



‘Does my bum look big in this?’ Language, Gender and Sexuality in Channel 4’s *How to Look Good Naked*

Chloe Harrison

H*ow to Look Good Naked* (hereafter abbreviated to HTLGN) is a popular Channel 4 programme presented by the homosexual self-professed ‘fairy Gokmother’, Gok Wan. The programme is targeted at a female audience, as each week Gok helps a different woman improve their body confidence and self-esteem.

This study is a qualitative investigation into the representation of sexuality and gender in this contemporary media setting, with particular references to the following linguistic variables:

- choice and variety in lexical items;
- terms of address/vocatives;
- gender and politeness markers.

The investigation is divided into an analysis of language and homosexuality, and language and femininity/masculinity, with an analytical discussion of linguistic markers and a consideration of the historicity and theoretical attitudes of language and gender studies. The focus of the investigation is on the contemporary *dynamic* paradigm; the ‘social constructionist perspective’ (Coates 2004: 6) that argues the *performativity* of gender. The study is therefore correlational: a small scale study that indicates wider social variation concerning the construction of gendered identity.

Methodology

Since HTLGN has been edited and formatted for public viewing, there are issues surrounding the ‘naturalness’ of language. All speakers are aware of the presence of the camera, and therefore, to some degree, are perhaps conscious and possibly hyper-corrective of their speech. This means that, in the course of the investigation, any judgements or inferences taken from the linguistic data are made with these issues in mind.

In order to refine the study and obtain comparative data, the judgement sample method of data collection is used. To this end, the same sections of the programme from three episodes have been selected, as this should provide enough data to create a substantive and representative study. It was originally intended to obtain data from three episodes of the most recent series in order to carry out the most contemporary synchronic investigation; however, copyright restrictions have made it not easily accessible to do this. For this reason the data collected is from two episodes of the most recent series, and the last episode of the previous series. Differences in the editing of the programme itself, and that one of the episodes is from a previous series to the other two, has meant that the data samples are not completely parallel, but they nevertheless comprise dialogic data similar enough for the purposes of this small-scale study.

The depth of the investigation will be restricted by a word-limit, and therefore certain lexical variables only will be considered. The size of this study also means that any emergent patterns are not assumed to be a generalisation for society as a whole; rather a detailed analysis indicating possible prevalent features of wider sociolinguistic trends.

Gok – Gay?!

GV: [...] let's spank the plastic. it's my favourite sport (1) shopping.

In recent gender studies, more and more emphasis has been laid upon the proposal that gender and sexuality should be seen as pluralised identities, rather than monolithic prescriptive stereotypes. Stereotypes cause over-generalisations, and it should be remembered that *'the fact that gays do X does not make X gay'* (Cameron & Kulick 2003: 88).

The school of thought that focuses around the fact that males and females are not dichotomous in their identities falls within the domain of the *dynamic* paradigm, which is one of the four models of theory known as the four 'D's: the *deficit*, *difference*, *dominance* and *dynamic* models, namely (Talbot 1998).

The first of which, the deficit model, is taken from Robin Lakoff's (1975) study, and focuses on this idea of stereotypes, of *Language and Woman's Place* in society in particular. Lakoff devised a list of 'WL features', which all work towards the construction of feminine identity indicating less social power, though she also 'suggests that some features of WL are also used by 'effeminate' men, a category into which she places upper-class Britons and college professors as well as gay men' (Cameron & Kulick: 51).

However, the deficit model is itself deficit in areas: it is argued that the model is based on archaic over-generalised gender assumptions, with little evidential support for the claims, merely an 'idealized symbolic construct' (Cameron & Kulick: 52) that generalises social groups and does not admit individual identities.

The dynamic model arose from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), in which Butler argues that 'the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex seems to have, gender is culturally constructed' (6). This view has been more favourable in contemporary studies, coupled with *socialization*, a process by which ideas of the 'expected norms' of social behaviour become internalised into people's lifestyle: the prescription of 'rules, roles and values' (Goddard & Patterson 2000: 34), that thereby form a social 'gender script' (94). In other words, gender is conditioned from birth, and this anti-essentialist approach purports the idea that the individual is entirely socially constructed.

Through his language use, Gok embodies the stereotype of the homosexual. 'Effeminate', using WL features, flamboyant and fashion-conscious, his lexicon is very 'lavender' (Leap 1995). It is also important to note in this investigation that Gok is a presenter for media discourse: he is required to fulfil a certain role, to play on this idea of a stereotype, to say the required utterances and create a characterisation that forms a figurehead for the television programme. Therefore, that *Gok says X* in HTLGN, *acts as a clear marker for his performance of homosexuality*.

The fluidity of the dynamic model is particularly pertinent to this contemporary study, as society is becoming much more accepting of homosexuality, as exemplified in civil partnerships becoming legalised recently in 2005, and people are consequently freer from stigmatization.

Society's more accepting attitude is displayed in HTLGN through Gok's overtly homosexual linguistic markers. The element of social performativity in Gok's homosexual identity is immediately apparent through his use of highly creative verbal wordplay and choice in lexical items, features that are 'expected norms' of homosexual linguistic behaviour:

Examples of Gok's Lexicon

Acronyms:	<i>VFM</i> (Value For Money)
Lexical Blends:	<i>glittertastic, Essex in the city</i>
Alliteration:	<i>beautifully bronzed, thunder thighs, woeful wardrobe, babelicious bob</i>
Nominal Affixation:	<i>Gokettes, Gokking, fairy Gokmother, Gok Scissorhands</i>
Puns:	<i>that sarong's sa-right, bling it on</i>
Slang:	<i>bling, cossie</i> (swimming costume), <i>slap</i> (make-up), <i>pins</i> (legs)
Rhyme:	<i>ding dong, a fizz in the world of showbiz</i>
Neologisms:	<i>The Gok treatment</i>
Exclamations:	[JENNY] TELL HIM YOU'RE NOT WEARING A BRA

