



Coming out – seducing – flirting: Shedding light on sexual speech acts

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates British and US gay men's comments on certain types of speech acts in their life narratives. This procedure yields folk linguistic evidence of the relationship between language and sexuality from a pragmatic point of view. At the theoretical level, the concept of “sexual speech act” (SSA) is introduced, distinguishing identity-related and desire-related SSAs. The analysis concentrates on gay men's comments on coming out as an identity-related SSA, and on seducing and flirting as desire-related SSAs. The narrated speech acts are analyzed quantitatively with respect to agency patterns, while a qualitative analysis of data extracts studies how narrators construct the illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects of SSAs, and how the SSAs are integrated in the contextual discursive construction of sexuality.

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1. Introduction

Research on language and sexuality from a pragmatic point of view has gained ground since the mid-1990s. Previous work has focused on rape-related communication (Dale et al., 1997; Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016; Johnson, 2018; Kramer, 2011; MacLeod, 2016), intercultural communication (Caldwell-Harris et al., 2013; Dewaele, 2008; Dewaele and Salomidou, 2017), dating advertisements (Marley, 2008; Zahler, 2016), online grooming sites (Lorenzo-Dus and Izura, 2017), pop lyrics (Kuhn, 1999; Watson, 2012), and pick-up artist talk (Hambling-Jones and Merrison, 2012). Such pragmatic studies have almost exclusively analyzed communication and linguistic representation of non-heterosexual subjects (but see Harvey (2002) on gay male camp talk, and Shrikant (2014) on communication in a lesbian counter-public).

This study seeks to advance the pragmatic investigation of language and sexuality by offering a theoretical discussion of the notion of “sexual speech act” and by analyzing comments about such speech acts in the pre-Stonewall life narratives of British and US gay men. On one hand, this investigation is important because it addresses the lack of pragmatic research on heterosexual language users. On another, this procedure sheds light on the role speech acts play in the discursive construction of sexuality more generally and on how the social context shapes their use. Furthermore, the analysis shows that meta-linguistic comments on speech acts provide better access to the functions and consequences of speech acts than observational language data.

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2. Sexual speech acts

The notion of a speech act originates in the philosophy of language, more specifically in Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1979) influential discussion of the idea that utterances can be used to perform actions. This performative dimension of language use is often illustrated by utterances that include verbs that make this performativity explicit: *I hereby baptize you Helen* does not just describe an action, it actually constitutes the act of baptizing. But most speech acts in language use perform actions without their function being made explicit. *It is cold in here* may perform the action of making a statement about the temperature in a room, but it may also function as an indirect request that somebody close the window or turn up the heating. Speech acts consist of three components. The locutionary act refers to the linguistic forms used in an utterance and their literal meaning. The illocutionary act describes the action or communicative function that the speaker performs with a particular utterance. Finally, the perlocutionary act covers the consequences of an utterance, for example, the recipient's mental, emotional or behavioral responses.

Speech acts and linguistic performativity have been recognized as relevant for the study of language and sexuality for quite some time (Livia and Hall, 1997), even though their full potential in this field remains underexplored. Notable exceptions are Chirrey's (2003) insightful discussion of coming out in terms of speech act theory, and Kuhn's (1999) and Watson's (2012) speech act analyses of seductive strategies in blues lyrics. These earlier studies are similar, in that they deal with speech acts that are related to sexuality. However, they deal with sexual speech acts (SSAs) of two fundamentally different types: coming out represents an expression of sexual identity, whereas seduction functions as an expression of sexual desire.

Sexual speech acts (SSAs) are speech acts that contribute to the discursive construction of sexuality. Their sexualization may surface at the illocutionary level, when subjects intend to communicate sexuality-related messages to other people, or at the perlocutionary level, when people exposed to a speech act interpret it in a sexualized fashion. As pointed out above, sexualization can take place in relation to sexual identities and sexual desires. Table 1 presents an illustrative, though necessarily selective, overview of SSAs.

Table 1

Overview: Examples of sexual speech acts.

