

That's fabulous!

- **A study of minimal responses in male homosexual language.**

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Autumn 2008
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1. Introduction

Humans have always had a need to communicate and interact with each other. It is essential in everyday life to be able to let people know what you think, communicate information, negotiate, and take part in activities involving interaction with others. Language is the tool which helps us engage in activities such as these. Having language also enables people to be part of various social functions for example, conversations and discussions. A language is at the same time something which people identify with and feel a certain belonging to, whether it is certain dialects or accents such as African American Vernacular English, the covert prestige of working class men, or just English as a language.

When it comes to the language of men and women there is plenty of prejudice. Language seems to have developed differently for men and women and it is well-known that men and women use language in different ways. A man might be direct and straightforward, whereas a woman might be tentative and unassertive. In addition to more general, perceivable, gender-based differences, there are also differences in language use on an individual level.

People of a certain culture or cultural sub-group may often feel a connection within that culture or group; a certain identity is achieved within the group as such and with the language or variety used within that group. Similarly, people of different sexual preferences might also perhaps identify with a language of their own in order to feel more connected to their community. However, it is not always clear what could be argued to be a language in its own right. It is for instance believed that homosexual men speak their own language (Leap, 1996); they use their own vocabulary, use specific speech strategies, and innuendos which might not be picked up by heterosexual men or women for that matter.

Nevertheless, research (Leap, 1996; Kulick, 2000) has indicated that supposed male homosexual language is difficult to pinpoint. Early, previous research has tried extensively to do so. In the very early stages of research in this field, Queer Theory (Kulick, 2000), one has tried to find a set of features of male homosexual language in order to identify it when it is heard. There have been dictionaries where male homosexual vocabulary has been defined. They have however, to some extent, not been long-lived. One of the reasons, according to Kulick (2000), is that all of these attempts to define male homosexual language have been inconclusive.

1.1 Aim

The aim of the present investigation is to analyse male homosexual speech in order to see whether these speakers use traditionally female speech strategies in multiparty, all male conversation. The particular linguistic feature focused on for this purpose is minimal responses.

1.2 Material

The material in the present study consists of, as far as can be established, authentic, non-scripted language from the American reality series *Queer Eye* (formerly known as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*). A total of three episodes have been analysed. These are episodes 17 from the 3rd season and 10, and 11 from the 4th season (44 min per episode). *Queer Eye* aired 2003 – 2007.

The reason for focusing on the particular TV-series *Queer Eye* is that it is one of quite few series, which features authentic, non-scripted male homosexual speech. However, it cannot be stated whether the characters are told to act stereotypically homosexual or not. One is to assume that the speech is authentic. Furthermore, *Queer Eye* may be said to be an interesting show also for other linguistic reasons. For instance it gives the viewer a chance to hear conversations between self-professed gay men who do not need to modify their speech for the fear of sounding stereotypically male homosexual.

The TV-series expands over five seasons and for reasons of availability the study only uses episodes from the third and fourth season. Finally, the episodes selected have been chosen with a particular aim, namely that they feature male subjects as the person who will receive the makeover; hence episodes with female subjects have been excluded.

1.3 Method

This study concentrates on a particular linguistic feature, minimal responses, often given as a central characteristic of female speech. The researcher has listened carefully to the conversations of male homosexual interlocutors in multiparty, all-male conversation and in addition has identified and written down the instances of the singled out linguistic feature of male homosexual language from the TV-series and compared them to that of traditional male speech as described and defined in previous research. This method is adopted in order to see if homosexual men use this particular speech strategy, minimal responses, which is generally given as characteristic of female speech, and if so to attempt to show that homosexual men adhere to a different linguistic speech norm than do heterosexual men.

2. Theoretical background

This section deals with definitions and concepts which are of importance for the study. Therefore, it deals with concepts such as communication, conversation, speech strategies, and concludes with theories within male homosexual language.

2.1 Communication

According to *Collins Cobuilds Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (2006), to communicate is when you share or exchange information with someone, for example by speaking, writing, or using equipment. This means that to communicate is not only using words but it is much broader. Any way in which one can convey a message to someone else, whether it is via language, signs, sign language, letters, facial expressions or more is a way of communicating.

Oreström (1983) declares that the reason why communication takes place at all must be because a person wants some kind of response in return. Also it is the essence of human communication to pass on a message to another person for a reaction or comment; when something is said there is customarily an expectation that this message will be picked up, or at least acknowledged, by someone else. Furthermore, communication can vary in form from a non-verbal way of communicating, for example via body language, to verbal forms of communication of which one kind is conversation.

2.2 Conversation

In discourse there are, as many researches have pointed out and discussed, differences between how women and men conduct conversation (Coates, 2004; Graddol & Swann, 1989; Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1992; Trudgill, 2000). There are many definitions of what conversation is. According to *Collins Cobuilds Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (2006) conversation is when two or more people are talking together. This definition is not entirely clear. Implicitly it states that in order for a conversation to take place there needs to be at least two people interacting and exchanging information. This view is also supported by Trudgill (2000), although he goes into further detail. He states that the obvious aspect of conversation is that it is based on turn taking, and in every turn the main principle is that only one speaker talks at a time. He also makes an interesting comment about silence in English conversations; he states that after four seconds of silence the people involved in the conversation are uncomfortable and someone is more or less obligated to say something even if it is as trivial as a comment on the weather.

