, existence and culture. In this paper, I will explore the construction of television-lesbianism through the characters of Bianca Montgomery (*All My Children*) and Willow Rosenberg (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), two characters that represent the spectrum from daytime to nighttime television, respectively. Through these characters I will examine the differences between educating mainstream television viewing audiences via the images portrayed about a single character, vs. the broader more inclusive portrayals of lesbian identities depicted through the dynamics between characters.

Heintzelman, Lori (University of Colorado-Boulder) **S3**

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Ex-gay ministries and the re-education of desire

Despite recent significant advances in gay civil rights, there is still strong impetus to view homosexuality as pathological. The evangelical Christian organization Exodus continues "Proclaiming to, educating, and impacting the world with the biblical truth that freedom from homosexuality is possible when Jesus is Lord of one's life" (www.exodus-international.org). Michel Foucault (1990) contends that sexuality is a particularly dense site of (public) power relations, with normalization/regulation often achieved through discursive means. Debate continues about whether homosexuality is innate, environmental, or chosen, and-relatedly-morally assessable. Exodus is strongly invested in this debate. Although its "transformation" methodology consists of prayer, counseling, and support to "strugglers" at the local level, I argue that its success is in a larger truth-making endeavor, i.e. fashioning and perpetuating a Master Narrative, counter to those currently circulating and gaining favor, of homosexuality as maladaptation that can be repaired. Exodus deploys a number of linguistic strategies to affect a "re-education of desire" (Stoler, 1995). These are reflected as individual "sexual identity reconstruction" (Ponticelli, 1999) in the testimonies of those who claim "ex-gay" status. This paper will explore those strategies using transcribed testimonies from past Exodus conferences and ethnographic data gathered at the July 2003 Exodus annual conference.

Jackson, Jonathan David (Goucher College) **S7**
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"Not just any old queen": One word's complex development in the community that created voguing

Gerald, of the house of Labeija, once said to me that in gay worlds, be they White or Black, rich or poor, the word "queen" bespeaks derision as much as pride. When a small Black and Latino community bases its aesthetics on their own conception of the queen, they transgress against multiple gay, straight, Black and White worlds at once. Drawing from eight years of participant observation and roughly forty-five oral histories, I trace the indigenous sociolinguistics and figurative development of the term queen as it is conceived in the same roughly 5000-member Northeastern American community featured in the film *Paris is Burning*. My question: how has the term queen in its complex polysemy and polyvalence become a signifier of particular forms of bodily expression, status attainment, relational aggression as well as states of femininity and masculinity in this community?

Kendall, Laurie J. (U Maryland-College Park) **S7**
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When we say "Michigan," we mean "Welcome home"

This paper is based on three years of ethnographic research at the Michigan Womyn's Music festival. It explores how the concepts of "home" link thousands of lesbians to a geographical location in Michigan and help ground their notions of home, community and family in the very terrain of the festival. In it, I show how anthropologists have conceptualized carnivals and festivals as liminal events designed to transition individuals from one reality into another. However, I argue that the language these women use radically changes our ideas about where the liminal is located. Furthermore, this paper argues that language is the first and foremost method by which these women begin to transform their physical and psychic reality. Metaphorically, language becomes the ground on which they build, and the tool they use to construct their concrete home in Michigan.

Kier, Bailey (University of Maryland, College Park) **S7**
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Gay rodeo: Defining urban and rural identities and the terms of community and national citizenship

Gay Rodeo is a location of complex negotiations between the urban and rural identities of queer communities. This paper is based on my participant observation during gay rodeo, and life histories. It specifically considers gay rodeo culture in Washington DC and suggests that language and cultural scripts used complicate the rural/urban binary so prevalent in the mainstream U.S. queer imaginary. It concludes that gay rodeo bridges the gap between the urban/rural binary and creates new spaces where queer existence is imagined to be possible.

Levon, Erez (New York University) **S4**

Examining a gay prosody: Issues in theory, methodology and identity

This paper presents results from one part of a two-pronged methodology, which examines both the linguistic perception and performance of a social identity. The prosodic variables I consider are variation in intonational contour (i.e., pitch range) and rate of pitch fluctuation (i.e., pitch dynamism). Previous research on gay-affiliated speaking styles has argued that these two variables may act as salient cues in identifying gay-sounding speech (Gaudio 1994; Henton 1989, 1995). The data I present comes from both acoustic analyses of certain popular gay television characters, as well as the results of subjective salience testing of the two variables. By comparing the results of these two analyses, this research assesses the extent to which popular perceptions of a gay-affiliated speaking style are paralleled in media representation of gay identity. In doing so, this research seeks to identify some of the specific linguistic resources that are socially marked as indexical of a gay identity.