	Sexual identity	Sexual desire
Illocutionary level: What does the speaker do with an utterance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coming out as gay, lesbian etc. - disclosing/revealing/admitting one's sexual identity - staying closeted - outing somebody - categorizing somebody sexually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flirting - complimenting - flattering - chatting up - hitting on - seducing - wooing - courting
Perlocutionary level: What effects does the utterance have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decoding an utterance as an index of being gay, lesbian, heterosexual etc. - accepting, rejecting, ignoring sexual identity information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decoding an utterance as flirting, flattering, complimenting etc. - feeling flattered - feeling turned off - feeling turned on - reciprocating expression of desire

SSAs prototypically involve a verbal component and are therefore a matter of “doing (sexual) things with words” (Austin, 1962). However, they also commonly include paralinguistic and non-verbal means of communication. For desire-related speech acts, such as flirting or seducing, it can be assumed that they substantially involve physical communication and/or bodily practices (gestures, facial expressions, kinetics, posture, proxemics, clothing and other means of body adornment; see Rossolatos (2016) for a multimodal interaction analysis of flirting). The potential centrality of non-verbal signification does not preclude an analysis in terms of speech acts. In fact, even linguistically limited sexual text genres such as pornography and sexting have been analyzed using speech act theory (e.g. Amundsen, 2019; McGowan, 2009). In interactions, SSAs tend to form components within larger speech events. Activities like flirting or seducing do not just consist of individual utterances, but unfold over a stretch of conversational turns.

When we characterize desire-related SSAs in terms of the facework they perform (Brown and Levinson, 1987), we can classify them within the group of speech acts that threaten the recipient's negative face, as they “predicate some desire of S[peaker] towards H[earer] or H's goods, giving H reason to think that he may have to take action to protect the object of S's desire, or give it to S” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 66). By contrast, sexual identity-related speech acts, like coming out, could be viewed as threatening the recipient's positive face, in the sense that they constitute a “raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics” or “indicate that [S] is willing to cause distress to H, and/or doesn't care about H's feelings” (both quotes Brown and Levinson, 1987: 67). To the extent that identity-related SSAs relate to non-normative sexualities (which they normally do), they can pose a threat to the speaker's positive face, since it could be argued that openly adopting such an identity

position makes it more difficult to be viewed by others as a valuable member of society. Desire-related SSAs also endanger the positive face of the speaker, as they always come with the risk of being rejected by the recipient.

When discussing coming out as a speech act, it is evident that this refers exclusively to coming out to others. Coming out to oneself constitutes an internal, mental process and does therefore not lend itself to a description as a speech act. In Searle's (1979: 12–13) speech act classification, identity-related SSAs (“I am gay”) qualify as assertives, as they make statements about the world and commit the speaker to the truth of their proposition, while desire-related SSAs (“I fancy you”) represent directives, in the sense that they attempt to get the recipient to do something, namely to co-construct or give in to the speaker's desire.

To the extent that a coming out changes the world for both speaker and recipient, an alternative classification as a declarative speech act is also plausible (Chirrey, 2003: 29–30). Coming out is then not viewed as a statement describing some extralinguistic reality but as an action that produces a new reality or changes reality:

Coming out is therefore a speech act that not only describes a state of affairs, namely the speaker's gayness, but also brings those affairs, a new gay self, into being. By presenting a gay self, an individual alters social reality by creating a community of listeners and thereby establishing the beginnings of a new gay-aware culture (Liang, 1997: 293).

The creation of a new reality through coming out is not a matter of black or white (or old or new). It is a matter of degree, because people may be out in front of certain (groups of) people and in certain contexts, but not in others. Coming out cannot normally be completed in one act, but has to be repeated throughout a person's life, in front of different audiences. It is, therefore, generally a processual phenomenon (Liang, 1997; Orne, 2012).

Coming out acts may manifest in various forms. They may explicitly spell out sexual identity labels (“I am gay”), or operate more indirectly, relying on conversational implicature (“I will never have children”). Other common features include references to same-sex partners or a raising of topics stereotypically connected to gay culture (Chirrey, 2003: 28–29). Whether a coming out can be performed, and how it is performed, depends critically on culturally and historically specific regulatory frames that dictate what can be publicly expressed (see Motschenbacher, 2019). In Western societies like the UK and the US, coming out as gay has lost some of its stigma and sensation value as a consequence of an increasing legitimization and normalization of such identities.

However, the data used in this study are narratives about pre-Stonewall life and thus relate to a time when this was not yet the case (see also Leap, 2020). In fact, the concept of “coming out” was not valid prior to Stonewall. This does not mean that coming out processes did not occur, but that they were framed in different ways and described using other terminology than the verb *come out* (see also the gay men's elaborations in Extracts 3 and 11 below). The Stonewall Riots (Stein, 2019), which took place in New York in 1969, are widely considered a decisive event for LGBT liberation, not just in the US but in the Western world more generally. In the UK, the developments associated with Stonewall coincide with another milestone for the abolishment of sexuality-based discrimination, as the Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalized sexual acts between men aged 21 or older in England and Wales.

