

The background of the slide is a light gray gradient. It is decorated with numerous realistic water droplets of various sizes. Some droplets are large and prominent, while others are small and subtle. They are scattered across the slide, with a higher concentration in the top-left and bottom-right corners. Each droplet has a highlight and a shadow, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

MEDIATED DESIRE: LANGUAGE, GENDER, SEXUALITY, DESIRE

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ONLINE SEX TALK AND THE SOCIAL WORLD: MEDIATED DESIRE

- Examines naturally occurring conversations about sex and desire, treating them as social and discursive phenomena
- Accounts for the ways in which the social forces of sexuality and gender manifest in the behaviours of online community participants
- Makes use of a novel dataset of synchronous conversations from a community that was not sexually themed in scope or purpose

LINGUISTIC VIEWS OF DESIRE: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

- Desire as a topic that communicates sexual identity
- Desire as a set of communicative erotic practices
- A thorny issue for linguists, pointed out by Cameron and Kulick (2003): part of what makes sexuality sexuality is the inarticulable parts of it
 - Pleasure, disavowal, repression, fantasy, etc.
- Concepts that are considered to psychoanalytical as well as outside the realm of the sociocultural and interactional achievement
 - But are they?

SEX TALK AND NORMS: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

- Laws and norms can be found in virtually all societies because they provide formal and informal structures of conduct – creating social order, reducing conflict/chaos, and providing individuals with a frame for actions
- Habermas (1996) distinguishes between facts and norms, linking norms with illocutionary forces (asserting, promising, inquiring, ordering).
 - Key here is the importance of illocutionary forces and norms for ‘social integration’
- Sacks (1992) asserts that adopting norms allows participants to demonstrate their position in membership categories

A CORE HETERONORMATIVE IDEAL: THE DYAD

- “When I get frustrated with the social norm of universal monogamy and hearing about how being in two relationships means I’m not “really” in love, it seems obvious that romantic love is what we - collectively, socially - make of it. We may have chosen to make it monogamous, but it doesn’t have to be that way. There’s this package of traditions and expectations that we’ve bundled together and labelled ‘romantic love’ and it gives our society a certain structure” (Jenkins 2017: 80).

WALFORD: THE COMMUNITY AND CORPUS

- A text-based synchronous MUD (multi-user domain) chat community created in 1993
- Spatial metaphor of a present day English village
- Approx. 1,500 regular users (350+ connected/ daily)
- Original communication commands based on those from TinyMUD (say, whisper, gripe, page), but users developed a rich set of commands
- Three communication settings (local, direct, global) with flexibility in these
- Participants have a wealth of strategies to manage their privacy in interaction

CHATLOGS AS RESEARCH

- DCS QMUL – Walford founders agreement (hosting, maintenance, research into MUD)
- Participants provided ongoing informed consent
- One-way hash algorithm (+pseudonyms)
- A contrast to much research into language and sexuality in online settings
 - Communities based on shared sexual identity, practice or interest (sexual community of practice)
 - E.g., King (2012, 2017), Mowlabocus (2016)
 - Researcher participation in the community/ data from conversations the researcher engaged/lurked in
 - E.g., Campbell (2016), King (2012, 2017)

DATASET

- Chatlogs are from 2003-2004 (approx. 1TB of data)
- Corpus consists of 75 logs of 24hrs, coded all conversations (XML) deemed to be 'sexual'
 - Once 30 files had been coded and initial findings were generated, this informed how I proceeded in addressing questions of function and structure
- Approached as a non-sexual 'community of practice' (cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, following Lave and Wenger 1991)
 - A group of people who share an interest or activity: contains different jargons, social conventions, and ways of being.
 - 'Social factors' are not seen as static, fixed categories but are examined in the linguistic and discursive context of a specific community that people are part of to do things

AUTOMATING DESIRE

- Two of the most popular automated commands or flags in Walford are shag and kiss
- Generate erotic scenarios between the user who initiates the command and one other user located within the same-room
 - Kiss: generates a kiss from a closed set of types and a length of time that the participants are left breathless for
 - Shag: results in a sexual position (from a closed set) for the participants and its duration

AUTOMATED DESIRE: EXAMPLE 1

- 1 20703 pulls 17212 close for a *sweet sexy* kiss.
- 2 20703 kisses 17212 until they are breathless for 12 seconds.
- 3 17212 pulls 20703 close for a *passionate* kiss.
- 4 17212 kisses 20703 until they are breathless for 19 seconds.
- 5 17212 says i beat you.