Oreström (1983) has an even more extensive definition of what conversation is: a conversation is “a speech event where a mutual exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, and emotions which takes place on a here-and-now level and is therefore both a social and psychological as well as a linguistic activity” (1983: 21). This means that the people involved not only determine the outcome of the conversation but also to a great extent what is being said and shared in a cooperative and shared frame of reference. Due to said definition a description of conversation must also include “both linguistic and non-linguistic criteria if it is to be meaningful, relevant, and comprehensive” (Oreström, 1983:21).

What is more, the human beings have a linguistic repertoire consisting of a set of linguistic behaviours which are applicable in different situations (Oreström, 1983). People use a certain speech strategy in their workplace, another one at home, a further kind with friends, and perhaps a special one with one’s significant other. All of these linguistic behaviours become a person’s communicative competence, and there are differences between men’s and women’s communicative competence (Coates, 2004).

2.2.1 Turn-taking in conversation

Oreström (1983) along with Sacks et.al (1974) claim that the cornerstone for conversation and what makes it function is to participate according to the turn-taking model, that is to allow the current speaker to finish his/her turn before engaging in the next turn. Oreström (1983) has further defined what constitutes a turn in conversation as follows: “the continuous period of time during which a person is talking” (1983:23). In male conversation there is a preference for speaking one-at-a-time and overlapped and interrupted turns are therefore unusual in all male conversation (Coates, 2004). Furthermore, men feel and regard overlapping speech as deviant and an undesirable effort to grab the floor and steal the authority away from the current speaker (Coates, 2004). This then means that men and women may come into conflict in regards of overlapping speech, which is common in the cooperative speech of women (Tannen, 1992). Nevertheless, overlapping speech does occur in all male conversation. It is used in specific settings such as gossip or when men become excited about a topic (Coates, 2004).

2.2.2 Simultaneous speech

In conversation the interlocutors have to be skilful to be able to interpret and time when a turn is coming to an end. In general people are good at timing their speech so it does not infringe on someone else’s speaking turn although sometimes this mechanism does not run smoothly.

It has been stated that since childhood people are taught to wait for their turn and not to interrupt when the adults are talking (Tannen, 1992). However, on some occasions there is a clash in conversation and simultaneous speech occurs; it can be perceived as an interruption and sometimes it can be seen as a collaborative overlap in speech between two or more interlocutors (Coates, 2004).

Overlaps are, as Coates (2004) defines it, when a speaker gets too eager to begin his/her speaking turn before the current speaker has finished his/her turn. It results in an overlap in speech where the speaker's final words are spoken simultaneously with the new speaker such as in the example below:

- (1) A: *I tried calling you several times last night but I **couldn't reach you.***
B: ***I know. I wasn't** available last night.*

Simultaneous speech can also occur as interruptions only then, they do not occur at the end of a speaking turn. Interruptions are used during a speaking turn, thus cutting off the current speaker, rendering him/her unable to finish his/her speaking turn (Coates, 2004).

- (2) A: *How very considerate of you to...!*
B: *Don't mention it. It is my pleasure. I'm happy to do it.*

Even if speaker B in this Example 2 is very polite it is still an interruption because speaker A had no chance to finish his/her turn.

Deborah Tannen (1992) discusses simultaneous speech and concludes that there exists a certain kind which functions as collaborative rather than as an interruption, namely overlaps. As long as an overlap brings the discussion forward, adding information to the topic at hand, it is not considered to be competitive but rather collaborative in nature. She also points to an interesting and important aspect when determining if simultaneous speech is an interruption or a collaborative overlap. One has to know a certain amount of the speakers involved and the context in order to be able to state if it is an interruption or something else. One might have to consider what the speakers are saying, how long they have been talking, do they know each other well, what are their preferences when it comes to being cut off, and most importantly, what is the second speaker trying to convey. It could be a supportive comment, reinforcement, a contradiction, and even a change of topic. It is important to take into consideration what the second speaker is trying to do.

In a conversation one should also consider the possibilities of different speakers' conversational style. Tannen (1992) describes two types of conversational styles. The first one is the so called high involvement speaker; he/she does not mind to take part in conversation

and being exposed to overlaps, rather they aid and push the conversation forward. Then there is the so called high considerateness speaker; he/she takes part in conversation with a polite and considerate approach and does not want to impose. When a conversation between a high involvement speaker and a high considerateness speaker takes place it is natural that the latter will feel interrupted and even feel discouraged in the conversation.

2.2.3 Minimal responses

In a situation where two or more interlocutors are engaging in conversation it is common that the one not holding the conversational floor may want to signal support of what is being said or that they are listening. This can be done by nodding your head, smiling, or giving a minimal response (Coates, 2004). A minimal response is what the word suggests; a small comment provided by the listener to signal continued attention, support, or agreement with what is discussed. Some frequently found minimal responses in conversations are: *mhm*, *yes*, *right*, *yeah*, *fine*, and *aha*. Oreström (1983) further explains how minimal responses are used. He states that minimal responses represent a significant function in conversation, namely that the listener has understood and received the message from the speaker. They could also function as direct feedback. He further explains that the speaker in conversation rarely, if ever, comments on the minimal responses given, but they are however important for the continuing flow of interaction between the interlocutors. If minimal responses were totally absent in conversation it could cause the speaker to wonder if he/she is being listened to or if the conversation has ended.