Desire-related communication has been investigated to some extent in sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and discourse analysis. Mortensen (2017), for example, has revealed how flirting in a Danish online dating forum is shaped by participants' constructions of a shared future or an “imagined togetherness.” Kiesling (2013) shows how context and the gender of the conversational partners influence whether we view an interaction as an instance of flirting or not. Speer (2017) highlights the key role of (playfully) sexualized compliments and the respective compliment responses in flirting, and characterizes them as transgressive acts in which the flirting party pushes social boundaries by laying claim to greater rights to intimacy than the context or social role conventionally allows. This latter aspect is also recognized by Hopper (2003: ch.3), who frames flirting communication more generally in terms of exceptional communication, involving social violations, startling language use and an overexploitation of sexual innuendo through the use of ambiguous lexical items (see also Keim, 1998).

A study that created an automatic flirtation-detection system (Ranganath et al., 2009) used speed dating interactions to identify the most predictive features of flirting. Based on prosodic, dialogue and lexical features, the automatic detection system achieved a higher rate of correct intended flirtatiousness ratings than human raters, who were found to be poor perceivers of intended flirtatiousness. Male flirting was, for example, linked to asking more questions and higher use of second person (*you*) and first person plural pronouns (*we*), while women on average used fewer questions (except repair questions) and more instances of first person singular pronouns (*I*) (Ranganath et al., 2009: 339–340). The combination of these features suggests a fairly traditional heteronormative role division, with men being the flirting initiators and the topic of the conversation being the woman more so than the man. A later study by the same research team (Ranganath et al., 2013) confirmed these findings, and additionally found that flirting women use more negation, which in turn plays a role in teasing and self-deprecation.

Previous studies have predominantly analyzed coming out stories and flirting communication. So far, metalinguistic comments on SSAs have not been systematically explored, even though they give us valuable insights into how the participants in a certain speech event themselves view the event. While coming out has previously been connected to speech act theory (see Chirrey, 2003; Liang, 1997), none of the earlier studies on desire-related communication has drawn on such a theorization. Kiesling (2013: 106) even states that “there is no ‘flirting’ speech act”, and explains this in terms of the intersubjectivity of flirting activities. However, this reasoning is not entirely convincing, as speech acts inherently cover reactions of the recipient as perlocutionary effects. Moreover, there are types of flirting (or rather flirt attempts) that are clearly not co-produced by the recipient (see e.g. Achugar, 2016; Goodboy and Brann, 2010; Kissling, 1991).

3. Methodological considerations

The data for this study consist of the Corpus of Gay Men's Pre-Stonewall Narratives (GMPSN), which has been constructed specifically for this research. The phrase *gay men* is used here for practical reasons, as a cover term for men who experienced sexual desire for other men before Stonewall. It is clearly a post-Stonewall label (see Motschenbacher, 2020), but many narrators in the data use it to make sense of their pre-Stonewall experiences. The corpus consists of four sub-corpora, as it contains pre-Stonewall narratives dating from before and after Stonewall (PRE and POST), as well as American and British narratives (US and UK): PRE-US, POST-US, PRE-UK, POST-UK (see Table 2).

Table 2
Overview of the Gay Men's Pre-Stonewall Narratives corpus (GMPSN).

Corpus	No. of narratives	No. of word tokens
PRE-US	173	555,923
PRE-UK	97	797,260
∑ PRE	270	1,353,183
POST-US	294	1,207,714
POST-UK	161	404,120
∑ POST	455	1,611,834
∑ GMPSN	725	2,965,017

The material used to compile the corpus has been previously published (see Appendix A for details), so ethical concerns do not arise in relation to this study. For the narratives created after Stonewall, I could draw on collections of gay men's pre-Stonewall life narratives. Such sources do not exist for pre-Stonewall times. In order to obtain adequate comparative corpus data from this time period, I used academic publications that contained such narratives. Many of these publications are from the medical field and discuss same-sex sexualities in a pathologizing fashion. Therefore, I exclusively used the gay men's narratives from these academic sources for the corpus, not the surrounding technical discussion. In addition, a limited number of book-length autobiographies were included. This results in a corpus of first-person accounts of pre-Stonewall life that, at the time of writing, contains almost three million word tokens. The narratives date from 1897 to today.

When searching for pragmatic phenomena in untagged corpora, the analyst faces a fundamental problem, namely that search queries necessarily have to rely on linguistic forms and formal presence in a corpus. This means that functional, pragmatic aspects cannot be directly searched for in the data, but can only be retrieved indirectly, via searchable linguistic forms. This, in turn, necessitates some familiarity with the form-to-function mapping of the pragmatic phenomena to be investigated.