Gok's homosexual identity is signposted in these choices of lexical items, which form an impression of his overall vocabulary. Penelope Stanley (1970) put forward the idea of a 'core' and 'fringe' vocabulary of homosexuality. She purported that both men and women knew the lexical items within the 'core' vocabulary, but that heterosexuals were not so familiar with the 'fringe vocabulary' (cited in Cameron & Kulick: 85). The markers of the latter, used by homosexual men in urban areas, come out of six syntactic patterns: *compounds, rhyme compounds, exclamations, puns, blends and truncations* (86). Gok verifies this paradigm: he was born in an urban area, Leicester, now lives in London and he displays these syntactic features (see table). However, as well as the list of syntactic structures Stanley identifies, it seems that Gok can be said to use certain semantic features, too: slang, nominal compositions, alliteration, and integration of references to popular culture – all are prevalent in his lexis. That Gok's discourse comprises Stanley's list of features but also other lexical trends could lead to a re-definition of the 'core' and 'fringe' vocabulary terminology: perhaps Gok's awareness of a definitive 'homosexual vocabulary' could be said to form his *fringe* vocabulary, and the other patterns in his lexicon – nominal affixation, acronyms – could be said to be his *core* vocabulary, as this is what individualises his lexicon.

That Gok's language can be categorised into different lexical and syntactic styles exemplifies Butler's view that 'gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (1990:140). Likewise, the fact that Gok's repetitive use of wordplay and display of Stanley's fringe vocabulary is more prevalent in Gok's voiceovers compared with his 'natural' speech is particularly indicative of a performative element to his discourse: the aforementioned lexical features are used much more overtly in the voiceovers, suggesting predicated gender construction in the script-writing. The aforementioned *gender script*

likewise compounds this impression: actors read scripts, in order to perform and construct a particular character successfully. This point is further compounded in the intonation of Gok's language: he varies his pitch far more in the pre-planned speech, such as in the voiceovers and commentaries (see 'opening commentaries' on pages 21, 25 and 30, and GV on page 25 of the appendix), than in the more spontaneous speech. This marked difference again could indicate a more conscious effort to construct an elaborated and more dramatic speech style.

Although these *stylized* lexical markers help construct Gok's homosexual identity, the frequent application of his name to words and phrases (*gokking*, *gokettes*) acts as an individualizing lexical signpost: in doing this, he appears to assert his *individual* identity within the larger gay speech community, but also creates a sense of programme-ownership. This usage also seems to indicate his commercial awareness of a presenter on a popular television series; his name becomes like a brand, or fashion label. And this commercial identity has proved to be a successful construction, for Gok now has a range of glasses at Specsavers, and recommends particular items of clothing in Dorothy Perkins as a means of promotion.

(Fashion) Labels

'Labelling' and categorising someone within a gender identity is problematic and political correctness and the semantic prosody of gender labels can cause issues: indeed, many gender studies open with an explanation or justification of choice in terminology. For example, *Queerly Phrased* opens with a discussion of the application of 'homosexual' versus the use of 'gay' (1997:22), and similarly Wardhaugh's chapter on 'Language and Gender' in *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* describes how 'gender' is the 'current vogue' term to use in place of 'sex' (2006: 315). It seems that labelling generates issues surrounding neutrality, and since sexuality is a sensitive and personal subject matter, semantics play an integral role. The meaning of 'heterosexual', for example, used to refer to a person addicted to sex, and 'homosexuality' in turn was considered an illness, and these associations can have further etymological repercussions. These connotative issues however also reflect the wider trend of the instability of taboo words: they are continuously pejorative, and a neutral word used now will be replaced with something yet more euphemistic when political incorrectness is alleged.

Even seemingly neutral terms of address and general vocatives have a part to play in the construction of gender identity, for vocatives 'can be used to address someone, expressing a particular social relationship of personal attitude' (Crystal 2003:70). Throughout the three episodes of HTLGN studied, the following vocatives are used:

Terms of address to participants

Michelle (episode 8):	<i>my girl, gorgeous, bubbly bird, darling, stunner, gorgeousness, denim diva, our mother-of-two, extrovert Essex girl, desperate housewife, runway diva</i>
Jenny (episode 13):	<i>girlfriend, swampy mummy, yummy mummy</i>
Clare (episode 14):	<i>my girl, fittie, madam, girlfriend, my lady</i>

Gok uses numerous expanded pronouns (*bubbly bird, denim diva, yummy mummy*), and slang terms (*mummy, fittie*), which create a certain level of familiarity with the participants of the

show. It is interesting that this sense of rapport is created however, as it seems somewhat artificially constructed, particularly as, in the three episodes, after Gok and the respective participant introduce themselves, he then asks them to undress (see sections entitled 'underwear scene' on pages 21, 25 and 31 of the appendix). That the use of these nicknames are coupled with the possessive pronoun use 'my' and 'our' draws the audience in, making them more seem more inclusive in the programme and part of the intimacy: another seemingly false inclusion (as most of the audience would not have met the participants personally), which indicate that this sense of rapport is merely performative.

It is also interesting to note that Gok uses more vocatives for Michelle than for the other two participants, with whom he mainly uses their first names. It is thought that 'women are more likely than men to be addressed by their first names when everything else is equal' (Wardhaugh: 322). Gok is closer in age to Jenny and Clare, and therefore this fact could alter the 'equality', a point further demonstrated through the fact that he calls both Jenny and Clare *girlfriend*, a vocative perhaps more typically collocated with younger women.

