

# Globalized Religion and Sexual Identity

*Contexts, Contestations, Voices*

*Edited by*

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# Contents

About the Authors VII

## Introduction (Contexts, Contestations and Voices)

*Heather Shipley* 1

## Contexts

- 1 **The Rise of Anti-Gay Right Activism in the U.S.: A Review of Major Sociological Theories** 15  
*Rebecca Barrett-Fox*
- 2 **Desiring Justice, Acting Jnana: Transforming the Transsexual Legal Fantasy from the Perspectives of Žižekian and Mahayana Buddhist Philosophies** 40  
*Chiu Man-chung*
- 3 **Talking Sexuality: Religious Identity Construction in Rural Canada** 62  
*Kate Power*
- 4 **Only Skin Deep: Revising the Secular Narrative through Circumcision** 86  
*Amélie Barras and Dia Dabby*

## Contestations

- 5 **Obama's Neo-New Deal: Religion, Secularism, and Sex in Political Debates Now** 109  
*Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini*
- 6 **Issues of Gender and Sexuality in a Brazilian Technical School: Displacements and Exclusion Processes** 129  
*Ana Cristina Leal Moreira Lima, Vera Helena Ferraz de Siqueira and Marcia Bastos de Sá*

- 7 **A Weberian-Troeltschian Examination of the Relationship between Religious/Spiritual Identities and Human Sexuality: The Case of the Proposed Anglican Communion Covenant** 148  
*Riva Lieflander*
- 8 **Religion and Homosexuality in Contemporary China: Debates, Identity, and Voices** 170  
*Shun Hing Chan and Ping Huang*
- 9 **Negotiating Sexual Rights in the U.K.: Christian Constituencies and Contested Moralities** 193  
*Stephen Hunt*
- Voices**
- 10 **Charismatic Protestantism, Gender and Sexuality in Brazil** 217  
*Nina Rosas and Cristina Maria de Castro*
- 11 **English Evangelicals, Equality and the City** 236  
*Anna Strhan*
- 12 **‘They Go Burn in Hell!’ Exploring How African MSM Negotiate Religion and Sexuality in Canada** 256  
*Nesochi Chinwuba*
- 13 **Values and Practices: How are Youth in Canada Integrating Religion and Sexuality in their Daily Lives?** 276  
*Heather Shipley and Pamela Dickey Young*
- 14 **Mapping Queer, Mapping Me: Visualizing Queer Religious Identity** 295  
*Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowdon*
- Conclusion** 313  
*Heather Shipley*
- Index** 319

# Talking Sexuality

## *Religious Identity Construction in Rural Canada*

*Kate Power*

### Introduction

Stereotypes abound concerning the relationships between religion and sexuality. In twenty-first century Canada, for example, negative attitudinal stances towards the legalization of same-sex marriage (hereafter SSM) became widely “bound” (Sacks [1972] 1986, 335) to conservative Christianity as churches and parachurch organizations weighed in on legal, media and public policy debates around that issue (Reidel 2009). Concomitantly, positive stances towards SSM have come to function as “predicates” (Watson 1983, 41) of more “liberal” religious identities (Walls 2010).

Scholarly inquiry into the relationships between religion and SSM has commonly focused on tracing the history of SSM, including the legal framing of LGBT rights and religious freedom. Some studies have documented changing attitudes towards SSM expressed by government policies and public *élites*, including media representations of SSM and the official stances of different religious groups. Others, by contrast, have investigated *non-élite* public opinions – in particular, the attitudes of both LGBT and religious individuals. Few studies, however, have focused on the linguistic resources with which attitudes to SSM are expressed.

Land and Kitzinger (2007) use Conversation Analysis to document how gay men and lesbians talk about their relationships against the backdrop of civil partnership legalization in the UK. Rodgers (2010) provides a discourse analytic study of how queer university student media represents SSM, while Boys (2010) argues – contra Kitzinger and Wilkinson (2004) – that LGBT advocates should use legal (rather than mental health or social justice) discourse to pursue the legalization of SSM. Finally, Tracy (2011) investigates stance-taking on SSM by U.S. Supreme Court attorneys and judges. Yet, scant consideration has been afforded to the language with which *non-élite religious individuals* discuss SSM. How do the relationships between religion and SSM play out in the speech of everyday Christian Canadians? How do Christians draw on and recontextualize religious and other discourses when discussing SSM? And how does

attitudinal stance-taking around SSM contribute to the discursive construction of religious identity?

Drawing on Membership Categorization Analysis (Schegloff 2007b) and stance analysis (Du Bois 2007), this chapter uses interview and group discussion data from rural Canada to analyze how Christian Canadians identify themselves in relation to religion via attitudinal-stance-taking around SSM. It pays particular attention to (i) Christian Canadians' engagement in collaborative stance-taking; (ii) their precise choices of stance object; (iii) the linguistic resources with which they project different stances; and (iv) the support offered for those stances. In doing so, it highlights oft-neglected intra-group differences and shows how multiple religious identifications can be negotiated, not only across different settings but even within a single turn-at-talk – thereby bringing some complexity to confront the negative stereotypes in terms of which religious individuals are often depicted.

