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"I'm METRO, NOT Gay!": A Discursive Analysis of Men's Accounts of Makeup Use on YouTube

The last two decades have seen a marked increase in men's self-presentation practices and the creation of a new identity category: "metr osexual" (Simpson, 1994, 2002). Here we examine men's makeup use, considered one of the more extreme indicators of "metrosexuality" (Harrison, 2008). We deploy a discursive analytic approach informed in particular by membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992) to examine male makeup users' responses to a young man's online makeup tutorial posted on YouTube. *In particular we focus on how the video cr eator and the respondents design and manage the accounts of their activities, paying particular attention to those gendered norms and categories invoked. What we find is that when contributors endorse or reference cosmetic use they invariably attempt to inoculate themselves against potential charges of being "gay"; our analysis highlights the strategies used to manage gender and sexual identities. In addition, we discuss the implications of the analysis for mapping contemporary masculinities.*

Keywords: makeup use, metrosexuality, masculinity, discourse analysis, online identities

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Modern men, it seems, are fascinated with their appearance, investing time and money in their personal appearance, through diet and lifestyle choices, fitness regimes, and the purchase of consumer goods, including clothing, accessories, and cosmetics. Between 2002 and 2006, the UK market for men's grooming products tripled to £781m (Mintel, 2007). Britain's second-largest beauty and health retailer Superdrug (2010) estimates the current male grooming market to be "worth an estimated £1.2 billion a year in the UK" (p. 1). Even in the current economic climate, analysts are forecasting

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a healthy 5 percent growth rate in the market (Mintel, 2010). Moreover, Superdrug (1) claims that men are now dedicating "83 minutes of every day to their personal grooming" (p. 1), some four minutes longer than the average woman' s daily beautification regime. It seems then that this trend is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. The change in men's self-presentation practices has seen the emer gence of the term "metrosexual" (Simpson, 1994, 2002) as a label for these men. In light of such trends, we examine one of the more extreme examples of metrosexual activity—cosmetics use (Harrison, 2008). In particular, we examine the way men who use cosmetics discuss their use of such products in response to an online makeup tutorial on *YouTube*. Drawing on a selection of the 334 written posts to a makeup tutorial, we focus on the design and management of these responses, with reference to the gendered norms and identities invoked.

Our aims then in this paper are twofold. Firstly, by examining a selection of men's own accounts of their use of cosmetics we aim to contribute to the emer gent body of literature on "metrosexuality." The majority of studies on this phenomenon have been largely theoretical. For example, Miller (2006, 2009) studied trends in men' s consumption practices in the U.S. suggesting that these had has been brought about by a political-economic shift in the labour market, one in which employers have commodified the male body. Coad (2008), on the other hand, argued that the marketing of high profile sports celebrities, such as international footballer David Beckham and Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe, are responsible for encouraging heterosexual men to "engage in practices stereotypically associated with femininity and homosexuality, such as care for appearance and the latest fashion trends" (p. 73). However, he goes one step further by arguing that "metrosexuality" challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Because beautification and self-care have been conventionally associated with gay men and women, heterosexual "metrosexuality" represents a move beyond the constrictive bipolar categorizations masculine/feminine and hetero/homo. The impact of "metrosexuality" on gender and sexualities was a theme taken up by Carniel's (2009) study of "metrosexuality" and Australian soccer. She found that although men were now more image-conscious, spurred on by the consumption practices of sporting celebrities, masculinities on display were in ef fect hybridizations of existing masculinities. In other words: "While metrosexuality re-socializes men as consumers, it does not necessarily alter other fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 81) because existing discourses of masculinity which favour heterosexuality, strength, violence, risk taking and so on are still readily available and frequently drawn upon.

Nothwithstanding the insights into metrosexual phenomena offered by these studies, we know little how self-identified "metrosexuals" construct this identity for themselves. Furthermore, these studies they are lar gely analyst-centered sociological interpretations of the phenomenon, presenting "metrosexuality" as a predefined given. We, on the other hand, take a different stance i.e., that identity categories, such as "metrosexual," are an "emergent feature" of social interactions (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stokoe, 2003, 2010; West & Fenstermaker, 1993). From this perspective, identity is not presumed in advance of analysis; rather identities and identity characteristics only becomes relevant if the participants within the interaction make it so. In other words,

fancy dress, drag and other such activities, is considered one of the more extreme forms of men's grooming (Harrison, 2008, p. 57), we selected one particular video that displayed a young man taking viewers through his daily makeup routine. This video was the most popular non-make-up artist tutorials, boasting a total of 30,133 views (and average of 35 a day since November 2008) along with 334 written comments (as of 03/05/11). Of those comments from self-identified cosmetic users, seven were particularly interesting for the ways in which they used makeup or accounted for makeup use by drawing on typical masculine markers such as heterosexual prowess.