When Gok addresses the audience, the general label *ladies* is used most often:

Terms of address to audience:	<i>Ladies</i> (15), <i>girls</i> (13), <i>real women</i> (5), <i>Gokettes</i> (3), <i>you honeys</i> (1), <i>beauty babes</i> (1), <i>sister</i> (1), <i>fabulous females</i> (1), <i>you pear-shaped lovelies</i> (1)
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These vocatives display a great difference in register: following the formal *ladies*, the not so formal *girls* is used second most frequently, perhaps as a form of flattery as the latter emphasises the youth of the target audience. Goddard and Patterson discuss how the third most frequent term:

'woman' has acquired negative connotations, so that 'lady' is seen as a 'polite' alternative. For many women, though, 'lady' is something of a false compliment, in having connotations of decorative ornamentation [not] to be taken seriously (2001: 91/92).

The premodifier *real* in *real women*, however, seems to negate the negative connotations of 'woman': the semantic associations of 'real' acting to individualise, rather than patronise, the audience. Also, the aim of becoming 'decorative' seems to be HTLGN's prerogative: the *ladies* on the show apply in order to learn *how to look good naked*. That Gok is the one using 'ladies', perhaps alters the falsity of the compliment: rather than being used in a dominant discourse, that Gok can speak like a 'lady' himself makes the application of the term more neutral. The *ladies* of the audience are also aware that they are watching a fashion makeover programme, and therefore know the programme itself is 'not to be taken seriously'.

The coupling of *ladies* with more informal terms such as *beauty babes* and *sister* aids the light-heartedness of the subject matter. It is interesting that at least once on each episode first person plural pronoun is used: twice on episode 8, once on episodes 13 and 14, respectively, and through this usage, Gok further places his viewpoint within that of the female community, as exemplified explicitly in the utterance:

G: I wanna be related to *you* (1) what are we thinking girls?

The desire to be seen as 'one of the girls' is also apparent through Gok's labelling the models *Gokettes*, a label that in turn demonstrates that Gok's lexicon is also slightly Americanised, for as Stephen Murray notes, American males use the morpheme *-ette* more often than heterosexuals (1996: 747). This Americanization is also apparent through the stress in

girlfriend and the vocative *sister*, terms which help construct Gok's feminine identity and direct performative influences from other female-focused programmes such as *Sex and the City*. That *girlfriend* is used in an Americanised manner is significant, as if used unstressed as in British usage it ironically would mean the female partner of an intimate relationship.

Though there are linguistic markers of Gok's homosexuality, there is not necessarily a *direct* link between linguistic features and gender identity. Few English lexical items directly index gender, and therefore 'linguistic features are associated with gender via their association with something else that can itself be associated with gender' (Cameron and Kulick: 58). Fashion and body image are concerns primarily associated with women, and therefore Gok's use of terminology within these fields act to indirectly index his femininity:

Body-shape:	<i>pear-shaped, hour-glass, top-heavy, flat-chested, petites</i>
Breasts:	<i>bad boys, bangers, bazookas, boobs, puppies, boys, boobilicious (adjective), tits</i>
Underwear:	<i>belly-warmers, boudoir bare-alls, hooter-holders, architectural gear</i>
Fashion jargon:	<i>boho-chic, Prince of Wales check, cocktail frock, tartan, fitted blazer, polo shirt</i>

The context of the programme needs to be considered here, however. The genre – a reality, make-over programme, namely – dictates that certain semantic fields are to be expected, and therefore the use of fashion jargon – styles, body shapes, labels for clothing – are also to be expected. Consequently, Gok utilises this jargon to definitively fulfil the role of a presenter of such a programme. The slang terms for breasts likewise demonstrate his familiarity with the programme's primary subject matter; women and the female body. It is interesting that Gok's homosexuality seems to make it permissible for breasts to be referred to thus, for if a heterosexual were to use such terminology the reception would perhaps be more negative? This impression could demonstrate how homosexuals are considered to be more within the female community, a position that perhaps allows more over-familiarity.

Other 'labels' in HTLGN index negative connotations:

Negative labelling	
Lexical items associated with age:	<i>net curtains (AKA knickers), hearing-aid beige panties, dressing like a fourteen-year-old boy</i>
References to being masculine:	<i>apprentice-mechanic, geezer-bird, beer-belly, rugby-player calves</i>
Profession:	<i>dinner-lady arms</i>

These references demonstrate a cross-application of semantic domains: appearing too old or too young, being masculine or too stereotypically feminine or matronly, or crossing any of these categories, is regarded negatively. These negative associations all affect the idealised self-image, being external performative signifiers of the identity a person would like to present to society.

As well as indexing gender identity indirectly, Gok also indexes his sexuality directly. There are, for example, explicit references to homosexuality throughout the programmes:

Sexual references: *a little bit five-a-side football club* (when Jenny touches one of the *Gokette’s* breasts), *let’s spank the plastic, we’re in Brighton so girls do this, a very sexy pair of shoes that are for you but obviously a little bit for Simon as well*, calls himself a *fairy gokmother*

These tongue-in-cheek references again reflect liberation of identity: homosexuality is present in the media, and so it is allowed to be flaunted openly and directly. The *five-a-side football club* reference in particular creates ironic humour; Jenny is married with children, so presumably Gok is the only *five-a-side football* player in the programme.

Language and the Construction of Gendered Identity

For now we have the vote, and equal rights legislation, it might well be that Gok Wan [is] the most significant person in the lives of 21st-century women.