### Discursive Constructions of Religious Identity

Religious individuals are not merely the “animators” of pre-existing religious discourses; they are also active “authors” (Goffman 1981, 144), who construct their own (and others') religious identities by using, combining, reinterpreting, even subverting discourses associated with specific religious traditions. Usage of the term “discourse” has multiplied exponentially during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, giving rise to considerable confusion (as criticized by Fairclough 2005, 58). In this chapter, *discourse* is used as a count noun to refer to “the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view” (Fairclough 1995, 56). Discourses reflect and contribute to shaping the ways in which individuals are positioned in social life (Johnstone 2008). Consequently, they are closely linked to identity and social relations (Fairclough 2003).

Religious discourses are often characterized by distinctive lexis (Mooney 2005), but religious traditions also share common discourses – such as the discourse of “loss” (Bramadat and Seljak 2008, 15), in terms of which many Canadian Christians decry the diminution of Christian influence in public life and the growing disjunction between Christian values and Canadian social norms. Moreover, multiple discourses are always found within a single religious tradition (Greene 2009). For, although particular discourses may be closely associated with certain religious groups, these associations are often neither definitive of – nor necessary to – the religious identities in question.

Individual adherents to a religious group or tradition can, and do, use multiple discourses. Steiner's (2006, 8) study of Operation Rescue, for example, demonstrates how one American pro-life group combines fundamentalist Christian discourse with "the legitimating power of historical civil rights discourses" to protest abortion.

Like discourse, "identity" is a word that has suffered from overuse (Grad and Martín Rojo 2008). Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 1) observe, for example, that it "tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)." In this chapter, *identity* is regarded as "the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 588) – that is, identity is constructed as individuals negotiate their category memberships in specific settings, via linguistic and other social practices (Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2003).

## Data

The data analyzed here are drawn from a larger study investigating discursive constructions of religious identity in rural Canada. In 2005, while debate around the legalization of SSM consumed the Canadian media, 32 interviews and two group discussions were conducted in Claresholm, southern Alberta.

Claresholm was chosen as the location for this study because it exemplifies Bibby's (1999) depiction of the Canadian religious demographic as "a culturally diverse Christian monopoly." Southern Alberta is commonly regarded as Canada's "Bible belt" (cf. Bibby 1987, 90) and, despite being home to just over 3500 people (STATSCAN 2002), Claresholm boasts considerable diversity of Christian expressions. These include churches representing ten denominations and three Hutterite colonies.<sup>1</sup> Claresholm's *Local Press* is also one of a

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1 The religious communities in Claresholm (in descending order of congregational size, at the time this fieldwork was conducted) are as follows: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (400 members; average attendance 200); Clear Lake Hutterite Colony (Lehrerleut, 132 residents); Willow Creek Hutterite Colony (Lehrerleut, 120 residents); Granum Hutterite Colony (Dariusleut, 116 residents); Faith Community Baptist Church (Baptist Union of Western Canada, 84 members; average attendance 134); Claresholm United Church (United Church of Canada, average attendance 75–100); Christ the King Church (Roman Catholic Church in Canada, average attendance 80); Claresholm Victory Church (Victory Churches of Canada, average attendance 75); Peace Lutheran Church (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, average attendance 72); Claresholm Church of the Nazarene (Church of the Nazarene

minority of Canadian local newspapers to feature a regular “religion” column (Bell 2005). Comprising spiritual reflections by members of the town’s “Ministerial Association,” this column suggests a familiarity with, and openness to the public discussion of, religion on the part of Claresholm residents – as well as a restriction of public construals of non-Christian and non-traditional Christian religious identities.

As noted earlier, this chapter considers “everyday talk” about religion by “everyday folk.” This orientation is inspired by Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) focus on popular manifestations of religion – which, Lyon (2000, 12) argues, warrants [...]

caution about generalizing about religion in Canada from the views of certain mainstream denominational theological seminaries or the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, and a willingness to listen to persons from one of the prairie Bible colleges or to read stories in, say, the evangelical periodical *Christian Week*, and to talk with the diverse clientele of Christian bookstores.

Lyon’s observation that popular religious voices have been overlooked by Canadian scholars – and his reference to “the prairie Bible colleges,” in particular – alludes to the condescension with which rural residents are often viewed. By contrast, the present study repudiates such “ruralism” (Bassett 2003) by providing a forum in which talk *by*, rather than *about*, rural people can be heard.

Claresholm’s population is arguably less dissimilar to the rest of Canada than might be anticipated. In political and social attitudes, for example, only minimal differences have been found between urban and rural-western Canadians (Gibbons 2003). Likewise, Claresholm represents what Varma (2003, 85) describes as the “prevalent demographic reality within the Canadian multicultural context” – namely, “the predominately White location.” It is not unreasonable to expect, therefore, that the stances on SSM taken by Claresholm residents, and the linguistic resources and forms of support with which those stances are projected, might resemble those in other parts of Canada.