Minimal responses can be found in both male and female conversations, although researchers have found that men and women might both use and interpret them differently (Bennett and Jarvis, 1991; Coates, 2004; Graddol & Swann, 1989). According to Bennett & Jarvis (1991) interpreting Maltz and Borker (1982) for women use minimal responses are used as a way of signalling by the listener that they are still attending to the message and a desire that the current speaker should go on speaking, whereas for men it is often a stronger statement. Men often use minimal responses to show that they in fact agree with the speaker or that they follow the argument so far. It is also stated by Coates (2004) that research findings are unanimous in having concluded that women use minimal responses far more extensively than men do. Women further use minimal responses, aside from signalling listenership and support, as a recognition of different stages in a conversation.

They could be used to accept a new topic or acknowledge the end of a topic as in the fictitious example below:

(Three women are discussing hot male actors on TV or in films)

- (3) A: *The guy from Gray's Anatomy is the hottest actor on TV.*
B: *...No! Brad Pitt is definitively the hottest guy on TV.*
C: ***Mhm***, *I couldn't agree more. He's just so fine.*
A: ***OK***, *we won't be able to agree here, let's just agree to disagree.*
B: ***Yeah!***
C: ***Fine!***

Note how both speaker B and speaker C are in agreement that they will not be able to come further in this conversation and therefore they agree to move on to another topic.

There are further uses of minimal responses but they do not necessarily function as support but rather as a way of interrupting or stopping the flow of a conversation. To use a minimal response in this way is called a delayed minimal response (Coates, 2004).

2.2.3.1 Delayed minimal responses

Sometimes in conversation a minimal response is uttered with a delay in time, in effect too late. Either the listener fails to comply with a minimal response right after the speakers turn or the listener does it voluntarily. Either way the result may be that the conversation falters and the listener ruins the momentum of the speaker, thus perhaps ending the speaking turn of the current speaker (Oreström, 1983). In Example 4 below the listener adds minimal responses at inappropriate times causing speaker A to feel interrupted.

- (4) A: *As you can see here there are no signs of vital loss in revenue despite the fact that we are*
B: ***Right***
A: *experiencing some hard financial times (pause) and...!*
B: ***some, hard financial times.***
A: *I'm sorry but you are really interrupting me.*

According to Coates (2004) the reasons behind a delayed minimal response can be a lack of understanding or a lack of interest in what the speaker is saying. Furthermore, delayed minimal responses can be used to interrupt the current speaker in order to get the conversational floor oneself. Coates (2004) also points out that it is primarily men who use delayed minimal responses in conversation and not women.

2.2.4 Interruptions

There are a great number on instances when simultaneous speech does not interfere with the current speaker's turn, for example minimal responses or collaborative overlaps. However, sometimes simultaneous speech does not occur smoothly, but it can occur in the form of an interruption. Oreström (1983) offers a useful definition of interruptions and maintains that it must include two elements. Firstly, an interruption contains an intrusion on the current speaker's turn; secondly, this intrusion has to result in an interference or disturbance of the current speaker's turn as in Example 5 below:

(5) A: *I have a great suggestion for what we...!*

B: ***I don't** want to know, your suggestions are always lame.*

Men and women have different perceptions of what could be interpreted as an interruption. According to Tannen (1992) men often perceive women's minimal responses and overlaps in conversation as interruptions. A man will see them as a way for the woman to try to take control over the conversation when actually she is only trying to contribute to the flow of conversation by showing attentiveness and support what is being said. Men however see conversations as contests and therefore they often occupy the conversational floor in mixed sex conversation. Women are then denied overlaps and minimal responses when talking to men because they do not fit into the conversational style. Furthermore, women are less likely to take on an adversarial conversational style; hence they are less likely to fight for their right to be heard, this, then minimises their speaking time in mixed sex conversations (Tannen, 1992).

2.2.5 Hogging the floor – a male characteristic

In conversation men tend to extend their turns and by doing so they prevent other speakers from entering the speaker floor (Coates, 2004). Men have been taught since childhood to use language in a way to get and maintain attention thus enabling them to feel comfortable speaking in a large group of people they might not know well (Tannen, 1992). This also ties in with the generalisation that most men use talk first and foremost as a way of preserving independence and to “negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order” (Tannen, 1992:75). Just as Coates (2004) points out men prefer to and feel secure in playing the expert in a conversation. They have no problem with conducting a monologue where they state facts and are allowed to be the authority on a given subject. The other interlocutors (in this case men) have no problem waiting for their turn to grab the floor and play the expert. To be the

expert and have monologues where men strive to maintain the upper hand in conversation adds to, and enables men's use of an adversarial speech style (Coates, 2004).

2.3 Speech styles

There are two major speech styles in conversation: a competitive and cooperative one. They denote different speech strategies in conversation (Coates, 2004). It is proven by researchers that women strive to use a cooperative style of speech whereas men use a competitive style when speaking (Coates, 2004; Tannen, 1992). The reasons why are numerous but according to Deborah Tannen (1992) it is due to the way men and women are brought up and raised. Men live in a world where there is a hierarchical social order. They are taught to conduct conversations as "negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can" (1992: 24-25). Women on the other hand think of themselves as individuals in a social network. In this network conversations are "negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus" (1992: 25). Given this explanation it is not unreasonable to believe that women and men communicate and use speech strategies differently.

2.3.1 Competitive speech

To use a competitive speech style is traditionally ascribed to men (Coates, 2004; Graddol & Swann, 1989; Tannen, 1992). In competitive talk one of the features is to maintain the one-at-a-time speaking paradigm, that is men attempt to refrain from infringing on someone else's speaking turn (Coates, 2004). Men would rather not have another interlocutor overlapping his speech or interrupting him, even if it were in a collaborative fashion. It all comes back to men's favoured way of interacting from childhood (Tannen, 1992). Further features of competitive speech are hogging the floor, interrupting, dominating, and generally trying to maintain the balance of power in a conversation (Coates, 2004; Tannen, 1992).