(Moran 2008, *the Times*)

HTLGN is a programme about women, for women. The desire to ‘look good naked’ is one primarily associated with the female domain: for as ‘Coates (1997: 295) points out, [one] of the dominant discourses of femininity is that women should care about their image and appearance; in particular, they should attempt to stay slim’ (cited in Mullany: 197). HTLGN initially focuses on this dominant discourse by portraying women who feel insecure enough about their image to appear on a reality television programme:

C: I just feel fat and. ugly

Shalom (1997) researched the use of stereotypes in personal advertisements, looking at the term ‘attractive’ as a common variable. She found that people like to think they are attractive, so adverts along the lines of ‘would like to meet an attractive male/female...’ are more likely to attract respondents (191). HTLGN however, advertises for and attracts respondents who feel *unattractive*: the female participants of the show would like to become more attractive, and therefore the self-selecting participants of the show display negative lexical features signifying their image-insecurities:

C: (2) let’s start with the feet **big** – **flat** feet – size nine ((laughs) (). **chunky** calves
(1) **lumpy** knees. **chunky** thighs. cellulite – **broken** veins (2) **big** bum (2) **big**
stomach (2) **big saggy** boobs =

In the above quotation, for instance, we see a list of noun phrases, comprising adjectives with purely negative semantic prosody (in bold).

The idea of success in the workplace as playing an important role in gender identity is also directly referenced in HTLGN. Mullany (2007) describes how the dominant paradigm dictates that ‘in order to succeed and be taken seriously in the workplace, women need to fulfil the heterosexual imperative’ (198), and as profession is yet another external performative aspect of a person’s identity, success in the workplace is often viewed as mirroring success in other areas of life. Becoming a mother is often seen as constituting a successful female profession, and Gok introduces Jenny in the opening section as a *mother-of-two* as a defining characteristic.

J: I am a mum (2.5) and there's a point to that (3) but there's not. really much point. to me=

Jenny's body insecurities seem to stem from the fact that her role as a mother has become a greater signifier for her identity than any other aspects of her life.

Conversely, Michelle derogatively describes her arms as *dinner-lady arms*, which she sees as negative physical signifiers of her profession. Gok focuses on this insecurity by appealing to her idealised self:

G: we're going to make you look like a sophisticated – mature – elegant – sexy. woman

The multiple references to popular culture, e.g. to *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives*, again use the image of the successful woman; they are programmes centred on successful, independent women, and these references parallel the concerns of HTLGN: they demonstrate a shift towards the difference model, and the aim to create an independent identity away from men and the 'heterosexual imperative'. That this identity is created, as the programme boasts, without plastic surgery or dieting, and purely through instruction in fashion and make-up, again stresses the integral role of performativity in identity construction: being perceived as pretty and feminine is just as simple as putting on a *face*.

Gender Speech Styles

In order to identify masculine/feminine speech, certain linguistic markers must be observed. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) compiled a collection of interactional features typically associated with 'masculine' and 'feminine' discourse. That they labelled the markers as 'masculine' and 'feminine', as opposed to Lakoff's *men* and *women* distinction, demonstrates the shift away from prescriptive stereotyping and the greater fluidity of contemporary gender characterisation.

Feminine	Masculine
Indirect	Direct
Conciliatory	Confrontational
Facilitative	Competitive
Collaborative	Autonomous
Minor contribution in public	Dominates (public) talking time
Supportive feedback	Task/outcome-oriented
Affectively oriented	Referentially oriented

(574)

The redundancy of Lakoff’s WL features is exemplified in the fact that some can fit into the ‘masculine’ as well as the ‘feminine’ listed features. For example, we see that *tag questions* (1975) can show a *task/outcome orientation*:

G: what can we say to her to make her feel better about her body?

F4: [you’re gorgeous]

F5: [you *are* gorgeous]

Gok asks questions to keep HTLGN ‘together’ and to drive the conversation, an integral part of his role as a presenter: his role automatically dictates a more *dominant* discourse. He likewise is required to dominate the public talking time because he must structure and drive the dialogue in a certain direction to meet the ends of the programme.

Another of Lakoff’s WL features is lack of humour: but if she places gay men into the group of WL users, Gok again defies her categorisation.

G: ← come here ((they hug, Gok kisses jenny on the cheek)) well done. this is a *very* expensive jacket do *not* cry over it

J: ((laughs))

The jacket-joke here reflects a *performative* British trait: making a joke out of a sensitive subject to lighten the atmosphere (Fox 2008: 72).

Despite elements of humour, Gok is also *required* to be confrontational, to a degree, because HTLGN is a reality television programme. Gok therefore employs one of Culpeper’s provisional ‘positive impoliteness output strategies’, in that throughout the episodes he ‘seeks disagreement’ by selecting a ‘sensitive topic’ (1996: 7):

G: why are you not wearing a bra? =

which shows that Gok is *confrontational*, but also *collaborative*:

G: ← come with me – let’s go ((takes hand))

He is direct:

G: okay – this suit will work for you

and yet offers *supportive feedback*, demonstrating the construction of his positive face (Brown & Levinson 1987):

G: I – don’t – think (2) you need to *change* a single thing (2.5)

The maintenance of this positive face is likewise necessary to maintain the participant’s, and the audience’s good opinion.

Gok does employ WL features, such as avoidance of ‘expletives’: using the circumlocutory *F word* for fat, and empty adjectives are rife in his vocabulary: *gorgeous*, *lovely*, *fabulous*, *fantastic* being the most common. Gok also uses a lot of intensifiers, though not only lexical items; his discourse is also intensified through use of:

Stress, G: *definitely* not loving it yet (1) but *absolutely* accepting it
 Pace, G: hideous. baggy. clothes
 and pitch, G: if we all looked the same the world would be a very.↓boring. place (5)

That Gok’s dialogue does share many features with the ‘feminine checklist’ may not simple be a direct homosexuality marker, rather a sign of interactional accommodation; he could be creating trying to create solidarity by mirroring his language to that used by the ladies on his programme, to become a more accepted member of the female speech community.