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in Canada, average attendance 63); Claresholm Pentecostal Assembly (Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, average attendance 56); Jehovah’s Witnesses Kingdom Hall (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 35 ministers, i.e., adult members); St John the Evangelist Anglican Church (Anglican Church in Canada, average attendance 20); Holy Redeemer Mission (Anglican Catholic Church of Canada, average attendance 6).

Participants in this study included all but one of Claresholm's religious leaders, lay people from each of the town's religious communities, and one person whose religious tradition was not represented institutionally in town. Each was invited to reflect on contemporary social issues in light of his/her own faith commitments. These conversations lasted between one and one half hours each; all were recorded and transcribed using a simplified form of Jefferson's conventions (as listed in Atkinson and Heritage 1984),<sup>2</sup> then coded both for themes related to religion and current events, and for the use of various linguistic resources.

All data fragments presented here have been anonymized and will be analyzed selectively, focusing on (i) religious self-categorizations "as *members*' phenomena...rather than [sic] as resources for sociological theorizing" (Hester and Eglin 1997, 157, emphasis added), (ii) interdiscursivity, or the combination of genres, discourses and styles within a single text (Fairclough 2003), and (iii) "the words and structures" (Du Bois 2007, 146) with which attitudinal stances on SSM are projected.

## Discussion

### *Collaborative Stance-Taking*

Greene (2009, 705) notes that choosing "people who have the most extreme and exclusive positions" to represent religious groups not only exaggerates the distance between perspectives but also potentially "elevate[s] marginal and extreme ideologies to a level of influence and credibility they do not deserve." It is helpful, therefore, to begin by considering a moderate stance on SSM which illustrates the collaborative nature of stance-taking and how attitudinal stances can function as the "category-bound" (Sacks [1972] 1986, 335) attributes of religious identifications. Pat is clergy with the United Church of Canada.

Excerpt 1 begins with the "question preface" (Greatbatch 1988, 408) *homosexuality has popped up a couple of times in what you've said so far* (line 1),

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2 The transcription symbols used in this chapter are listed below.

- // Double obliques indicate the beginning of overlapping or simultaneous speech.  
 - Dashes mark a false-start or truncated word.  
 [...] Square brackets contain commentary on the transcript, including notations of omitted material.  
 HOORAY Upper case letters signal vocal emphasis.  
**Mormon** Bold font marks features of interest to the analyst.  
 Conventional spelling has been used throughout.



## EXCERPT 1

- 
- 1 Kate     **homosexuality** has popped up a couple of times in what you've said so far um I  
 2            mean how-how do you think Christians could or should handle **those kind of**  
 3            **divisive issues in society**
- 4 Pat       OH! It's a good question. I mean, it even came up this morning at  
 5            ministerial Ron was telling us that they're it's coming to the [name  
 6            omitted] church that they're I don't know at a national level debating  
 7            **the whole same sex marriage thing** and you know I thought to  
 8            myself I-I know in the past with the ministerial I think they know  
 9            where I STAND but I'm not very vocal about it//at-at the ministerial  
 10           about the fact that **I'm actually OKAY with this**
- 11 Kate     //mm mm
- 12 Pat       um I-I-I'm **actually fairly evangelical** and get along with them quite  
 13           well **apart from that issue**
- 

identifying “homosexuality” as the topic at hand. A question proper then expands that focus, inviting Pat to discuss *divisive issues in society* (lines 2–3). Pat's selection of *the whole same sex marriage thing* (line 7) as her “object of stance” (Du Bois 2007, 143) is thus a demonstrably collaborative achievement, influenced by both the interviewer's question and Pat's own sensitivity, and orientation, to the question preface.

In naming her stance object, Pat uses the placeholder *thing*, which implies an expectation on Pat's part that her interlocutor will recognize the object to which she is referring (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs 1986). It also signals that Pat perceives this object to be more complex than the relevant noun phrase (*same sex marriage*, line 7) can express (Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge 2003). This use of placeholders – that is, explicitly vague words (Channell 1994) – to refer to stance objects, in combination with more specific expressions that partially identify those objects, occurs throughout the data upon which this chapter is based and features the following elements, in the following sequence:

- 1     either the definite article (*the*), or a demonstrative determiner (*this/that*);
- 2     the evaluative adjective *whole* (optional);
- 3     a noun phrase (of variable form and length), depicting central or defining features of the speaker's stance object; and
- 4     a placeholder (usually *thing*, but also *stuff* and *issue*), functioning as head noun.