Mahon, Ryan (American University) **S2**

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The Digital Scarlet Letter: The Legacy of Megan's Law

Media coverage of a child maltreatment death can have a profound impact on communities and child serving agencies. Thus it is necessary for child welfare professionals and the public to understand how child maltreatment death stories extend their influence. The murder of Megan Kanka is an example of how quickly and profoundly media coverage can impact the development of legislation at the state and national level, and can help frame public discourse about child abuse. This paper examines the themes, agents, and other linguistic features of articles appearing in the news paper coverage from July 1994 to May of 1996, the period between Megan Kanka's murder and the passage of Megan's Law during the second Clinton Administration. Explicit reference to predatory homosexuality is noticeably absent, even though predatory homosexuality is part of public discourse on child abuse. The paper explores the implications of omitting explicit reference to this dimension of child abuse within a larger discussion of the regulation of sexuality through the public media.

McCune, Jeffrey Q. (Northwestern University) **S7**

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"Out" in Da Club: The Down Low, Performance, and the Archi-Texture of Black Masculinity.

This paper explores the relationship between black masculinity, the club space, and men on the "down low." Some black men who have sex with other men, who dis-identify with normative descriptors of sexuality, participate in queer activity while still maintaining their status as being "down low." In my research, such occurrences, although rare, are critical to understanding the intersections between the hetero and homo normative performances of identities. In this essay, I am interested in the contradictory and complicated ways that these men find hetero-normative traces with in a club space, which privileges hip-hop and a certain texture of black masculinity. Many of the moments of (dis) identification happen as these men engage the rap lyrics and a specific, texturized hip-hop language performed through the body. I examine how this certain texture of black masculinity allows men on the down low, to explore queer sexual desire while maintaining certain black hetero-normative masculine codes.

Peterson, David (U Nebraska - Omaha) **S3**

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"Vampire Capitalists" to "Cannibal Queers": The Circulation of Homophobic Discourse between Literary Texts and Literary Criticism

My presentation examines the circulation of homophobic discourse between a literary text and a work of literary criticism that seeks to explicate that text. First, I demonstrate how homophobic discourse functions in Leslie Marmon Silko's (1991) *Almanac of the Dead*. Written partly in anticipation of the Columbian quicentennial, Silko's novel depicts gay male characters as monstrous individuals who exploit and destroy the innocent. In short, these characters and their brutality are the metaphors for "vampire capitalists," a phrase describing European white males and the horrors they have unleashed over 500 years of dominance in the Americas. Secondly, I examine an essay by St. Clair (1999) that attempts to justify the novel as nonhomophobic. St. Clair's apology reproduces the novel's homophobic discourse at the same time it attempts to explain why the novel is nonhomophobic. The critical text thus not only perpetuates the novel's homophobic discourse but also extends and enlarges it, as when she reformulates Silko's "vampire capitalists" into "cannibal queers." The circulation of homophobic discourse enabled by both novel and criticism represents the insidious nature of homophobic discourse when used as a metaphoric tool as well as the ways homophobic discourse can pervade even the most socially and culturally enlightened texts.

References:

Silko, L. M. (1991). *Almanac of the dead*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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Dead. In L. K. Barnett & J. L. Thorson (Eds.), *Leslie Marmon Silko: A collection of critical essays* (pp. 207-222). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Provencher, Denis M. (University of Wisconsin, La Crosse) **S7**

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Gay Paris: Language, Space and Belonging in the French City

This presentation consider a series of maps of "gay city" drawn by a number of French gays and lesbians to illustrate how these informants delineate sexual citizenship on the French urban landscape. First I offer a brief examination of recent US and French scholarship as it relates to gay urban geography and sexual citizenship (Hocquenghem 1980; Bech 1997; Eribon 1999; Sibalis 1999; Leap forthcoming). Next I offer an analysis of several maps of Paris and Lyon drawn by my informants to examine their conceptualization of "gay" urban space, gay identity and community, "the gay ghetto" and discourses of belonging, isolation and homophobia as they operate in the French context. In particular, I compare maps drawn by male and female informants and draw out their relationship to larger French discourses about gender differences. Furthermore, I compare maps drawn by "French," "French Jewish" and "French Arab" (Maghrebian) informants to examine French discourses related to ethnicity and racial differences. Ultimately, I argue that French gay neighborhoods (i.e. Paris' Marais district and Lyon's Petit-Marais district) are situated between the global and the local configurations that have emerged in the recent literature on gay city and sexual citizenship (Leap, forthcoming).

Rochelle, Warren (Mary Washington College) **S3**

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(Almost) Ordinary: Transitional Gay Imagery in Julian May's Galactic Milieu Universe