As we have seen, gender styles impacts on linguistic usage, but it also impacts on politeness. Politeness studies and gender studies are often interlinked, due to the fact that ‘politeness’ is considered more in the linguistic domain of women, for ‘[t]he teaching and enforcement of ‘manners’ is often considered to be the preserve of women’ (Mills 2003: 203):

G: I’ve done a lot of these. and people. will tell you the absolute truth – they won’t just be polite all right? and I’m going to prove that to you right now

HTLGN is concerned with a sensitive topic, and so issues of politeness and impoliteness are particularly relevant. The programme transgresses normal ‘politeness’ boundaries of everyday life; the formality with which Gok meets the participant:

G: how are you nice to meet you ((they shake hands))

Is juxtaposed with the request to get their *kit off*. From a paralinguistic perspective it is interesting to note that Gok’s homosexuality makes it permissible for him to bypass political correctness issues: he is permitted to touch the female participant’s breasts (see page 36 of appendix) and to see them with them semi-naked, but again these occurrences would not be as accepted if the presenter was a heterosexual male.

The women’s reactions to the public display of the participants in their underwear are stereotypically more polite than that of the men. They tend to be more conciliatory and periphrastic:

F6: [and] they’re like. they seem like sort of toned at the back and
 [everything]

And the men tend to be a little more direct and personal, though the ‘empty adjective’ *nice* is still used frequently:

(M3): the underwear’s not great but I can see there’s a nice. there’s a nice bum under there

(M1): I’m thinking (2) ((looks up at picture)) we have a nice rack up there

The gender differences in the data thus show how gendered politeness is definitively marked in discourse, and acts as another kind of indexicality. For, it is thought that “the ‘primary’ meaning of a feature like superpoliteness is ‘deference’; but because this trait is associated [in Lakoff’s community] with women rather than men, the use of superpolite features acquires the conventional ‘secondary’ meaning of ‘femininity’” (Cameron & Kulick: 56). However, further study would be needed to make accurate inferences of the data: for example, it may be that initial ‘shock’ reactions, i.e. asking a member of public on the spot for an opinion of a

semi-naked woman on a large photograph positioned in a public place, may mean that people fall back on their ‘gender scripts’, indexing the expected and correct socially constructed answer for their gender.

As well as the empty adjectives, the heterosexual males on HTLGN further display WL features. In response to the publicised semi-naked photographs of the participant, for example, we see *exclamation*:

M1: [oh woah]

Though Gok’s discourse comparatively comprises very few exclamatory utterances, and similarly we also see the use of intensifiers and empty adjectives:

(M3): the underwear’s not great but I can see there’s a nice. there’s a nice bum under there

(M4): your body is simply fantastic – don’t change a thing

S: absolutely

These linguistic cross-overs and amalgamations exemplify how Lakoff’s WL framework is too rigid, and how Holmes and Stubbe’s table offers a much more adaptable framework. It is thought that ‘the young woman’s sense of their femininity is at times contradictory and precarious, and they draw on a range of discourses’ (Coates & Johnson: 214), the same, however, could be said of young men based on the data. Though it is perhaps more expected that Gok fits into a more feminine characterisation, so too can heterosexuals: there are masculine females, and feminine males, and the categorisation of both can be dependent on context. ‘Queer theory’ focuses on this idea: in discussing the notion of *heteronormativity* the theory the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality, and how ‘it is vigorously demanded and actively produced in specific sociocultural contexts and situated interactions’ (Cameron & Kulick: 55). In this way, heterosexuality is just as much of a performance as homosexuality, with just as varied performative signifiers.

Conclusion

As we have seen, sexual and gendered identities can be used in discursive constructions, and linguistic markers can clearly be used as a medium for different identity representations. Just like gender construction, looking good naked involves an element of performance, as foregrounded in the quotation:

G: [...] it’s going to **showcase** all of your upper [torso]

It seems that gender identities are merging, with looser boundaries of categorisation and ‘blurry’ distinctions. This crossover has formerly been somewhat asymmetrical: for example, women are freer to dress in a masculine style, whereas the reverse is not socially acceptable. The coinage of the term ‘metrosexual’ (first attested in 1994), however, seems to be acting to redress this fashion imbalance:

A. *n.* A man (esp. a heterosexual man) whose lifestyle, spending habits and concern for personal appearance are likened to those considered typical of a fashionable, urban, homosexual man.

The appearance of this definition demonstrates the development towards a society of multivalent gender, one in which a definitive gender can be constructed just as simply as having a concern for personal appearance.

The programme's title itself supports this view: *How to Look Good Naked* is much more indirect than something like the imperative *Look Good Naked*, making Gok's instructions on the matter appear more like those in a recipe book; if all the signifiers are used correctly, a specific gender characterisation can be constructed, but, equally, different step-by-step instructions can construct a different outcome.

Wardhaugh states there is no 'solution' to the 'problem' of gendered language (333): but is it necessarily a *problem*? It would also be interesting to conduct a diachronic investigation in a few years' time to see if these gender boundaries have broken down further, and whether the 'problem' of categorisation has disappeared completely.

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Appendix

A Note on Transcription

To infer with greater accuracy trends of the data, critical discourse analysis will be used. This analysis will comprise of transcriptions from sections of dialogue from three episodes: the opening commentaries, and the underwear, public reaction, and makeover sections.

Following normal transcript conventions, the following notation has also been included:

- */description/*: This is used to describe the scene/ physical setting in which the interaction takes place;
- GV: This indicates that Gok is speaking, but in a pre-recorded voiceover. On occasion the female participants also have a voiceover, and this is indicated in the same way; initial of forename plus 'V';
- F1/M1: This indicates another speaker, i.e. it follows the number of males (M)/ females (F) who are interacting in the particular scene.

If the conversation participant has been named, the initial of their first name is used to indicate that they are speaking.

The dialogue has been transcribed as accurately as possible and with the intention of transcribing the same scenes. Due to the fact that no two episodes are alike, however, and because of changes in editing and so on, the scenes are not exactly comparable in some instances.