This formulation typically conveys a negative evaluation but allows speakers to avoid specifying their precise stance object, while implicitly inviting their listeners to reconstruct and, in doing so, to corroborate their evaluation of that object (Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge 2003). Yet, notwithstanding her depiction of SSM as complex, Pat's stance here is favourable, as indicated by the moderately positive adjective *okay* (line 10). Riggins (1997, 4) argues that the development of self-identity hinges on both (i) the adoption and rejection of "specific identities," and (ii) the generation of "discourses of both difference and similarity." Indeed, as scholars have repeatedly observed (see, for example, Davie 1994, Day 2009), religious identity is more complex than a simple matter of belonging/ non-belonging. For example, Pat uses the category "label" (Moerman 1988, 90) *evangelical* (line 12) to self-identify in relation to a theologically conservative form of Christianity. At the same time, however, she couples *fairly* with the stance adverbial *actually* (both lines 11–12) to attenuate that identification (Holmes 1984) – thus marking her affiliation with evangelicalism as both partial (*apart from that issue*, line 13) and unexpected (Biber and Finegan 1988). In short, Pat implicitly binds opposition to SSM to evangelical Christianity, while simultaneously affiliating herself with, and distancing herself from, that identification.

### *Stance Object*

Part of the complexity involved in the relationship between stance-taking and religious identification arises from the fact that a single turn at talk may project numerous stances in relation to multiple stance objects. Du Bois (2007, 146) augments this complexity by proposing that:

There are at least three things we need to know about a given occasion of stancetaking, beyond what may be overtly present in the words and structures of the stance sentence itself: (1) Who is the stancetaker? (2) What is the object of stance? (3) What stance is the stancetaker responding to?

In Excerpt 1 above, for example, Pat invites her interviewer (a Claresholm resident and churchgoer) to collaborative stance-taking on *the whole same sex marriage thing* (line 7) – referring not only to the legalization of SSM in Canada, but also to the political and media furor that surrounded it. She does so against the backdrop of that debate, across Canada and within her ministerial colleagues' denominations (line 6). However, Pat's stance can also be situated in relation to her own denomination's public support for SSM (Young 2010), her ministerial colleagues' known (oppositional) stances on SSM (lines 12–13), and the fact that her interlocutor's stance had not yet been disclosed.

In other interviews, Claresholm residents selected different stance objects when presented with a photograph of one of Canada's early same-sex marriages. In Excerpts 2 and 3 below, for example, both Peter and Ron evaluate homosexual individuals and their behaviour.

## EXCERPT 2

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1 Peter oh yeah [laughter] **as individuals I have no problem** we've got a um a  
 2 chap in Toronto that ah was we met first in Edmonton he um **he's a good**  
 3 **friend of my son's and still is and we see him** and ah he's another man-  
 4 ager of a mall and ah and he's had different live-ins in fact he's got a little  
 5 negro boy now and ah ah it's I can describe it in in in words of ah another  
 6 mutual friend who who's um has owns a number of um drug stores and  
 7 she's part of a little crowd that they go to and ah when they go out for din-  
 8 ner at his house they they **the exhibitionism they want to hug and kiss**  
 9 and oh we don't do that and um so ah **I can accept them as individuals**  
 10 **but I wish they would know their place and stay there and not flaunt it**

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## EXCERPT 3

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1 Ron this looks like a gay marriage not necessarily the case but that's what it  
 2 looks like and ah again **two people trying to do what they think is right**  
 3 **most likely and we would be in in disagreement as to whether that's ah**  
 4 **God's will for their lives but still um they're people human beings who**  
 5 **God loves and and who um I would enjoy relating to knowing**

---

Both speakers negatively evaluate (different) public expressions of love by homosexual individuals (lines 7, 8, Excerpt 2; line 1, Excerpt 3), while claiming to be positively disposed towards those same individuals (lines 1–3, 9, Excerpt 2; lines 2, 4–5, Excerpt 3). In demonstrating thereby that they not only know but also care about “the rules” of Canadian society (McLaughlin 1984, 207), both speakers use a positive stance on homosexual *individuals* as a “shield” (van Dijk 1984, 120), behind which to protect their “positive self-image” (van Dijk 1984, 46) – even while projecting a negative stance on homosexual people's *behaviour*. In this respect, both Peter and Ron demonstrably endorse the “sin-sinner’ distinction” (Veenvliet 2008, 64) widely adopted by conservative Christians.

Strikingly, however, Peter (a member of the United Church of Canada) also projects a highly pejorative stance towards homosexual (and Black) individuals (lines 4–5), while Ron (clergy with an evangelical church that opposed same-sex marriage in 2005) is considerably more balanced in his stance-taking. Peter uses a variation of the familiar “I’m not racist but...” disclaimer (Every and Augoustinos 2007, 412) to coordinate his contradictory stances (*I can accept them as individuals but...*, lines 9–10). As Barnes et al. (2001, 324) explain, the statement following *but* in this formulation typically justifies “some racist practice” (or attitude), while the “I’m not prejudiced’ statement” preceding *but* distances the speaker from that practice – thus positioning him or her as “a reasonable and nonracist individual and [...] claim[ing] membership of the ‘moral community’ of the nonprejudiced.”