If Anna Quindlen, Newsweek columnist and novelist, is correct, the proof that the struggle in America for gay rights is over is that 'the image of the community has changed to one of ordinary people searching for the ordinary ideal: commitment, love, privacy, work, family. Homosexuals are no longer the suspect Other-rather they have become 'the woman at the next desk, the guy behind the counter at the deli'. Quindlen acknowledges that this transition to ordinary is still in process. One only has to list the names of Matthew Shepard, Billy Jack Gaither, and Allen Schindler-among too many others-to know this. But, she asserts, 'there is no doubt things have changed'. The question becomes then, how far has this change permeated all aspects of American culture, including its fiction? It would seem that science fiction, particularly in its utopian forms, should also reflect this cultural transition, if not be ahead of it, presenting possible futures in which columns like Quindlen's wouldn't need to be written. Is science fiction then, a cultural mirror, with its own transitional imagery? Or cultural critic, with its homophobic-free futures as alternatives to a homophobic present? It is my argument here that science fiction is both and I want to examine this dual aspect in the Galactic Milieu universe of Julian May, with its utopian future of progressive human evolution in a society constructed to be free of prejudice. To contextualize my argument I will first give some attention to a look at other evidence of this cultural transition-just how far have gay Americans come in being accepted as ordinary? I will also contextualize the changes in gay imagery in American science fiction as well. I conclude that even as May presents a society in which gays are accepted, her imagery-especially in characterization-is still transitional, somewhere between old stereotypes and Quindlen's ordinary.

Sanford, Jesse (University of California, Berkeley) **S2**

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Finding Words: Relational Rights as an Extension of Marriage

This paper investigates the mass-mediated political speech that constitutes the United States' contemporary gay marriage debate in light of a Foucauldian understanding of the connections between language and power, reading together aspects of George Lakoff's metaphor analysis and Elizabeth Povinelli's work on grids and gridlock. It attempts a new articulation of ideas based on what Foucault referred to in several later writings as "relational rights" or the importance of friendship. Rather than defer the study of actual experience, as some accuse discourse analysis of doing, this paper outlines a dangerous, experimental method for social scientific research in which analysis and intervention are open-ended and intertwined. Integral to this task is a preliminary assessment of the consequences of developing Free Families, an organizing project and website (www.freefamilies.org) based on the idea of relational rights.

Scanlon, Mara (Mary Washington Collage) **S2**

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(Un)defining Queer Selves in Kathleen Tyau's Makai

I will explore the representation of gay men, bisexuality, lesbian desire, and ambiguous sexual identity in Asian American author Kathleen Tyau's 1999 novel Makai. I argue that Tyau deliberately confounds the reader's own desire to categorize sexual identity and insists instead on a slippery, unfinalizable self. I find further support in the presentation of racial identity; for example, when one character raised ethnically Chinese finds he is actually an adopted Japanese child, his wife questions, "If the way you look makes so much difference, how come we didn't know? And when we guessed the truth, why didn't we believe?" Similar questions might be made to trouble strict divisions of sexual orientation and insist instead on fluidly sexualized selves. I will discuss also the theory of intersubjective identity formation and analyze how "sameness" and identification may relate to lesbian desire. I will consider theories of "romantic friendship" between women and discuss whether they provide an adequate model for the unconsummated relationship between the novel's female characters.

Smyth, Ron (U Toronto) and Henry Rogers (U Toronto) **S4**

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Pitch and Intonational Variability in Gay-sounding Male Speech

A common stereotype holds that gay-sounding men speak with higher-pitched voices and use more intonational variation in their speech than straight-sounding men. Previous studies, including our own work, have failed to verify this stereotype. This paper reports on an experiment in which the acoustic property of fundamental frequency was distinguished from the perceptual quality of pitch, with a parallel distinction for intonational variation. The segmental portion of the speech was artificially removed; only then did listeners appear to use the stereotype of higher pitch and greater intonational variability to identify gay-sounding speech. Further, the judgements of which voices sounded gay correlated only with the perceptual judgements of pitch and intonational variability, not with the acoustic measurements.

Tobler, Aaron (American University) **S3**

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The Power of Place in Homophobic Discourse

In considering homophobic discourse, it is important to understand how a site can influence the construction and perpetuation of homophobia. A site, while obviously part of the human aspects of homophobia, forms a homophobic factor separate from the actors in a particular situation. Moreover, the homophobia present at a site can be subtle and vague, as with the language used to describe and discuss its presence. This paper will discuss such homophobia as evident in newspaper articles concerning public same-sex sexual acts in a Virginia park. Such discussion will present how homophobic discourse that occurs at a site influences and distorts public notions of queerness. The text cited in this presentation, by Jon Ward, comes from the Washington Times newspaper: "Public sex acts a problem at state park" (9/24/2002), "Virginia Park is now taken over by gay sex" (9/30/2002), and "Gay sex in park 'worse' despite arrests" (11/25/2002).

Wagner, Sarah (University of Massachusetts, Boston) **S5**

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Gender, Power, and Language Use in Seven Lesbian Families

This paper reexamines the gender basis of the power dynamics discussed in Ochs and Taylor (1995) by analyzing the conversational discourse between seven lesbian couples with children. The findings point to three conclusions. First, there is a power imbalance in lesbian families, comparable to the original study, as seen through the use of negative evaluative comments. However, the use of negative evaluations is not necessarily a gendered power tactic. Second, the form that the power imbalance takes differs between the straight and gay families in these two studies. Third, a high level of conscious decision making by lesbian parents seems to explain some of these differences in form. This study of lesbian speech in intimate relationships expands our understanding of how conversational dynamics in families take shape and how they might influence the children's perceptions of the relationship between gender, sexual orientation, and power.