Sociolinguistics Data Transcription

Episode 8, Series 2

Opening Commentary

/Gok is walking down a high street, facing camera/

G: listen ladies the glossies are ↓getting to you – because over sixty per cent of you say that the images you seen in magazines make you feel bad about yourselves – you do *not* need to conform to that stick-thin ↓stereotype. you gotta stand up to that sexy silhouette and curtsy to those cute curves. because you know what?. if we all looked the same the world would ↓be a very. boring. place (5) / and that's the message I've gotta get through to my girl Michelle. she's a lovely bird. whose bubble has burst

Participant's Opening Commentary

M: [no] I feel the person I was years ago I can't seem to identify myself with I feel I've lost (1) I've lost me along the way to be honest (4) I just see this long body and short legs and (2) lots of fat and (2) ((sniffs)) not nice at all =

G: you have an hourglass figure with a small waist (1) I – don't – think (2) you need to *change* a single thing (2.5) something stopped (1) and we just need to *kick* start it a[*gain*]((smiles))

M: [yeah]

G: and I wanna d[o it] →

M: [thank you]. [thank you]

G: ←[I *will* do it.] I ↓ promise [you] →

M: [thank you]

G: ← do you want a cuddle? =

M: ((laughs)) yes. thank [you]

G: [well done] ((they hug))

M: ((sniffs))

Public Reactions

/Gok has put up a photo of Michelle in her underwear on a billboard and is asking members of the public for opinions/reactions to the photograph/

(M1): I'm thinking (2) ((looks up at picture)) we have a nice rack up there

(F1): very nice ((traces hourglass shape with fingers)) hourglass shape

(M2): I like the curves around the waist and hip

(F2): amazing legs

(M3): the underwear's not great but I can see there's a nice. there's a nice bum under there

(M4): your body is simply fantastic – don't change a thing

The Makeover: Opening Commentary

/ Footage of Gok and Michelle walking along a crowded high street/

GV: [...] let's spank the plastic. it's my favourite sport (1) ↓shopping. but right now I need to get Michelle feeling more Essex in the city and give her the rules for dressing for her shape (2) take Kim Catrell (1.5) who like Michelle goes in and out in all the right places (1) but she knows exactly how to dress her figure (2)

The Makeover: Shopping Interaction

/Michelle and Gok walk into a large department store, into the women's clothing section/

G: at the moment you're dressing like a fourteen-year old boy [is what] →

M: [yeah]

G: ←I would say. so we need to get you out of all that right ?

GV: (2.5) Michelle's at a loss where it comes to blaming up and always resorts to casual clobber (2) I'm going to show her – and you how to sex it up without going over the top.

G: okay – this suit will work for you because one. it's ↑young it's [also] →

M: [yeah]

G: ←casual (1.5) okay. but it's also got all the elements you need in it it's going to nip you in at the waist (1.5) yeah?. it's going to showcase all of your upper [torso]→

M: [yeah]

G: ←also this skirt this panelling's going to elongate you all right?. we're going to make you look like a sophisticated – mature – elegant – sexy. woman that knows her body shape [all right?]

M: [okay]

Episode 13, Series 3:

Opening Commentary

/Gok is at a train station, walking towards the camera/

G: tonight we have an all-time first on *How to Look* ↓*Good Naked* – a secret nomination (1.5) twenty six year old mother of two Jenny from Cheshire. thinks we've just brought her down to London to meet the producers of the show. her husband Simon is in on the surprise (3.5)

/Moves forward a couple of scenes. A train pulls into the station, and Gok starts to move towards it/

G: I'm about to surprise Jenny off the train. right here in Houston. she has no – *idea* at all that I'm here. down the road I've set up all my mirrors – today we are going to be looking at her body for the first time (5)

- G: ((running up to meet her)) JENNY →
- J: ((covers face)) []
- G: ← [hi] (5) hi [Jenny] →
- J: [()]
- G: ←hi ((kisses)) =
- J: nice to meet you [hey]
- G: [hi welcome] to London. so =
- J: thank you [very much]
- G: (((leans over and shakes husband's hand)) hey nice to meet you] you did a sterling job thank you very much indeed right (1) me and you. have got some work to do I →
- [think]
- J: [oh my god]
- G: ← come with me – let's go ((takes hand))

Underwear Scene

- GV: despite having two children Jenny has a gorgeous size eight figure but she's got it all covered up. the last time she looked in the mirror was *ten years* ago which proves that no matter what shape you are – you can still feel unattractive but to find out why jenny feels this way I've gotta see her naked.
- J: there isn't much point. to me (1.5) I am a mum (2.5) and there's a point to that (3) but there's not. really much point. to me =
- G: why are you not wearing a bra? =
- J: because I never wear a bra (1) because. they're saggy and. there's no. there's nothing to put in a bra there doesn't seem to be much point =
- /Jenny sitting on a swing in a park. Facing the camera/*
- J: my boobs are. my worst problem really because they're saggy and. horrible really and I. I also feel just my top in general is – is not. that nice=
- /Jenny's husband Simon. Sitting in their living room, facing the camera/*
- S: my view of Jenny's body is it's beautiful – it's absolutely beautiful ((smiles)) (4) it's that simple ((smiles)) (2)
- /Jenny is standing in front of 'Gok's mirrors' in her underwear. Gok is standing behind her also looking into the mirror/*
- G: and how many years since you've been wearing a bra? =
- J: it's probably about (1) eight years =
- G: have you ever ever tried to get yourself fitted [since?]
- J: [no] =
- G: have you – do you even know what your bra-size [is?]
- J: [no]