Although typically associated with “new racism” (Barker 1981, van Dijk 1992), this disclaimer formulation is used here as “a kind of alignment talk” (Overstreet and Yule 2001, 48) with which Peter positions himself as upholding Canadian mores around diversity, even while rehearsing the common critique that homosexual individuals should not “flaunt” their sexuality (Kitzinger 2005: 257). By contrast, Ron uses the adversative conjunction *but* (line 4, Excerpt 3) to foreground his more positive view that – notwithstanding the probability of disagreement between himself and homosexual couples as to God’s view of ssm – homosexual individuals are loved by God and likely to prove agreeable acquaintances.

Other participants chose different stance objects, including homosexuality (lines 1–3, Excerpt 4 below), the public debate around ssm (lines 5–6, Excerpt 5), and Christian responses to ssm (lines 2–5, Excerpt 6). Indeed, as Excerpts 4 through 6 below illustrate, Claresholm residents commonly project attitudinal stances on one or more of these objects in close succession, thereby indirectly aligning themselves with various (stereotypical) religious identities.

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EXCERPT 4

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1	Meredith	I can love a homosexual I have no problems with that but I don’t
2		believe that they’re right their lifestyle is right any more than I do
3		that somebody who is married and is unfaithful to his spouse but to
4		me don’t move into a church where we have established beliefs where
5		definitely once again the Bible you cannot anywhere see that that is
6		right or acceptable and then want us to change our things go make your
7		church with that belief you know

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## EXCERPT 5

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1 Baylee one of the things that turns me off about some churches is the fact that  
 2 they are intolerant of others and their beliefs and to me it just doesn't  
 3 make sense that there would be only one little way that's right in this  
 4 whole world [98 words omitted] my beliefs are fairly global and I'm  
 5 **very tolerant and accepting and that's the reason why that whole gay**  
 6 **marriage thing is just seems ridiculous to me**

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## EXCERPT 6

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1 Nicole I personally have no problem with this whatsoever it's two people that love  
 2 each other that want to be together and **I think the church is wrong on it**  
 3 **I do** [130 words omitted] and that's again then where **I vary from from or**  
 4 **disagree with the church and believe is still stuck in the Dark Ages**  
 5 **because of it**

---

In Excerpt 4, Meredith (a member of Claresholm's Baptist church) implicitly self-identifies as a conservative Christian via stance-taking on the homosexual "lifestyle" (line 2) (Shumway 2004, 83). By contrast, both Baylee's (an Anglican) stance on the public debate around SSM and Nicole's (a Roman Catholic) critical evaluation of her own denomination signal more liberal Christian identifications. Indeed, by negatively evaluating the religious group with which she identifies, Nicole arguably displays a form of religious "belonging without believing" (cf. Davie 1994), which surfaced in interviews with several other Claresholm residents.

### *Linguistic Resources*

In addition to self-identifying via their choice of stance objects, Claresholm residents index their religious identities by employing various linguistic resources for attitudinal stance-taking. Some of these have already been discussed (namely, placeholders, disclaimers, and adversative conjunctions). However, religious self-identifications are also conveyed via evaluative lexis, reported speech, and different types of narrative.

First, Claresholm residents use evaluative lexis – notably, "attitude verbs" (Hyland 2005, 180) and "evaluative adjectives" (Hunston and Sinclair 2000, 83) – strategically when stance-taking around SSM. In Excerpt 6 above, for example, Nicole uses a negative attitude verb (*disagree*, line 4) to evaluate the Catholic Church's position on SSM. In doing so, she positions herself "along an affective scale" (Du Bois 2007, 143) in relation to her stance object. For, by

negating *to agree* – rather than selecting a more expressly negative verb, such as *to reject* – Nicole retains some of the positive connotations associated with *agree* and thus positions herself closer to the middle of the affective scale. Similarly, Ron's combination of the conditional auxiliary verb *would [be]* with the adjectival phrase *in disagreement* (line 3, Excerpt 3) signals an even subtler – and arguably less negative – attitudinal stance.

Strikingly, no Claresholm residents use strongly negative attitude *verbs* for stance-taking around SSM, even those whose evaluations are patently pejorative. They do, however, use overtly negative evaluative *adjectives* to critique various properties of their stance object(s) – and, in doing so, construe those properties as the “intrinsic qualit[ies]” (Hunston and Sinclair 2000, 93–94) of their stance objects, and their own evaluations as “stanceless ‘facts’” (Biber et al. 1999, 969). In Excerpt 5, for example, Baylee combines the “Noun *that* pattern” (Charles 2007) with a negative adjective (*the fact that they are intolerant of others*, lines 1–2) pejoratively to evaluate religious groups whose stance on SSM differs from her own.

Yet, Claresholm residents seem to prefer even more subtle forms of stance-taking on SSM, routinely negating *positive* evaluative adjectives to attribute unstated – yet implicitly negative – properties to SSM (*you cannot anywhere see that that is right or acceptable*, lines 5–6, Excerpt 4). They also use non-evaluative adjectives that are nevertheless “associated with comparison against a norm or scale” (Hunston and Sinclair 2000, 91) to evaluate perspectives that differ from their own (*only one little way that's right in this whole world*, lines 3–4, Excerpt 5). The stance encoded by such adjectives is not overtly negative, but rather must be deduced from their immediate co-text (Hunston 2007, 36), such that the interviewer is required to do some of the speaker's evaluative work.