AUTOMATED DESIRE: EXAMPLE 2

- 1 3293 pulls 14863 close for a lingering kiss.
- 2 3293 kisses 14863 until they are both breathless for 10 seconds.
- 3 3293 says that's pants.
- 4 3293 pulls 14863 close for a whisper like kiss.
- 5 3293 kisses 14863 until they are both breathless for 17 seconds.
- 6 14863 pulls 3293 close for a lingering kiss.
- 7 14863 kisses 3293 until they are both breathless for 17 seconds.
- 8 3293 says well i am out of touch today then.
- 9 3293 says i can't even snog.
- 10 3293 pouts

ANALYSIS PART 2

- Moving from automated desire to co-constructed sexual fantasies

CO-CONSTRUCTED SEXUAL SCENES: EXAMPLE 1

- 1 44417(M) 's hot shaft fills you completely...
- 2 44417(M) pulls on you tightly, as he suddenly comes inside you
- 3 44417(M) says 'yes!'
- 4 27604(F) screams with pleasure.
- 5 44417(M) 's hot seed fills every crevice of your womanhood...
- 6 44417(M) keeps fucking you hard, jolting your entire body with each thrust.
- 7 27064(F) grinds you by twisting and turning, faster and faster... she really wants it rough.
- 8 44417(M) gives it to you so hard your ancestors feel it.
- 9 27064(F) is pleased senseless, she has tears coming to her eyes.
- 10 44417(M) reaches around and rubs your hardened clit, violently.
- 11 27604(F) whispers 'know any other wild positions? Hehe.....'
- 12 44417(M) whatever comes to mind is good for me.
- 13 27064(F) same here... surprise me...

CO-CONSTRUCTED SEXUAL SCENES: EXAMPLE 2

- 1 44417(M) nearly cums, but it passes.
- 2 27604(F) asks “got anything fun we can use?”
- 3 27604(F) heh heh heh...
- 4 27604(F) or...
- 5 44417(M) says “not I, but if you brought some toys, it’s cool”
- 6 27064(F) wanna take a shower?
- 7 44417(M) says “sure” [40 seconds]
- 8 44417(M) asks “are you coming with?” [6 seconds]
- 9 27604(F) says “it won’t let me [4 seconds]
- 10 44417(M) says “odd” [20 seconds]
- 11 44417(M) says “try now” [40 seconds]
- 12 27604(F) says “it won’t let me”
- 13 44417(M) says “hmm” [18 seconds]
- 14 44417(M) says “ok try it now”
- [Participants switch rooms]
- 15 27604(F) says “here we go”
- 16 44417(M) draws a hot shower
- 17 27604(F) wonders why it wouldn’t let me in
- 18 44417(M) it was a lock issue
- 19 27064(F) says “oh”
- 20 44417(M) says “for some reason, some of my exits have locks set on them”
- 21 27604(F) approaches you
- 22 27604(F) takes your hands and thrusts your fingers inside her

CONCLUSIONS

- Sex talk is varied, persistent, and prevalent
 - Typologies with their own structures, forms and functions
 - Striking consistencies in the discourses that participants re/create in their interactions
- The range of sex talk and the discursive resources users call upon requires high levels of 'communicative competence' (Hymes 1972): is an utterance formally possible; feasible; appropriate in the context; and actually done
- Links to in-group status and belonging
 - To know what to say, how to say it, where to, to whom and in what context demonstrates awareness and navigation of group-specific and societal norms