2.3.2 Cooperative speech

To use a cooperative speech style is traditionally ascribed to women (Coates, 2004; Tannen, 1992). Cooperativeness in speech is when one or several interlocutors enable other interlocutors to participate in conversation with no perceivable aim to control the conversation, that is the interlocutors strive to take part in a conversation on equal terms (Coates, 2004). Additionally, it also seeks to make the interlocutors feel a sense of connection and security in conversation.

Other features of cooperative speech are to provide minimal responses to ensure one is listening, using tag-questions as a way of incorporating other speakers into the conversation, and talking about topics which are of personal nature in order to promote closeness (Coates, 2004).

2.3.2.1 Collaborative floor – a female characteristic

When women are engaged in informal, friendly conversation, be it two women or more, they are likely to adopt a conversational style which Coates (2004) calls a jam session. She equates a female conversation to the jam session of Jazz musicians. In this session every participant may contribute to the conversation, building on previous topics and contributions, in order to create new and interesting topics to discuss. If the interlocutors' speech overlap that is by no means a problem, it may in fact be corroborative and contribute even further to the closeness that the speakers promote in the jam session. Also in the conversation minimal responses are frequent. They are used as supportive comments when someone is talking; either they function as a way to let the current speaker know that one is listening or they function as a confirmation for what has just been said (Coates, 2004), as in Example 6:

- (6) A: *I was out walking and then something weird happened!*
B: *aha*
A: *A bird came flying towards me! /and it almost hit me in the face.*
B: *No!*

Women in the jam session-setting are not set out to try to establish leadership; they do not try to get the upper hand, if anything the purpose of this setting is to achieve solidarity, companionship and friendship (Tannen, 1992).

2.4 Male homosexual speech

The speech of the male homosexual may not be different from that of the male heterosexual, although it could also be very different. According to Leap (1996) it has much to do with the context of where the speech is produced. In all male homosexual settings the speech will differ from a setting with homosexuals and heterosexuals. The speech may also vary if women are present. Furthermore, Leap (1996) has tried to identify the speakers of male homosexual language and the result is uncertain. He says that male homosexuals are a “diverse and fluid social category” (1996: XIX). Even though these speakers may share familiarities of the gay community and the language it elicits, they may have little else in common. There is a great number of social factors which may interfere with a person's use of

language for example where you live, age, ethnicity, occupation and therefore it is difficult to state what male homosexual language is (Leap, 1996).

Trying to define male homosexual language is not a straightforward task but there are advantages in trying to define it. It is argued that male homosexual language creates a sense of affinity to the gay community; it is easier to be accepted by other gay men (Leap, 1996). In this sense male homosexual language would provide a set of features which would be accessible for further research. The perceived reasons why it is difficult to define male homosexual language is that research is yet in its very early stage (started in the 1990s) and one may very well not find an extensive, conclusive set of features that can be exclusively ascribed to male homosexuals. There are features which have been ascribed to homosexual men such as the use of lexical items, previously defined by Lakoff (1975) as female characteristics, for instance empty adjectives (adjectives which do not assert themselves; do not carry a strong formal meaning), hedges (which is a strategy used to distance oneself from an utterance in order to respect someone's negative face needs). Also it is supposed that homosexual men are sensitive to hypercorrect pronunciation and use a wider pitch-range than heterosexual men (Barret in Livia & Hall, 1997). These features are not exclusive to male homosexuals and they are further context influenced. They may very well be used by male homosexuals to a great extent but they may also be used by other social groups.

Research has shown (Leap, 1996; Kulick, 2000) that supposed male homosexual language cannot be identified as a set of lexical terms or linguistic features of binary oppositions as in male and female speech. Early, previous research has tried extensively to do so. In the very early stages of research in this field, Queer Theory (Kulick, 2000), one has tried to find a set of features of male homosexual language in order to identify it when it is heard. There have been glossaries and dictionaries where male homosexual vocabulary has been defined. They have however, not been long-lived. The reason why, according to Kulick (2000), is that there is no such thing as gay or lesbian language. He states that just because self-identified gay men or lesbians use language in particular ways in certain contexts it is not the equivalent to say that there exists a gay or lesbian language. Even William Leap (1996), who is one of the leading and most extensive researchers in this area, has posed doubts about finding a universal and extensive set of features which will in fact determine and state what male homosexual language is. He has nevertheless managed to chart some features that are ascribed to male homosexual speech such as cooperativeness in male homosexual speech. Cooperativeness is also a distinctive feature of female speech; hence it is argued that some features of male homosexual speech are similar to that of women's speech.

2.4.1 Cooperativeness in male homosexual speech

Much as in female conversation, male homosexual conversationalists use a cooperative way of speaking, they also use overlaps and minimal responses in order to maintain cooperativeness in speech (Leap, 1996). Furthermore, male homosexuals use even more features to ensure cooperativeness in gay discourse such as exaggerated language, gay-oriented metaphor and innuendo, and references to prominent gay characters and events in history (Leap, 1996). These, sometime, obscure gay references are optional to pick up by any listener that is present; it is up to the listener if he is willing to shift away from the conventional frame of reference and move into the gay centred co-constructed discourse.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) interpreted by Barret (in Livia & Hall, 1997) gay men use positive politeness strategies, such as exaggeration (including exaggerated intonation), the use of in-group lexical slang and words, and the use of hedges, to indicate solidarity in male homosexual speech. It is further suggested that positive politeness strategies are used to create a unified social identity in the company of gay men from divergent backgrounds.