Second – in addition to using third-party “language reports” (Thompson 1996, 502) to distance themselves from negative stances on SSM and related stance objects (Goffman 1974) (*I can describe it in...we don't do that*, lines 5–9, Excerpt 2) – Claresholm residents repeatedly use hypothetical self-quotations to “dramatize” (Holt 1996, 235) stances that run counter to socio-cultural norms. In Excerpt 4, for example, Meredith uses hypothetical self-quotation negatively to evaluate the pressure her church was under to affirm SSM (*don't move into a church where we have established beliefs...go make your church with that belief*, lines 4–7). Typically introduced by “zero quotatives” (Mathis and Yule 1990), such that their attribution to the speaker is implied rather than explicitly stated (D'Arcy 2004), hypothetical self-quotations often include a second person pronoun (*your*, line 7) directed to an absent interlocutor, who is seldom identified but can usually be inferred from the dialogic context to be a generalized “category” (Sacks 1979) whose stance might be expected to differ from that of the speaker (in this case, homosexual Christians). Often following hard upon a depiction of the absent addressee wanting something, they can

therefore be viewed as providing a negative response to the absent party's reported stance (Gold 1991), expressed more explicitly and strongly than might otherwise be acceptable in a Canadian context.

Third, Claresholm residents routinely use narrative for stance-taking around SSM – and thus, also, for religious self-identification. For evaluation is but one aspect of “a single overarching, unified stance act” (Du Bois 2007, 163), which includes positioning oneself in relation to a stance object and aligning oneself with stances projected by others. Narrative positioning occurs at three levels, the first of which concerns “the linguistic means used to establish the characters in the story” (Bamberg 2004, 336). In Excerpt 7 below, for example, members of Claresholm's Baptist youth group discuss a photograph (mentioned previously) depicting SSM. In response, Kristin recounts a “personal-experience narrative” (Sawin 1999) that “tell[s] about a series of events...which *did* take place” at a specific moment in history (Polanyi 1985, 10–11, emphasis original), using *I* (lines 4–5, 7) to present herself as a “figure” (Schiffrin 1990, 252) within the story.

## EXCERPT 7

- 
- |   |         |   |
|---|---------|---|
| 1 | Kate    | what do we how do we respond to that  |
| 2 | Kristin | um how do you respond to it is the question                                     |
| 3 | Frank   | right   |
| 4 | Kristin | it's almost like a shock <b>I don't know what how to respond to it I was in</b> |
| 5 |         | <b>the mall I was like excuse me um I actually said miss and I excuse me</b>    |
| 6 |         | <b>miss can you help me get some clothing off that top rack and they</b>        |
| 7 |         | <b>turned around and it was a guy in drag and I'm like nice shoes</b>           |
| 8 | All     | [laughter]  |
- 

A second level of narrative positioning concerns “the interactive work that is being accomplished between the participants in the interactive setting” (Bamberg 2004, 336). In this same excerpt, Kristin's story is told in response to my prompting (*how do we respond to that*, line 1) and can therefore be heard as a “self-portrait” (Schiffrin 1996) dramatizing Kristin's stance on SSM (*I don't know what how to respond to it*, line 4). In relating this story, however, Kristin positions herself in relation to cross-dressing, rather than SSM. She also positions herself in relation to me (as interviewer), her fellow youth group members, and an array of unspecified expectations (Scheibman 2007) concerning *inter alia* the attitudes of (i) Canadians, for whom acceptance of diversity has become a defining national characteristic (Madison 2000), and (ii) members of the Baptist Union of Western Canada, most of whom might be described as “evangelicals on the conservative side” (Brackney 2006, 225).

People also tell stories in order to “position themselves vis-à-vis cultural discourses and normative (social) positions, either by embracing them or displaying neutrality, or by distancing, critiquing, subverting, and resisting them” – and, in doing so, create “a sense of (them as) selves” (Bamberg 2004, 336). Although only a narrative fragment, Kristin’s “small story” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) vividly displays her discomfiture at unexpectedly meeting a *guy in drag* (line 7): her reported response (*nice shoes*, line 7) suggests that she looked down rather than meet this man’s gaze, and that she self-consciously avoided noticing his cross-dressing. In short, this story attributes to Kristin a homophobic identification (Weinberg 1972) – that, is an unease with sexual diversity (Young 2008, Herek 2004) – which many would argue indexes her Baptist identification (Young 2006).