- G: this whole issue you've got with your chest (2) this whole issue you've got with you not feeling like a woman and not. deserving a bra (1) which is what it's ~~ab~~out
- J: ((nods))
- G: ← that has to stop. because I'm telling you now that world out there there is so much fun to be had=
- J: ((laughs)) that would be nice=
- G: but the first thing I have to do. absolutely. is getting you looking at your body differently →
- J: ((nods))
- G: ← are you exc[ited?]
- J: [yes] very yes=
- G: are you relieved? =
- J: yes. some. some help. help me. ((laughs))
- G: I'm here girlfriend →
- J: ((laughs))
- G: ← come here ((they hug, Gok kisses jenny on the cheek)) well done. this is a *very* expensive jacket do *not* cry over it
- J: ((laughs))

Public Reactions

/ Gok displays six banners hanging from the first floor of a shopping mall, showing Jenny in her everyday wear and underwear, respectively. Asks for opinions from members of the public/

- G: */ talking to F1 as she goes up the escalator/* now if you had that body ((points to banner)) =
- F1: yes=
- G: would you do *that* ((points)) [to it]
- F1: [no]
- G: what is the one. fabulous piece of advice you would give to my lovely friend here Jenny
- F1: well she's clearly got a lovely fig[ure] →
- G: [yes]
- F1: ← so she needs clothes that fit her ↓ figure. so instead of *hiding* ((points to banner)) it in baggy things like that you need something that fits your shape

/Gok approaches F2 and F3 shopping/

- F2: [hi]
- F3: [hi]
- G: [h] ding *dong* – are you mother and daughter? =
- F2: we are=
- F3: ((laughs))
- G: I wanna be related to *you* (1) what are we thinking girls?
- F2: she's a good proportion she's got a lovely slim figure

/ Jenny is on an escalator with M1. They are looking at the banners of Jenny in her underwear/

J: this is me in my [pants] →

M1: [oh woah]

J: ← what [do you think?]

G: [JENNY] TELL HIM YOU'RE NOT WEARING A BRA

J: I've got no bra on though because I don't wear bras=

M1: you know I could tell that

/Gok is speaking to F4 at the top of the escalators and has his arm around her shoulders. They stand facing Jenny/

F4: if I had that figure I really wouldn't hide it but you've got *fantastic* legs you've got really really really nice boobs =

G: now look at those clothes up here do you like what she's wearing just there=

F4: no=

G: do you think it's feminine=

F4: no not at all=

G: do you think it's sexy=

F4: not really [no]

G: [but] do you think that after ten minutes with me she'll have some style?=
 J: ((laughs))

F4: oh yeah=

G: I love you (mwah) ((kisses F4 on the cheek))

The Makeover

/ Gok and Simon are in a clothes shop. Gok is standing at a table with piled clothes. Simon is standing in front of a full-length mirror /

G: *kit* off. just now I'm gonna get you looking. so hot. and so sharp that she's not gonna know what's hit her=

GV: who's a *lucky boy* then

G: okay. we are doing the *cutest* suit now. a polo shirt. you *cannot. ever* again. give. your lovely girl. your clothes. because otherwise she's going to spend the whole of her life. Hiding underneath. all of your excuses (4) so this is a Prince of Wales check=

S: yep=

G: very very famous in the sixties. it's a. basically a *plain* . cut. suit. double button. *really* iconic (2) to finish it all off we've got the most fabulous stiff pork pie hat. and we've got▶

S: ()

G: ← [a nineteen] sixties style. man-bag (1) are you ready to go and impress her?=
 S: ab[solutely]

G: [do you] love it?

S: ab[solutely]

G: [do you] look sharp?

S: very sharp

/Scene change. Jenny enters the room/

G: when I first met you guys I realised you’re not mainstream you’ve *got* your own unique look so we’ve just got to give it a polish all right? =

J: ((nods))

G: so. you know the drill. *kit* off.

J: ((starts to undress))

GV: I want to get Jenny out of her huge baggy clothes and into something *fitted* – so I’ve chosen an outfit that will suit her ↓ individual style =

G: good. now- we’re gonna start off with a pair of skinny jeans. light. wash. blue denim all over the high street at the moment. and then straight on. with▶

J: ()

G: ← a very sexy pair of shoes that are for you *but obviously* a little bit for Simon as well=

J: right. [wonderful]

G: [when you’re] wearing a skinny jean and stiletto you’ve got two options either you wear the jean *all* the way down. *over* the heel – which extends your legs (2) because your legs are already really long I’ve decided to leave them on the ankle (1) so (2) a classic polo T-shirt [all▶ right]

J: [yeah]

G: ← we’re gonna have a look at that? (1) *now*. tartan (2.5) fitted blazer – and this is going to give you your little bit of style and make it look *unique* – non-mainstream – very very on trend – and do you love it?

J: ↑ yeah I [do]

G: [yeah?]

Episode 14. Series 3

Opening Commentary

/Gok is pacing on a stage in a theatre/

GV: this week I’m treading the boards on the south coast ↓ (1) I’ve taken my mirrors *out* of the studio. and brought them to the theatre royal – to meet thirty three year old wannabe actress Clare Coxon

Underwear Scene

/ Gok faces the camera/

G: (2) today – her name *will* be in lights – but it’s not acting I’m after. she has *no* idea at all that me – or my mirrors ((points)) – are here waiting for her