In order to gain an understanding of how comments about SSAs surface in the data, twenty narratives from the data were subjected to a close qualitative analysis. This enabled me to identify structures that are commonly involved in such comments. Verbal (e.g. *seduce*, *seduces*, *seduced*, *seducing*) and deverbal forms (e.g. *seduction*, *seductive*) that denote an SSA function were identified as essential cues. This yielded a list of forms that were searched for in the corpus, using the corpus tool AntConc (Anthony, 2018). For the three SSAs seducing, flirting and coming out, for example, which are analyzed in more detail in Section 4, the search queries used were *seduc**, *flirt** and *com* out|came out* (the asterisk stands for any number of letters; the pipe symbol marks alternatives).

Concordance lines of the individual forms were inspected, and all uses that were not speech act-related or not sexuality-related were discarded. The remaining hits were analyzed against various criteria (research questions in brackets):

1. Agency (Who is reported to perform the SSA and who is the recipient or object of this performance?),
2. Perlocutionary effect (Does the comment give information on the consequences of the speech act?), and
3. Co-text (How is the speech act contextually embedded in the discursive construction of sexuality?).

These aspects were selected because they represent the central factors shaping the use of sexual speech acts.

For reasons of space, the analysis in Section 4 concentrates on three central SSAs: coming out as an identity-related SSA, and seducing and flirting as desire-related speech acts. Research question 1 is analyzed quantitatively, while research questions 2 and 3 are dealt with in a qualitative analysis of individual data extracts.

The quantitative analysis of agency patterns (Duranti, 2004) is based on the inspection of the concordance lines and, where necessary, the wider co-text of the search terms. A crucial question here is which personal reference forms are used to talk about interactants, taking their lexical and referential gender into account. Age specifications were also included in the analysis where relevant.

It is important to note that comments about speech acts do not give us direct access to subjects' actual language behavior, but rather tell us something about how subjects view certain communicative events. Even though we need to be careful when

making statements about people's actual language use (and their reactions to this language use) based on this evidence, the data still provide valid information on the discourses and communicative norms that matter to the language users.

In a similar vein, comments on speech acts often do not refer to concrete utterances but rather to coming out, flirting or seducing in an abstract fashion. Typically we do not get to know which forms have been used at the locutionary level, but we obtain evidence that some communicative act (or a series of acts) took place that functioned as an act of coming out, flirting or seducing (illocutionary level), or that such acts have brought about certain consequences (perlocutionary level). The analytical focus, therefore, is not on the locution (what is said and how), but rather on what the narratives tell us about illocution (i.e. the purpose or function of what is said) and perlocution (i.e. responses to the SSA).

4. Analysis of metalinguistic comments

4.1. Identity-related sexual speech acts: coming out

In my analysis of identity-related SSAs, I will concentrate on coming out, as it is by far the most common type of identity-related SSA in the data. Other types that occur in the corpus include confessing, revealing, disclosing, admitting, confiding, and outing, some of which will be illustrated at the end of this section.

Table 3
Narrated agency patterns of the SSA “coming out” in gay men's pre-Stonewall narratives.

SSA of coming out [Subject (to)]
Narrator as agent (204)
I: 153
I to: 51
Other agents (107)
you: 14
you to: 1
he: 20
he to: 6
she: 2
we: 13
we to: 1
they: 40
they to: 2
one: 8
Discussion of coming out (56)
Total: 367

Abbreviations: I = male narrator; he = any male third-person subject; she = any female third-person subject; they = any third-person plural subject; to = targeted coming out.

Table 3 gives details on who is constructed as the agent of coming out in the data. Of the 367 coming out acts, the majority (204 tokens; 55.6%) are performed by the male narrators themselves (see Extracts 1 to 4). This attests to the fact that coming out is often constructed as a highly personal and subjective experience (Note: The codes presented after each example provide information on which text from the appendix is the source. The abbreviations *UK* and *US* specify the national culture; *pre* and *post* refer to pre- and post-Stonewall periods.)