In Excerpt 8 below, by contrast, Tess volunteers a story about the United Church of Canada (within which she is clergy) approving the ordination of homosexual individuals (lines 4–8). Using first person plural pronouns (*we*, lines 4, 6, 8, 9; *our*, line 6; *ourselves*, line 8), she positions herself as affiliated with this denomination and, thus, as a party to the events recounted. Tess thereby implicitly owns an affirmative stance on SSM, aligning both herself and her denomination with a broader discourse of social justice (*it’s just it’s that we have a social conscience*, line 9). Because her denomination has long been a supporter of gay rights (Hutchinson 2011), Tess’s church narrative is arguably one way in which she “does being religious.”

## EXCERPT 8

- 
- |   |      |   |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | Kate | and how good a fit is the denomination for you  |
| 2 | Tess | oh it is it’s like it is a perfect fit for me it really is [33 words omitted] because |
| 3 |      | of our stance on ah gays and lesbians in the church and our stance on ah same         |
| 4 |      | sex marriage we have often said that it’s ah well in nineteen eighty eight we         |
| 5 |      | <b>decided that it was alright for a self-proclaimed homosexual to be ordained</b>    |
| 6 |      | <b>in our church that we would not have any sort of [unclear] any kind of barrier</b> |
| 7 |      | <b>except um their own um willingness and their own ah readiness you</b>              |
| 8 |      | <b>know to be a minister so sometimes we get ourselves in hot water it’s not</b>      |
| 9 |      | because we really want to it’s just it’s that we have a social conscience             |
- 

Finally, Claresholm residents also recount narratives of national – and thus both “shared” and “known” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, 381) – events, when stance-taking around SSM. In Excerpt 9 below, for example, Neil (a leader within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) recounts the



passage of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (line 2) and speculates about the potential implications of Canada's legalization of SSM for his church (lines 2–6). This, then, is a hypothetical narrative of nation, within which Neil rehearses the fear of many conservative Christians that the legalization of SSM will threaten religious liberty (Severino 2007).

## EXCERPT 9

---

1	Neil	[...] the government of Canada can require me now to marry homo-
2		sexuals since the Charter has been passed they could say to me if you
3		don't marry two men of your congregation that want to be married
4		we will um well they'll pull my licence but that's not going to hurt my
5		feelings but they would ah strip our properties um there's all sorts of
6		things governments can do to punish you

---

As de Fina (1996, 352, emphasis added) observes, however, “what defines people as members of a group is not only the *content* of their stories, but [also] the way in which they use socially established resources to tell them.” The speakers in Excerpts 7 to 9 arguably draw on their respective religious traditions when story-telling around SSM: Kristin's *personal experience narrative* displays an individualism commonly associated with evangelicalism (Schmalzbauer 2002); Tess's *church narrative*, by contrast, resonates strongly with the social justice orientation, expressed through congregational action, which is stereotypically bound to “liberal” forms of Christianity (Wellman 2002); while Neil's *narrative of nation* indexes the LDS Church's historic vulnerability to state persecution (Lee 1968). In sum, the ways in which “the referential world is constructed” in these narratives can also be seen to construct the narrators' religious “sense[s] of self” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, 380).

### *Stance Support*

The excerpts discussed thus far illustrate Claresholm residents using various linguistic resources to “support” (Chandrasegaran and Kong 2006, 377) their stances around SSM, including analogy (lines 2–3, Excerpt 4), personal opinion (line 10, Excerpt 1; lines 5–6, Excerpt 5; line 2, Excerpt 6), and narrative (lines 4–7, Excerpt 7). As Excerpts 10 and 11 below illustrate, however, further forms of stance support are also employed – and these merit more detailed consideration.

First, Claresholm residents repeatedly use various forms of explicit apology for multi-faceted attitudinal stance-taking around SSM, including both “Sorry-based units of talk” (Robinson 2004, 293, emphasis original) (*I'm sorry*, line 4, Excerpt 10) and “offer[s] of apology” (Olshtain and Cohen 1983, 22) (*I apologize*

## EXCERPT 10

- 
- 1 Rose okay I'm looking at the picture it appears to be the marriage of two men  
 2 um with oh a woman
- 3 Kate [laughter]
- 4 Rose doing the oh yeah I'm sorry ah I apologize to anyone who would be  
 5 offended but I don't apologize for what I believe I believe that homo-  
 6 sexuality is anti-Scriptural period um I believe it's an abomination to  
 7 the Lord the Scripture says that um what is natural is a man and a  
 8 woman that's how they were created to be you know Adam and Eve not  
 9 Adam and Steve that whole thing so that's my thing on that but again  
 10 don't hate the person don't hate the person [133 words omitted] the  
 11 Bible says that God hates the wicked
- 

to anyone who would be offended, line 4, Excerpt 10). Like Peter's disclaimers (Excerpt 2), Rose's apologies indicate awareness that her stance on homosexuality is likely to be perceived as problematic. Unlike disclaimers, however, these apologies "focus on an unpleasantness for the addressee" (Borkin and Reinhart 1978, 63) within the speaker's stance. They do not deny that Rose is projecting an adversarial stance. Rather, they signal "a defeasible *recognition* of [Rose's] moral responsibility" for this stance (McEvoy 1995, 46, emphasis original), which is thereby implicitly construed as an "*object of regret*" (Coulmas 1981, 75, emphasis original).