2.4.2 Fear of being outed

Male homosexual speech is, according to Leap (1996), a language of risk; everywhere one goes there is always the risk of being detected as a suspect gay due to one's language use. Because of this male homosexuals tend to shift their speech from gay oriented co-constructed speech to conventional speech, that is speech that is not risking giving away their sexuality. However, if a homosexual man does suspect another man to be gay he can then invite him to the conversation by using seemingly undetectable gay references which are not necessarily detectable by heterosexual men. By using gay references covertly it enables male homosexuals to detect other male homosexuals in heterosexual settings without the risk of putting themselves out there and exposing their sexuality (Barret in Livia & Hall, 1997). This, then, adds to the cooperativeness in male homosexual speech.

3 Analysis

In this section the results of the study of minimal responses are presented and analysed; firstly per episode and secondly collectively. Furthermore, the characters in *Queer Eye* are also analysed.

The show features five gay men, each with their own special expertise in doing makeovers of individuals. The five main characters are set out to do a makeover of a person, more often than not a straight man. In each episode they radically change the person's wardrobe, the decoration of his/her home, and they collectively offer tips and ideas on grooming, lifestyle, and food. The show plays on the stereotype that gay men are superior when it comes to fashion, style, personal grooming, interior design, and culture.

The Fab Five, which is the five main characters collective nickname, consists of Ted Allen who is the food and wine connoisseur; Kyan Douglas who is the expert on grooming and personal hygiene; Thom Filicia who is the expert on interior design and organizing one's home; Carson Kressley who is the expert on fashion and personal styling; Jai Rodriguez who is the final member of the Fab Five, he is the expert on popular culture, relationships, and social interaction.

3.1 Minimal responses

In all of the episodes studied a total of 110 minimal responses were found. Some minimal responses are far more common than others, for example *yeah* and *right*. *Yeah* is used by all of the characters whereas *absolutely* is only used by two characters (Carson and Thom). All of the minimal responses are used in a collaborative way in order to signal listener support for the current speaker, that is there are no delayed minimal responses in any of the episodes, which instead would indicate a lack of understanding or support. The conversations analysed between the members of the Fab Five are all friendly, cooperative and seemingly aimed to promote closeness, happiness and a good time in general.

3.1.1 Episode 17, season 3

This episode revolves around a fraternity called the Huntington Moose Lodge on Long Island, New York. It consists primarily of men and they collect money for charity; providing funds and suitable living arrangements for children who are underprivileged so they can get an education and provide for themselves in the future.

The Fab Five helps the fraternity to throw a charity to raise money and at the same time they redecorate the lodge and restyle twelve of the members.

In Table 1 all the minimal responses are collected and presented both collectively and individually. Minimal responses which are uttered in conversation where there is a woman participating are consciously neglected.

Table 1: Minimal responses episode 17

Name:		Kyan	Thom	Carson	Ted	Jay
Minimal Responses		<i>ok</i>	<i>yeah</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>oh</i>
		<i>right</i>	<i>yeah</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>all right</i>	<i>what</i>
		<i>that's amazing</i>	<i>oh</i>	<i>aha</i>	<i>oh my God</i>	<i>uh</i>
		<i>yeah</i>	<i>yeah</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>totally</i>	<i>yes</i>
		<i>woo</i>	<i>oh</i>	<i>wow</i>		<i>yes</i>
		<i>I know</i>	<i>wow</i>	<i>wow</i>		<i>yeah</i>
		<i>oh</i>	<i>yeah</i>	<i>sure</i>		<i>yeah</i>
		<i>aah</i>	<i>absolutely</i>	<i>yeah</i>		
Total per character		8	8	8	4	7
Total amount:	35					
% per character	100%	≈22,9%	≈22,9%	≈22,9%	≈11,4%	20,0%

In total there are 35 instances of minimal responses and they are relatively evenly spread out amongst Kyan, Thom, Carson, and Jay. Ted on the other hand only uttered minimal responses four (4) times in this episode. To account for that low amount a possible reason might be that Ted is not present as much as the other members in this episode. Normally he prepares a meal together with the subject but in this episode there are twelve subjects and the meal was already pre-prepared, hence Ted does not cook the meal together with any of the subjects.

Most of the minimal responses are uttered when there is an appropriate pause in the conversation (albeit very slight) and then the conversation continues undisturbed as below:

- (7) Member: *This is a picture and it is a representation of the children at Moose Heart./ /Every night*
 Kyan : *oh*
 Member: *...they say their prayers at 9 o'clock./*
 Kyan: *aah* (Queer Eye episode 17, season 3)

Minimal responses do not have to occur at appropriate pauses in conversation, they can also occur as in the following conversation:

- (8) Stephen: *Our main two functions are to help Moose Hearts and Moose Haven which are...*
 Carson: *aha*
 Stephen: *...the main two fraternal bodies in our organisation.*
 Carson: *ok* (Queer Eye episode 17, season 3)

Stephen (governor of the Huntington Moose Lodge) is explaining what the fraternity does and Carson provides two minimal responses which are uttered simultaneously as Stephen's speech. The minimal responses in Example 8 signal that Carson is paying attention and he understands what is being explained to him, and most importantly they do not interrupt the momentum of the speaker, they imply that Carson is attentive and interested in what Stephen is saying.