As with other online sites, *YouTube* provides viewers with the ability to engage with the material they encounter through the computer-mediated communication channels—text and video comments. These allow viewers to write comments on, rate, and make video responses to their favorite videos, whilst also providing the maker(s) of the videos with a means to respond to viewer's questions. The use of this type of video material in ethnomethodological research poses the problem of "data reproducibility" as, unlike written texts, it cannot be reproduced on the printed page. Francis and Hart (1997) highlight this issue:

> A distinctive feature of ethnomethodology and conversation analytic inquiry is a commitment to the reproduction of materials, in order that fine grained analysis may be conducted in a way which provides the reader with access to the detail of the phenomena. (p. 124)

Although this has the potential to raise concerns over the veracity of our analysis, since we cannot reproduce the video in this paper for readers to see, this issue is avoided within this particular analytical inquiry since our focus of the research is directed to the written and reproducible comments of the viewers.

Following the British Psychological Society's *Guidelines for ethical practice in psychological research online* (2007), the relevant university approved ethics and Rodham and Gavin (2006), we anonymised the online talk by removing personal tags and replacing them with "video creator" (VC) and "respondent" (R1-7).We did this in order to avoid disclosing personal details since some respondents'and the video creator have hyperlinks to their own *YouTube* webpage. However, personal consent was not sought since our data is publically available and the majority of respondents provided no contact details. We present the extracts of talk in full as they appear on *YouTube* including spelling mistakes, colloquial language and other electronic forms of notation (e.g., underscores), albeit with the addition of line numbers for ease of analysis.

METHOD

Starts here

In analyzing the electronic talk, we identified one main issue for the video creator and the respondents. The number of orientations to heterosexual status ("speaking as a straight guy"; "I'm METRO, NOT gay," etc.), suggest a concern that cosmetic use might attract charges of homosexuality. In each example we analysed how the respondents worked up, orientated to, and managed their descriptions in relation to gendered norms and identities, identifying the significance of discursive phenomena such as list-

ing (Jefferson, 1991), extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), nonextreme generalizations (D. Edwards, 2000), greetings (Sacks, 1992) and so on. In combination with these conversation analytical insights we drew on Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992).

Sacks (1972a, 1972b, 1992) developed Membership Categorisation Analysis as a method for examining how people go about categorising and negotiating social identities. In his now well-cited example—"The baby cried. The mommy picked it up" (1992, p. 236)—Sacks suggests we hear the baby, as the baby of the mother, and do so because "mommy" and "baby" are categories that form part of a collection of categories (Membership Category Device) called "family." Categories such as these are linked to particular actions (category-bound activities) and characteristics (category predicates), such that when "babies" cry, mommies comfort them. Although categories have these features, why, as Schegloff (2007, p. 469) puts it, "should one *care* all that much about these terms and their deployment?" One of the important features of categories is that they are "inference rich." That is, they store huge amounts of culturally rich common-sense knowledge within them. If a person is categorized, that person is presumed to embody the common-sense knowledge about that category. However, if a person contravenes that knowledge, they may be seen as "an exception," "dif ferent," or "defective" category member (Schegloff, 2007, p. 469) and re-categorised (Speer, 2005). For example, as beautification is typically associated with women, men who beautify or "groom" (e.g., metrosexuals) are often considered either efeminate or "gay" (T. Edwards, 2003). It is these normative features of categories and the potential for re-categorisation that we focus on in our study.

Analysis

We begin our data analysis by focusing on VC's written text, which accompanies his video, since this piece of text sets up the context for viewing the video and any subsequent talk.

The Original Post

VC
1 Hey
2 This video's just basically my face routine that i go though almost
3 every morning.
4 Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup is because of acne and
5 some scaring and also redness.
6 No, my face is usually not as red as it was in the beginning of the
7 video; it was like that because i had exfoliated my face right before
8 turning on the cam.
9 Products used:
10 Eucerin- everyday protection face lotion SPF 30
11 Almay- Clear complexion concealer in "light 100"
12 -Clear complexion makeup in "Naked"

13 Covergirl- Clean fragrance free pressed powder in "250, Creamy
14 beige"
15 and some Covergirl sponges.
16 btw, I'm METRO, NOT gay!

The first thing to notice in this extract is VC's choice of greeting, "Hey' (l.1). Sacks (1992, p. 4) identified a procedural rule for greetings, "... a person who speaks first ... can choose their form of address, and in choosing their form of address they can thereby choose the form of address the other uses." In other words, exchanges tend to occur in pairs, so that if someone says "Hey," the response will most likely be "Hey." The use of a casual greeting "Hey" then sets the tone and context of this introductory text and video to be read and seen by the audience in a casual non-serious manner . The other thing to notice about VC's use of "Hey" is that VC doesn't choose to address anybody specifically. Given that VC could have opted for a range of other candidate greetings to address particular types of person e.g., "guys/girls" with the greeting "hey guys/girls," or indeed none at all, all of which would not seem out of place, it is evident that VC's expectation is that the video could possibly be viewed by anybodyNow the relevance of these preliminary observations becomes clearer when we examine the remainder of VC's introductory text.