In this way, Claesholm residents simultaneously convey negative "metastances" (Kockelman 2004, 143) towards their own stances around SSM, whilst smoothing social interaction (Schegloff 2007a). They do not necessarily, however, thereby promise "non-repetition" (Kramer-Moore and Moore 2003, 163). Rose's *I'm sorry* functions as a "softener" (Borkin and Reinhart 1978, 63) for her negative stance on homosexuality, but its import seems to be (as indicated by her assertion *but I don't apologize for what I believe*, line 5): "I know that you consider [my stance] wrong or impolite. I wish I hadn't had to [project] it, but I had no choice. Given the same circumstances, I'd do it again" (Kramer-Moore and Moore 2003, 163).

Second, Claesholm residents use commonplaces to support their stances around SSM and, thus, to invite a convergent stance alignment from their interlocutors in the reporting context (Holt 2000). Commonplaces are "general argument[s], observation[s], or description[s] a speaker could memorize for use on any number of possible occasions" (Lanham 1968, 110). In lines 9–10 of Excerpt 10, for example, Rose rehearses the *love the sinner, hate the sin* "mantra" (McQueeney 2009, 159) of the contemporary "compassionate" Christian right (Apostolidis 2001) – and, in doing so, not only displays care in her

stance-taking (Myers 2007), but also indirectly identifies herself with conservative Christianity.

Finally, Claresholm residents commonly report religious authorities when stance-taking around SSM, forging intersubjective relationships with those authorities which index their own religious identifications in various ways. In Excerpt 10, for example, Rose responds to the SSM photograph used throughout this study by quoting and paraphrasing both the Bible (*it's an abomination to the Lord...a woman*, lines 6–8; *the Bible says...the wicked*, line 11) and Christian fundamentalist leader and founder of the Moral Majority (Harding 2000), Jerry Falwell (*Adam and Eve...Steve*, lines 8–9).

Charles (2006, 494) observes in relation to academic writing that authors “select sources which they consider to be persuasive within the context of their own discipline and study.” The same seems to hold true for Claresholm residents who quote religious leaders and/or texts as backing for their attitudinal stances: whom (or what) one chooses to quote in this way can be suggestive of whom (or what) one considers to be authoritative. Viewed in this light, Rose's decision to quote both the Bible and Jerry Falwell signals her endorsement of (Dickerson 1997) – and solidarity with – Protestant fundamentalism (Boone 1989).

In Excerpt 11 below, by contrast, Baylee paraphrases part of the Old Testament (*go forth...earth*, lines 4–5), using the Biblical text not as a source of authority with which convergently to align herself, but rather to “set up” a stance against which to position herself (Myers 1999): *we did it is overpopulated*, line 5.

## EXCERPT 11

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1 Baylee I think if somebody is in a committed relationship that's a committed  
 2 loving relationship it's nobody's business who that relationship is with so  
 3 long as they're of age and consenting and all that kind of thing [33 words  
 4 omitted] you know **Biblical references and so forth you know um go**  
 5 **forth and populate the earth we did it is overpopulated**

---

In short, Baylee claims the right to reinterpret and redirect *Biblical references* (line 4). For Shuman (1993, 135–136), such recontextualization amounts to “an entitlement claim,” the assertion of which entails the assertion of identity. Thus, Baylee's Biblical paraphrase contributes to her self-presentation as familiar with Christianity. Yet, by recruiting the Bible in the service of her own stance-taking, Baylee also presents herself as a free and critical thinker, capable of maintaining a measure of independence from the more conservative branches of her religious tradition.

## Conclusion

This chapter has used discourse analytic tools to provide a “bottom-up” account of how relationships between religion and SSM play out in the speech of everyday Canadians. In contrast to more traditional social scientific approaches (see, for example, Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006, Rosik, Griffith, and Cruz 2007, Koons 2009), however, it does *not* propose that Canadians project certain attitudinal stances on SSM because they “have” specific religious identities, nor that linguistic stance-taking behaviour is *determined* by religious affiliation. Rather, it argues that – given the local conventional associations that pertain between certain stances on SSM and particular (stereotypical) religious identities – stance-taking around SSM potentially “carr[ies] symbolic importance [...] as a *signal to others*” of an individual’s religious identity (Bechhofer et al. 1999, 527, emphasis added).

In doing so, this chapter highlights intra-group differences, corroborating André Droogers ([1995] 2006, 29) observation that “Believers simply do not behave in a consistent manner, despite the official, more or less homogeneous and integrated version of their religion, as represented by its religious figure-heads.” It also illustrates Billig’s (1991) notion of “ideological dilemmas,” whereby individuals both can and do simultaneously construct contradictory “identifications” (Jenkins [1996] 2004, 5) via multi-layered attitudinal stance-taking. For, as Milot (2009, 119) observes, “the identity of every individual, even that of orthodox believers [including those living in Canada’s rural Bible Belt], is complex, dynamic, and multifaceted.”

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