(1)
After I came out, all the usual stereotypes I had about gay men crashed, one after another. I found I was walking with a quicker step and felt twenty years younger. I was euphoric whenever I entered a gay environment or felt the electric thrill of dancing in the midst of a mob of moving men. Euphoria was knowing in my heart that being gay was all right. [post-UK-REV-134-138-Laurence Wolf]

In Extract 1, we see that the narrator uses his coming out as a structuring device for his life narrative (*after I came out*). The use of temporal clauses (*when/after/until I came out*) and prepositional phrases (*after/before coming out*; see Extracts 2 and 7 below) that serve to locate events in relation to the narrator's coming out is common across the stories, paying witness to the centrality of coming out within the narrators' lives. The narrator in Extract 1 clearly connects coming out to sexual identity, repeatedly using the identity label *gay* (*gay men, gay environment, being gay*). We also find a detailed description of the perlocutionary effects of coming out. However, these effects do not affect the recipients of the speech act, but the performer of

the speech act himself. He frames his life after coming out in terms of positive feelings and experiences (*stereotypes [...] crashed, felt twenty years younger, euphoric, thrill, euphoria, all right*).

Interestingly, in approximately one third of the narrated first-person coming out acts (51 tokens), the co-text identifies the target of the coming out. This indicates that coming out is conceptualized by the gay men in the data as an SSA that does not just change the world for the speaker, but also for the recipients.

(2)
*As my marriage disintegrated and the dreams of my lifetime turned to sand, I finally **came out** first to myself, then to my wife, my son, family, friends, and even coworkers. As I traveled the road of self-confrontation, I grew to become happy and proud of myself. After **coming out** I blossomed. In my own way, I really have made a difference. [post-US-TTS-34-39-John R. Selig]*

In Extract 2, the narrator states that his coming out marked a turning point in his life and that it was a continuous process that involved disclosing his sexual identification repeatedly, to various people (*first to myself, then to my wife, my son, family, friends, and even coworkers*). He conceptualizes this process as an achievement requiring his conscious agency, as challenging (*self-confrontation*) but worthwhile (*I really have made a difference*). Again, the perlocutionary effect of coming out is discursively constructed as a positive experience for the narrator, as he uses positive emotional adjectives (*happy and proud of myself*) and metaphors (*I blossomed*) to describe his post-coming-out life. The focus is clearly on how the world of the speaker has changed for the better (*I grew to become ...; I really have made a difference*).

In other narratives that sketch out a targeted coming out (i.e. one in which the recipient of the coming out is specified), the description of the perlocutionary effects is not restricted to effects on the performer of the speech act:

(3)
*I always say I **came out** before it was invented. That was in 1963, three months after I started college, that I **came out** to my mother. Nearly a quarter of a century later she is just beginning to come to terms with it. There was a lot of tears and anguish. At this remove I can't quite recall whether it was she who suggested I go to see a psychiatrist or whether it seemed the only thing I could reasonably do. [post-UK-PCM-Kevin]*

As in the two previous examples, Extract 3 shows the narrator using coming out as a structuring principle for his life narrative (*that was in 1963, three months after I started college*). He is clearly aware that the notion of coming out was not available before Stonewall (*I came out before it was invented*), which renders his elaboration a description in hindsight. More specifically, he narrates how he came out to his mother, and describes the various reactions that she appears to have shown as a consequence of this speech act: emotional responses (*tears and anguish*), initial failure to cope with the situation (*she is just beginning to come to terms with it*), and – a common reaction in former times – suggesting treatment (*whether it was she who suggested I go to see a psychiatrist*), even though the narrator cannot rule out that he wanted to seek psychiatric treatment himself, potentially as a consequence of social pressure.

Extract 4 illustrates the narration of another targeted coming out:

(4)
*I remember the exact moment because it changed my life. I was with my friend Joe, who was admittedly gay. Previously, I had toured the gay joints with him but as his straight friend. [...] Later that night I **came out**. I simply said to Joe, "I am gay." He stared at me. I said it again, only louder, more to make me hear it than him. I am not exaggerating when I say that from that moment that enormous weight that I had been carrying dropped off my back. [post-US-HOM-221-239-Erik Edwards]*

In accordance with the patterns outlined above, the narrator characterizes his coming out as marking a turning point in his life (*I remember the exact moment because it changed my life*). This time, the coming out is performed in front of an (out) gay male friend. Note that the phrase *my friend Joe, who was admittedly gay* refers to another person's identity-related SSA that is framed in terms of admitting, which implies a reluctance to disclose one's sexual identity. The narrator explicitly refers to coming out as a reality-changing speech act. As he says, before his coming out he was a *straight friend* for the recipient – an identity category that is no longer tenable afterwards. We get to know about perlocutionary effects on both parties, with the narrator experiencing a feeling of relief (*that enormous weight that I had been carrying dropped off my back*) and the recipient merely staring at him. What makes this passage remarkable is also that the narrator provides information on the actual locutionary act that he used to come out (*I simply said to Joe, "I am gay."*)