VC's description of his video, "This video's just basically my face routine that i go though almost every morning" (l.2-3) contains the downgrade "just basically." Downgrades and upgrades—extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986)—are ways of referring to events and objects by invoking minimal or maximal properties. What this does is reduce the basis for others to search for an account. Pomerantz's (pp. 219-220) work showed that people use extreme-case formulations in adversarial situations and when they anticipate others undermining their claims or to propose that some behaviour is not wrong (or is right) especially if it can be regarded as frequently occurring. Or, as Potter (1996, p. 61) points out, accounts are often provided for dispreferred actions, so that if an action is not the preferred action of the actor then a reason for such action may be required. Therefore, VCs use of "just basically" rather than saying "This video is my ..." in the description, proposes that VC "should not" have to offer an account for using makeup. However, VC does anticipate that some viewers may still need an account, and so provides a justification for his use of makeup use: "Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup is because of acne and some scaring and also redness" (l.4-5).

In providing such an account VC is signaling that his makeup use will "trouble" some viewers referenced specifically as "you" (l.4). "Y ou," as Sacks (1992, pp. 163-168) points out, simultaneously references both "you (you alone) or 'you'(you and others)" (p. 165). What this implies then, is that VC is directing the account at individual viewers as members of a category of people who may object to his makeup use. Although we cannot be sure what sort of category that is,VC's response "... because of acne and some scaring and also redness" does imply that this category of people do not object to makeup use by men who use it to cover facial defects. Note also that this is a three-part list "acne," "scaring" and "redness." As Jefferson (1991) showed, the presence of three items on a list adds clarity and weight to arguments. In other words, strength by

numbers. Therefore, VC's list helps support and strengthen his account in the presence of potential discord or criticism. VCs response can therefore be read as an attempt to inoculate himself (Potter, 1996) from charges of wearing cosmetics for reasons other than to cover facial defects—presumably beautification. This is further grounded by the implication that this is a necessary daily procedure. However, although VC uses this tactic as a deterrent to ward off potential criticisms, he is careful to minimize the extent of his facial defects in his second pre-emptive response: "No, my face is usually not as red as it was in the beginning of the video; it was like that because i had exfoliated my face right before turning on the cam" (l.6-8). Such minimization works in two ways. Firstly, it avoids having to provide a further account for why VC has such skin problems (potentially from the use of cosmetics), and secondly too much emphasis on skin defects risks excluding some viewers who do not have facial skin defects. Put simply, if a *YouTube* user wants to reach the widest possible audience, then narrowing the scope of the video limits that possibility.

Having attempted to avoid potential "trouble" so far, VC counters this possibility further in the list of the products used. What is immediately evident is that the list, which can be summarized as moisturizer, concealer, foundation and face powder, is limited in scope to coverage products rather than products for beautification, such as lipstick, eyeliner, mascara, rouge and so on. What's also interesting is that these products are presented with pragmatic and technical features (e.g., "everyday protection," "complexion concealer," "fragrance free"), along with a throwaway reference to Cover girl sponges as if to sweep these beautification items under the carpet (see Harrison, 2008 for other examples of the masculinisation of makeup).

A final observation: VC self- categories himself as "METRO," but "NOTgay" (l.16). In doing so VC makes relevant the MCD (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992) "types of men." Although in this collection, two types of men are explicitly stated—"metrosexual" and "gay"-VC's disclaimers "Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup' (l.4) and "I'm ... NOT gay" imply another (unspoken) category of "men," one whose members are neither gay nor makeup users. This sets up a first contrast pair (Smith, 1978) based on sexuality i.e., "straight/gay." The MCD "heterosexual men" is also invoked, providing a second contrast pair centered on activity: "makeup user/non-makeup user" Since VC also provided an account of the reason for using cosmetics we can see that the category 'straight men' with the activity 'makeup use' may become recategorised as "gay."

Rather than risk being categorised as "gay," VC preemptively categorises himself as "metrosexual." Such an undertaking demonstrates how the conventional rules for applying categories, activities and predicates can be transformed and revised (Speer, 2005, p. 120), but also create new identity categories. In this undertaking VC also shows us one aspect of the parameters of this new identity category—heterosexual men who wear cosmetics can be categorised "metrosexual." Of course, not all heterosexual men who wear cosmetics may warrant being categorized as "metrosexual" (e.g., fancy dress, TV personalities, movie stars on so on). Where the categorization of "metrosexual" becomes relevant can be seen by VC's statement "This video's just basically my face routine that i go though almost every morning" (l.2-3). This indicates that one of the category-features of "metrosexuality" is about straight men applying makeup "almost every morning" and not simply in a specific environment or context.

Ends here