In this episode there is a variety of minimal responses used and the most re-occurring ones are *yeah*, which was the most re-occurring one in this episode, *yeah* is uttered eight (8) times (22,9%); *oh* is uttered four (4) times (11,4%); *ok*, *yes*, and, *wow* are uttered three (3) times each (8,6% respectively). Furthermore, *absolutely*, *oh my God*, and *that's amazing* are uttered once (1) each (2,9% respectively).

Interestingly there are no instances of the minimal response *mhm* in this episode, although it is mentioned to be one of the most commonly used minimal responses in conversation (Bennett & Jarvis, 1991; Coates, 2004; Oreström, 1983; Graddol & Swann, 1989). A probable explanation could be that if *mhm* is uttered in this episode it is when the sample was not valid, that is when a woman was a part of, or present, in the conversation. Other than that there are no perceivable reasons why such a supposedly common minimal response should not be occurring.

3.1.2 Episode 10, season 4

This episode is placed in New York and the subjects are the Rotondo family; three generations of Rotondo men, where the two youngest need to start taking care of their loved ones better. The Fab Five is styling all three of the Rotondo men but they only redecorate Peter senior's home.

In Table 2 all the minimal responses are collected and presented both collectively and individually. Minimal responses which are uttered in conversation where there is a woman participating are consciously neglected.

Table 2: Minimal responses episode 10

Name:		Kyan	Thom	Carson	Ted	Jay
Minimal Responses		<i>exactly</i> <i>right on</i> <i>hey</i> <i>right x 7</i> <i>wow</i> <i>that's right</i>	<i>right</i>	<i>totally</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>right</i> <i>aha</i> <i>aha</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>right</i> <i>mhm</i>	<i>woo</i> <i>wow</i> <i>oh my God</i> <i>ah</i> <i>yeah</i>	<i>yeah</i> <i>aha</i> <i>no</i>
Total per character		12	1	9	5	3
Total amount:	30					
In % per character	100%	40,0%	3,3%	30,0%	16,7%	10,0%

There are 30 minimal responses collected from this episode and surprisingly, Thom only uttered one (1) minimal response in this episode. He did however, utter minimal responses in

conversation where there were women present. Furthermore, in this episode Thom does not do much listening instead he does explain and inform matters to the subjects and such talk might not elicit minimal responses as much.

Kyan uses the minimal response *right* seven (7) times and in one conversation he uses it five (5) times. Kyan is also the character to use the most minimal responses (12) in this episode, he appears significantly in the conversations and he does much listening which does elicit minimal responses. In the following conversation, Example 9, one can see how Kyan uses the minimal response *right* to show that he is listening, understanding, and agreeing to what is being said, Jay is also a listener in this conversation and he provides one (1) minimal response followed by overlapping speech.

- (9) Peter: *I guess you can consider me a mama's boy,/ /but I am proud of it because / /if I'm not...*
 Kyan: *right right*
 Peter: *obviously I prefer being with a woman/ /and having a regularly life but in the meantime...*
 Kyan: *right right*
 Peter: *...the unconditional love that my mother gives every woman engaged in a relationship*
 Kyan: *right*
 Jay: *yeah, it is very satisfying.*
 Peter: *... /pause/ there would be no divorces.* (*Queer Eye* episode 10, season 4)

Kyan places the minimal responses at appropriate times when there are slight pauses in the conversation. Kyan possesses, just as Coates (2004) points out, the skill of being able to time the minimal responses much like women do. Although Kyan has one minimal response which is uttered simultaneously as Peter's speech but it does not disrupt the flow of conversation.

Carson is also a great contributor to the category of minimal responses. He uses nine (9) in this episode including *mhm* once (1). Carson, much like Kyan, appears in conversation a great deal and listens in on many conversations. With regards to the absence of the minimal response *mhm* in these results one may assume that these particular five characters do not, seemingly, use the minimal response *mhm* as listeners are stipulated to do according to previous research (Bennett & Jarvis, 1991; Coates, 2004; Oreström, 1983; Graddol & Swann, 1989).

3.1.3 Episode 11, season 4

This episode is also placed in New York and deals with a married couple who are having problems after just nine months of marriage. Ron is the husband and the subject of the episode, he is a doctor and he is lacking in the domestic as well as in the romantic department.

In Table 3 all the minimal responses are collected and presented both collectively and individually. Minimal responses which are uttered in conversation where there is a woman participating are consciously neglected.

Table 3: Minimal responses episode 11

Name:		Kyan	Thom	Carson	Ted	Jay
Minimal Responses		<i>yeah</i> <i>ok</i> <i>right x 5</i> <i>no</i>	<i>yeah x 8</i> <i>really</i> <i>oh</i>	<i>ok</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>absolutely</i> <i>right</i> <i>ok</i> <i>perfect</i> <i>oh stop</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>yeah</i>	<i>yeah</i> <i>ok</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>of course</i> <i>exactly</i> <i>ok</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>woo</i>	<i>yeah</i> <i>right</i> <i>good</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>oh my God</i> <i>yeah</i> <i>ok</i> <i>ok</i>
Total per character		8	10	9	9	9
Total amount:	45					
In % per character	100%	17,8%	22,2%	20,0%	20,0%	20,0%

This episode contained the most instances of minimal responses (45) and they were evenly contributed amongst all the members of the Fab Five. In this episode Thom utters ten (10) compared with one (1) minimal response in the previous episode, and a majority of them (80%) is the minimal response *yeah*. In this episode Thom is more present in conversation and in listening activities. Furthermore, there is an overwhelming amount of the minimal response *yeah* in this episode, a total of 19 instances (42,2%). In the following conversation, Example 10, all the members of the Fab Five are discussing the subject, Ron, and trying to come to a conclusion of what needs to be done.