Only two coming out acts in the data are constructed reciprocally, which shows that coming out is generally conceptualized as unidirectional, with social actors performing it for themselves and for an audience, but not mutually. Extract 5, however, illustrates a mutual coming out process:

(5)
*After the induction, on the train headed toward San Diego, I met a fellow and within - oh, I'd say forty hours of the actual time on the trip, we had **come out** to each other. Not sexually, but as "sisters." That type of thing. We became very fast friends and remained great friends for years thereafter. [post-US-MRS-7-10-Moss Brentwood]*

What is interesting about this coming out is not only that it is mutual (*we had come out to each other*), but that the narrator explicitly describes it as an identity-related, rather than desire-related, SSA (*not sexually, but as "sisters"*). The narrated perlocutionary effect of the mutual coming out is the formation of a friendship among the two social actors.

Other fairly common agents of coming out in the narratives are (male) third person subjects (*he*: 26 tokens, Extract 6; *they*: 42 tokens, Extract 7).

(6)
*Chris was in frequent contact with me during his freshman year of college, as I allowed him to call collect whenever he wanted or needed to talk. He **came out** to most of his classmates, joined the campus gay organization, and had his first serious relationship with another man. [post-US-FAB-124-126-Ronald Schoen]*

As we can see in Extract 6, narrators may incorporate other men who come out in their life stories. As such coming out descriptions emerge from an outsider perspective, they tend to be less personal and less clear in terms of perlocutionary effects. Here, we do not get any information about the recipients' reactions (*he came out to most of his classmates*), but we can assume that the narrator views this coming out as a prerequisite for Chris' following activities (joining a gay organization, having a first gay relationship).

Extract 7 contains a coming out description in which a group of male social actors is the performer of the speech act:

(7)
*I knew just what the others were talking about when they told me they were twenty-six before they admitted to themselves certain facts. (There are men, of course, who marry, father children, and wait until their sixties before **coming out**; but these seemed to me as rare as the people who claim they knew in their crib.) Most people, surely, fall somewhere in between. And their stories of **coming out** are always inextricably tied to the tale of what preceded it - the long, arduous, humiliating attempt to pretend that the door had not even opened to that forbidden room. [post-US-BLU-88-97-Andrew Holleran]*

In this passage, the narrator highlights the diversity of coming out experiences and sets up three groups of gay men: those who have always known they are gay (*people who claim they knew in their crib*), those who lead heterosexual lives and come out late (*there are men, of course, who marry, father children, and wait until their sixties before coming out*), and those who come out in their early adult lives (*most people, surely, fall somewhere in between*). As is typical of a third-person coming out description, this account is less personal and provides no information on perlocutionary effects. Since the social actors are here constructed as groups, the description is collective rather than individualized.

The latter is also true when coming out acts are said to be performed by social actors in the first person plural:

(8)
*IN FALLS, NORTH Carolina, in 1957, we had just one way of "**coming out**." It was called getting caught. [post-US-BLU-40-72-Alan Gurganus]*

Here, the narrator sees himself as part of a larger, regional group of gay men (*we had just one way of "coming out"*). At the same time, he constructs pre-Stonewall coming out as an involuntary process due to the former criminalization of same-sex sexualities – something that is done to you rather than something that a subject actively does (*getting caught*).

Collectivity is also expressed by generic coming out statements. These frequently involve generic uses of the pronouns *you* (Extract 9) and *one* (Extract 10).

(9)
*There's a commitment to your lifestyle in **coming out**, if you like, but that's different. I think that if you are in a mature relationship you are freer to **come out**. [post-US-QUF-58-72-Will Whiting]*

(10)
*Before, one **came out** into the gay community. Now, **coming out** had become something entirely aimed at straights. [post-US-BLU-1-26-Samuel R. Delany]*

These generic examples sketch out coming out as a general experience that gay men share.

The corpus also contains a substantial number of passages (56 tokens; 15.3%) in which the narrators do not construct coming out as being performed by a social actor but rather describe or discuss it as a phenomenon.

(11)
 "COMING OUT" HAS acquired extraordinary significance in the gay community since the Stonewall Riots of 1969 - so much significance that many of us might even say that **coming out** "defines" the difference between being gay and an older, pre-gay notion of being homosexual. [post-US-BLU-1-26-Samuel R. Delany]

As we can see in Extract 11, discussions of coming out as a general phenomenon often do not tell us much about the speech act of coming out from a pragmatic point of view. We do not get to know who the agent and the target of the coming out is, or what perlocutionary effects it achieved. Still, we can often gain a more general understanding of coming out from such descriptions. In Extract 11, for example, the narrator explains that coming out is really a post-Stonewall phenomenon that is strongly tied to "gay" as an identity position, while in pre-Stonewall times, neither "being gay" nor "coming out" were valid as identity-related concepts.