/Footage showing Clare entering the theatre foyer/

- GV: (3) if my girl's going to make a fizz in the world of showbiz – I'm gonna need her to deal with those body hang-ups she's lived with for so long (3) she's about to face an audition like no other for the part of how to love her body =
- C: ((walking in)) ()
- G: [hi] →
- C: [hi]
- G: ← come down here my gorgeous. today my darling we're going to do your mirrors. we've [got it all set up] →
- C: [oh my god]
- G: ← are you all right are you ready? =
- C: yeah yeah of [*course*]
- G: [shall] we go down there and start? =
- C: ((nods)) let's do it
- GV: I've got to help Clare confront her demons head-on (3) I want her to strip bare and face those body issues once and for all
- G: (3) what are you feeling right now
- C: (5) exposed. fairly horrified. if I'm honest. [erm]
- G: [yeah] so I understand exposed – why horrified?
- C: (3) it's just I don't like what I see – it's just (2) this is a view I normally try to avoid (1) I don't like looking at it ((starts to cry))
- G: (3) tell me why you don't like it? =
- C: I just feel fat and. ugly
- G: (4) I need you to tell me *exactly* (1) what you *don't* like looking at in these mirrors
- C: (2) let's start with the feet big – flat feet – size nine ((laughs) ()). chunky calves (1) lumpy knees. chunky thighs. cellulite – broken veins (2) big bum (2) big stomach (2) big saggy boobs =
- G: who do you talk to about this Clare?
- C: I don't really. discuss it that much because. it kind of feels like it's my problem it's not. not anyone else's problem. but me =
- G: but maybe that's the problem (1.5) maybe it's the fact that →
- C: ((nods))
- G: ← you haven't spoken to anyone about this. and that you're dealing with this completely on your own. which basically means you're having a relationship with your body on your own (1) that's quite unhealthy (2) you're about to go back to college. yeah? to go and do acting – if you're not comfortable in your own skin how are you going to be able to get on stage. and play a different character? (3) it's not going to happen
- C: (2) it'll certainly make it more difficult. yeah ((smiles))

G: (2) we've got to start from the very very basics. which is get you looking in that mirror – and the first thing is not necessarily liking it (1.5) *definitely* not loving it yet (1) but *absolutely* accepting it

C: .okay=

G: well done ((gives Clare a hug))

Public Reactions

/Gok has organised for a picture of Clare in her underwear to be shown on all the television screens in the display window of a television shop. He and Clare are standing in front of the window/

G: what kind of things are you expecting to hear? =

C: people being *polite* ((laughs)). maybe=

G: I've done a lot of these. and people. will tell you the absolute truth – they won't just be polite all right? and I'm going to prove that to you right now

/Scene changes. Gok is speaking to a group of women who are shopping. Both are looking at the television screens/

G: what do you think?

F1: (1) nice figure. good bum. good boobs. nipped in the waist=

G: do you think this is a body to celebrate?

F1: [yep]

F2: [yes]

C: ((laughs, looks embarrassed))

G: look at her. go on tell [her]

F1: [you're beautiful]

F2: [you have an amazing figure]

G: say thank you [very much]

C: [thank you]

/Gok and F3 are facing the camera, looking at the television screen. Clare is standing apart but listening to the conversation/

G: what do you think of Clare in her bra and pants?

F3: she's got a *good* body. very curvy as well [and] →

G: [yeah]

F3: ←I think she's got a nice ass – actually=

G: go on get in there

F3: ((feels Clare's bum)) (3.5) *nice* isn't it?

C: ((laughs))

G: we're in Brighton so girls do this

/Gok is talking to another group of women/

G: so [] about legs. *what* makes a good pair of pins? =

F4: good calf [muscles]

- F5: [yeah]
- F6: [and] they're like. they seem like sort of toned at the back and
[everything]
- F4: [yeah]
- F5: [()]
- G: would you be happy to have a body like that?
- F6: [yes ((nods))]
- F4: [yes]
- G: what can we say to her to make her feel better about her body?
- F4: [you're gorgeous]
- F5: [you *are* gorgeous]
- F6: [and you've got] a great figure
- G: () and if you had her figure would you be happy for [it?] →
- F5: [yes]
- G: ← and would you walk around the beach in a [bikini?]
- F5: [yes absolutely]
- F4: [YEAH]
- F6: [()]

The Makeover

- GV: when it comes to fashion getting the right clothes for your body shape is *essential* for boosting your confidence (2) it's time to unleash that fabulous body within and make the most of Clare's gorgeous curves. cue Gok Scissorhands
- G: (3) right. what we've got here. right? is we've got excess material here ((indicates shoulders)). excess material here ((indicates waist)). and excess material all the way down. right. okay. this basically is telling me that. your silhouette looks a *little* bit like. a toilet roll. all right. there's absolutely no curves to it at all it keeps it *straight*. up and down. if you can't see your curves – you're not going to feel feminine. you're not going to feel glamorous. and you are *absolutely* not going to feel like a woman. so I'm going to show you your silhouette. right ((picks up scissors)) (2) firstly I'm going to do. I'm going to expose these gorgeous. fabulous. lovely legs (3)
- GV: I wanna show Clare that her pins are something to be proud of (1) with legs as long as this hiding them under such baggy jeans is nothing short of sinful
- G: (3) what do you think? =
- C: I'm not sure it's a high street outfit ((smiles)). but ((laughs)) =
- G: but come on can't you see your body [now?]
- C: [yeah, yeah]
- GV: I've turned those giant jeans into a hot strapless denim number (1)

- G: how much weight do you think you’ve just lost?
- C: [()]
- G: [from wearing] those hideous. baggy. clothes? =
- C: probably a good stone or so I should [think]
- G: [these] are your shoulders. that’s your *upper width* →
- C: ((nods))
- G: ← we come down here. you’ve got a great set of tits →
- C: ((smiles))
- G: ← at the moment they’re kind of squashed here but you’ve got a great. set. of bangers just there ((cups Clare’s breasts with hands)). this then comes in and scoops you in at the very smallest part of your waist. we then come out and your hips come out *almost*. now to the → same [width]
- C: [yeah]
- G: ← as your shoulders which gives you. an hourglass figure. gorgeous? =
- C: definitely a lot better=
- G: look at all this ((gestures to exposed back)) – how does that feel to get some flesh out? =
- C: actually it’s not as bad as [I thought] →
- G: [yeah?]
- C: ← you know it’s. I feel more comfortable=
- G: can you imagine. what it’s going to be like if I got some proper clothes and dressed you can you imagine what you’d look like. shall I do that?
- C: ((smiles and nods))