(10) Ted: *We have got to put some spark back into this marriage.*

Kyan: *yeah!*

Jay: *yeah!*

Carson: *We've got to get this doctor operating!*

Thom: *Yeah!*

Jay: *Yeah!*

Kyan: *Yeah!*

Ted: *Woo!* (Queer Eye episode 11, season 4)

It is clear that everyone is in agreement in this conversation. All of the interlocutors are supportive and concur with what is being suggested.

According to the results the minimal response *Oh my God* is used only by Ted (2 times) and Jay (1 time). *Oh my God* is a minimal response which one would probably use in order to show amazement or that one is taken by surprise. This, then, indicates that the characters of the Fab Five are not participating in conversations that elicit a surprise reaction and therefore minimal responses of this kind are uncommon.

3.1.4 Overall analysis of minimal responses

The use of minimal responses is noteworthy in these samples. In Table 4 one can see how many instances of minimal responses there are as well as who utters them.

Table 4: The total use of minimal responses

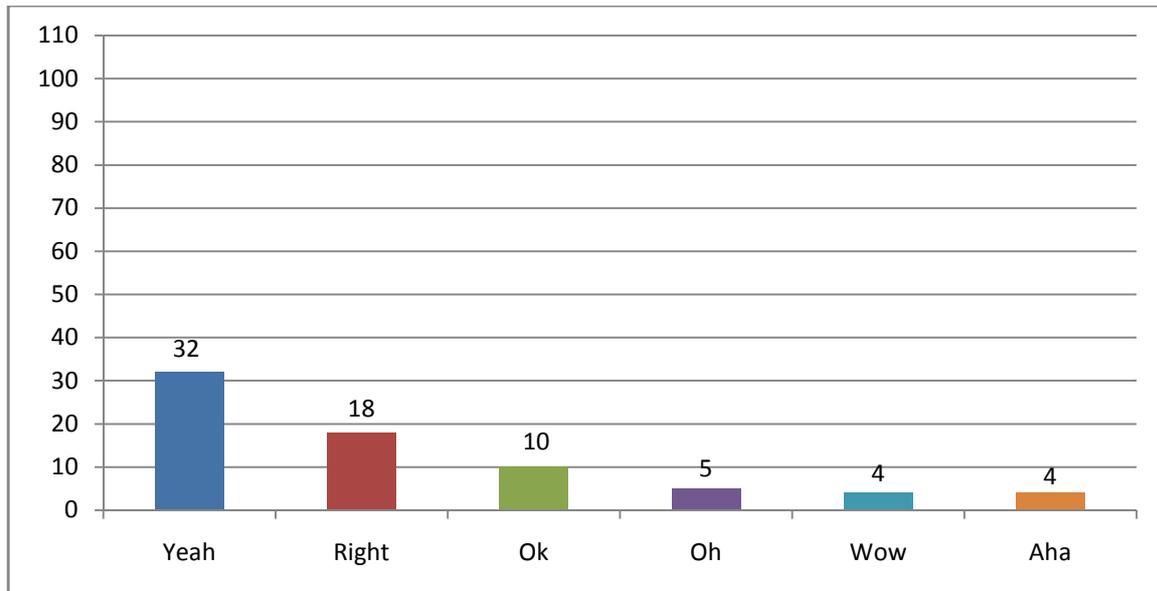
Name:		Kyan	Thom	Carson	Ted	Jay
Minimal Responses		<i>right x 13</i> <i>ok x 2</i> <i>yeah x 2</i> <i>that's amazing</i> <i>woo</i> <i>I know</i> <i>oh</i> <i>aah</i> <i>exactly</i> <i>right on</i> <i>hey</i> <i>wow</i> <i>that's right</i> <i>no</i>	<i>yeah x 12</i> <i>oh x 3</i> <i>wow</i> <i>absolutely</i> <i>right</i> <i>really</i>	<i>yeah x 7</i> <i>ok x 4</i> <i>right x 3</i> <i>aha x 3</i> <i>wow x 2</i> <i>what</i> <i>sure</i> <i>totally</i> <i>mhm</i> <i>absolutely</i> <i>perfect</i> <i>oh stop</i>	<i>yeah x 4</i> <i>oh my God x 2</i> <i>ok x 2</i> <i>woo x 2</i> <i>yes</i> <i>all right</i> <i>totally</i> <i>wow</i> <i>ah</i> <i>of course</i> <i>exactly</i>	<i>yeah x 7</i> <i>yes x 2</i> <i>ok x 2</i> <i>oh</i> <i>what</i> <i>uh</i> <i>aha</i> <i>no</i> <i>right</i> <i>good</i> <i>oh my God</i>
Total per character		28	19	27	17	19
Total amount:	110					
In % per character	100%	25,4%	17,3%	24,5%	15,5%	17,3%

Kyan and Carson are the primary users of minimal responses according to the results. Kyan utters 28 (25,4%) of the minimal responses whereas Carson utters 27 (24,5%). Reasons as to why Kyan and Carson have such a relatively high frequency of minimal responses could be, just as Tannen (1992) describes, that they are high involvement speakers. Although from what can be observed from the samples none of the members of the Fab Five shy away from conversation and certainly none of them seem to be modest. It could also be due to the amount of time the individual characters are on camera; how much of the material of each individual are actually shown on the show. It is not likely that each and every individual have the exact same amount of time on camera and the same number of conversations. Further reasons have to do with the difficulties of transcribing what the individuals say. At times

much of the conversation occurs simultaneously and therefore some of the dialogue is muffled.