Coming out is the predominant identity-related SSA type in the corpus, attesting to the fact that many gay men view this concept as a positive and adequate reflection of their experiences. This is noteworthy, because the narrators tell stories about their pre-Stonewall lives, that is, a time period when "coming out" and the associated metaphor ("coming out of the closet") were not yet available concepts. In accordance with this, we do not find a single instance of its use in the pre-Stonewall sub-corpora.

The corpus data also contain comments on other SSAs whose function it is to specify one's sexual identification. These occur in much lower frequencies than coming out, so that a quantitative analysis is not feasible. I will therefore restrict myself to an illustration of some of these (Extracts 12 to 14), to make the point that coming out needs to be viewed as embedded in a web of related speech act types.

(12)
 I still don't feel inclined to **disclose** a particular word with pinpoint accuracy: gay. Yet I feel an inordinate need to **confess, reveal, tell** all. [post-US-BLU-82-87-Brad Gooch]

(13)
 It took me several months before I could **admit** before the group that I was homosexual. [post-US-HOM-112-128-Bob Lawson]

(14)
 In the few cases when I felt a person would understand, they have floundered miserably when the fact of my homosexuality was brought home to them. It is very difficult to **confide** in anyone. [pre-UK-MIN-40-61-Attempts to Combat]

In these examples, identity-uncovering SSAs other than coming out are used to describe the narrators' experiences. They are constructed through the verbs *disclose*, *confess*, *reveal* and *tell* (Extract 12), *admit* (Extract 13) and *confide* (Extract 14). While *coming out* can be considered a self-affirmative in-group term, the other verbs used originate from general language use and possess certain other connotations. They range from semantically fairly neutral verbs such as *disclose* and *tell*, to alternative expressions that evaluate a gay identity as something that is negative and sensational (*reveal*), sinful (*confess*), hard to talk about (*admit*), and not shareable with the general public (*confide*).

4.2. Desire-related sexual speech acts: seducing and flirting

Comments on a range of desire-related SSAs occur commonly in the gay men's narratives. I concentrate here on two such speech acts: seducing and flirting. Other types in the data that cannot be discussed in detail for reasons of space include flattering, complimenting, chatting up, hitting on, wooing and courting.

The agency analysis for desire-related SSAs is semantically based. For example, personal direct objects of the act of seduction (he seduced *me*), as well as personal subjects of passive structures (*I* was seduced) involving the verb *seduce*, were counted as instantiations of a desired object. Personal subjects of seducing (*he* seduced *me*) and personal *by*-phrases in passive structures (*I* was seduced *by him*) were counted as representations of agents acting as desiring subjects. The purpose of this procedure is to identify the role of factors such as the narrator as a central protagonist, gender, and other social aspects in SSAs.

Table 4
 Narrated agency patterns of the SSAs “seducing” and “flirting” in gay men’s pre-Stonewall narratives.

SSA of seducing [Seducer (– Seducee)]	SSA of flirting [Flirter (– Flirtee)]
Narrator as agent (37) I – man: 24 I – woman: 4 I-boy – man: 3 I – person: 2 I-boy – boy: 2 I-boy – person: 2 Other male agents (69) man – I: 25 man – man: 12 man – boy: 12 man – woman: 7 man – I-boy: 3 boy – I-boy: 3 man – child: 2 man – person: 1 boy – boy: 1 boy – man: 1 boy – I: 1 boy – woman: 1 Female agents (23) woman – I: 11 woman – man: 9 woman – boy: 2 woman – I-boy: 1 Agents of unknown sex (8) person – I: 3 person – child: 2 person – boy: 2 person – I-boy: 1 Total: 137	Narrator as agent (26) I – man: 13 I: 6 I – boy: 3 I – person: 2 I-boy – man: 1 I-boy – girl: 1 Other male agents (28) man – I: 12 man: 7 man – woman: 4 man – man: 4 boy – I: 1 Female agents (11) woman – I: 4 woman – man: 4 woman: 2 woman – boy: 1 Agents of unknown sex (1) person – I: 1 Mutual (3) Total: 69

Abbreviations: I = male narrator; I-boy = narrator as a boy; man = any adult male person; woman = any adult female person; boy = any under-age male person; girl = any under-age female person; person = any adult person; child = any under-age person.