Some minimal responses are far more common than others. *Yeah*, *right*, *ok*, *oh*, *aha*, and, *wow* are the most frequent ones (see Graph 1).

Graph 1: Top six minimal responses



The minimal response *yeah* is the commonest with 32 instances (29,0%), then *right* with 18 instances (16,4%) and *ok* with 10 instances (9,1%). The result is indicating that *yeah* is a reoccurring minimal response in conversation and it is consistent with previous research (Coates, 2004; Graddol & Swann, 1989). *Yeah* in conversation is probably common because it shows that one is listening, paying attention, and it does not stand out if being said, that is a speaker would probably not react to the minimal response *yeah* when being uttered, and it does not elicit any kind of surprise reaction from the speaker. Furthermore, *yeah* is a versatile minimal response; it can be used to show support, that one is paying attention, direct feedback, or that one shows an interest. The versatility of *yeah* could be argued to be the likely reason why *yeah* occurs as often as it does.

On the other end of the continuum there are minimal responses that only occur once for example, *perfect*, *of course*, *mhm*, and *sure*. A possible account for the few instances of these minimal responses, except from *mhm*, can be that they, on a semantic level, denote a restricted reaction from the listener. For instance, *perfect* would probably be less used in order to show that you are listening and that one is following the conversation; it would rather be used in order to show agreement and that one thinks the speaker is making a correct statement or

conclusion. However, that does not account for the few instances (1) of the minimal response *mhm* which is said to be one of the commonest minimal responses according to previous research (Coates, 2004; Oreström, 1983). *Mhm* does not denote a restricted reaction from the listener; it could also be seen to be, just as *yeah*, a versatile minimal response. According to the results of the present investigation *mhm* is seemingly not a common minimal response in male homosexual speech. Nevertheless, it could also be said that the primary material is not sufficient enough to make such a claim.

As mentioned Kyan and Carson use minimal responses more than Ted, Thom, and Jay. Ted is the one member of the Fab Five who uses the fewest instances of minimal responses. It could be explained by the fact that much of Ted's contributions in conversation are of such kind which would not elicit minimal responses on his behalf, namely he offers instructions and explains much to the subjects, rather than listening and chipping in on other's conversations. Furthermore, it could be argued that given the prevailing stereotypes of what a male homosexual man is supposed to do, not only in terms of appearance, Ted does not fit that category as well as the other ones. Therefore, he might not behave according to stereotypes such as exaggerated behaviour, high pitched voice, and certain feminine behaviour, including female speech strategies, vis-à-vis Ted might not be perceived to be as stereotypically homosexual as the other members of the Fab Five.

There are a total of 110 minimal responses in this study and it is difficult to state if these results are to be seen as being high or low, because there seem to be no studies of exactly this kind conducted to compare with. Nevertheless, the minimal responses are produced by men and according to research men do not use minimal responses as much as women (Coates, 2004). Therefore, due to the seemingly relative extensive amount of minimal responses found in the present investigation one could conclude that male homosexuals do at least favour minimal responses, which are said to be a female speech strategy, (Coates, 2004; Graddol & Swann, 1989) and consequently the results indicate that the prejudice that male homosexuals use at least this female speech strategy is true.

4. Conclusion

There are many prejudices regarding homosexual men. These prejudices could be about how they walk, what they do, but also about how they speak. It is a common stereotype that homosexual men are feminine and speak like women do. These stereotypes are however not all true, but they prevail in society as long as people are uninformed and unwilling to contradict these stereotypes.

What might be said to be true about these stereotypes is that male homosexuals tend to adopt a certain female speech strategy namely, cooperativeness in speech, including hedges, overlapping speech, and minimal responses (Leap, 1996). Furthermore, stereotypes such as exaggerated speech, pitch variation, hypercorrect pronunciation, and femininity cannot be ascribed exclusively to homosexual men, because there are men who are feminine but not necessarily homosexual.

In the light of the results of this study of the use of minimal responses it is indicated and reasonable to assume that male homosexual men at least use this particular speech strategy in conversation with other homosexual men; and then, it is fair to propose that male homosexuals use female speech strategies which subsequently points to the conclusion that male homosexual men use, to a certain degree, other speech strategies than do heterosexual men. As the results of this study indicate, namely that homosexual men tend to use the female speech strategy minimal responses in all-male multiparty conversation, it is then probable to assume that male homosexuals also might use other female speech strategies in conversation as pointed out by Leap (1996). Nevertheless, it might not be sufficient to make such an assumption solely based on the indication that homosexual men use minimal responses in all-male multiparty conversation. The amount of research in the field of Queer theory is still rather limited and there need to be further studies conducted in order to be able to make stronger statements regarding male homosexual speech and how it is used.

List of references

Primary Material:

Queer Eye, Season 3, episode 17: *Expose the Moose for Charity: Stephen G.* (44:20 min) First aired: 1/17/2006 for the Bravo cable television network.

Queer Eye, Season 4, episode 10: *Enroll this Trifecta in Domestic Boot Camp: Rotondo family.* (43:58 min) First aired 8/8/2006 for the Bravo cable television network.

Queer Eye, Season 4, episode 11: *Turn Dr. Dud into Dr. Stud: Ron B.* (44:22 min) First aired: 8/15/2006 for the Bravo cable television network.

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