One may expect seduction in gay men’s narratives to be an activity exclusively among male people. However, a look at the agent-patient combinations in Table 4 reveals that this is not the case: 23 out of 137 seduction scenarios involve female agents and 12 involve female patients, which means that 35 out of 137 scenarios (25.5%) are heterosexual. That the heterosexual scenarios show a majority of female agents strikes one as remarkable, since traditionally (and this is definitely true for pre-Stonewall times) female sexual agency was seen to be in direct opposition to femininity ideals, commonly leading to phenomena such as “slut-bashing” (Bamberg, 2004). Such scenarios often serve the narrators as a tool to construct their immunity to women’s seductive efforts, and thus form a key component in the discursive construction of themselves as gay.

(15)

At twenty, when I was at X University, I had an awkward experience by being sexually attractive to a pretty young married woman, the relative of a friend. She once lost control of herself, enough vainly to attempt my seduction. But I had by this time a complete hatred of the idea of having to do with any woman in that way. I was engaged in regular sexual intimacy with a college-mate, and also with a young coachman, employed in a family some miles distant... I had never been able to think of a woman as a sexual partner, except with a vague dread. [pre-US-TIN-154-158-Instance of strong youthful Uranianism]

In Extract 15, the narrator does not provide concrete seductive utterances, but he explicitly refers to illocutionary force, as he states that a woman tried to seduce him (*to attempt my seduction*). The verb *attempt* acts here as a presupposition trigger, that is, its use presupposes that the subject had the intention of seducing him. In terms of the perlocutionary effect, it is clear that the narrator decodes the woman’s actions as seduction but does not reciprocate her efforts (*vainly*). Desire is here constructed in a unidirectional fashion, as emanating from the woman to the narrator. The latter denies any agency by describing his role in terms of a state, rather than an action (*being sexually attractive to a pretty young woman*). He characterizes the event negatively as an *awkward experience*, and as a matter of the woman *losing control of herself*, supposedly because, as a *married woman*, she is normatively not supposed to seduce other men. This amounts to a gendered double standard, because the narrator constructs himself as an unfaithful partner, entertaining sexual relationships with two men (*regular sexual intimacy with a college-mate, and also with a young coachman*), and finds nothing wrong with it. Beyond this

individual event, he explicates his general dislike of women (generic phrases: *any woman, a woman*), framing it in terms of highly negative emotional responses, such as *complete hatred* and *dread*, and heterosexual inability (*never been able to think of a woman as a sexual partner*). All this narrative work contributes to the effect of a gay male self-construction.

The most common patterns in the data are the narrator seducing a man (24 tokens, Extract 16) and the narrator being seduced by a man (25 tokens; Extract 17):

(16)
*In the junior year I worked together on problems with another boy in the frat house. I became very attracted to him physically and I remember telling him that I wished he were a woman so I could marry him. I once tried to **seduce** him but he laughed it off.* [pre-US-SVA-132-144 Michael D.]

In Extract 16, the illocutionary force of the narrator's actions is specified (*I once tried to seduce him*), with the verb form *tried* triggering the presupposition that seduction was intended. In terms of the perlocutionary effect, we can see that the desired object does not reciprocate this expression of desire, as he is said to show a reaction that indicates rejection (*he laughed it off*). Again, desire is constructed in a unidirectional way here, with the narrator saying that he was attracted to the other man (*I became very attracted to him physically*) and even told him that he wished to marry him. The narrator draws on a heteronormative marriage discourse (*I wished he were a woman so I could marry him*). The wish for his desired object to be a woman suggests that biological sex is of secondary importance, which contradicts the fact that he feels physically attracted to a man.

In Extract 17, the narrator constructs himself as the object of seduction:

(17)
*After I came to New York I spent a week end with one of my father's boyhood friends and he tried to **seduce** me. He was married and had a child. There were other friendships in my father's life I could never see the reason for. The thought would keep coming back. It still puzzles me. I think he might have been homosexual.* [pre-US-SVA-272-280-Noel W.]

Again, the verb *try* is used as a presupposition trigger signaling the seducer's intention (*he tried to seduce me*). At the same time, the fact that the action is constructed as an attempt suggests that it was unsuccessful. The perlocutionary effect is, therefore, not a co-construction of desire by the narrator. By contrast, he describes the event as being puzzling to him, even a long time after it took place (*the thought would keep coming back; it still puzzles me*). The source of this puzzlement is a contrast between how he viewed the man before and after the event. This opens up two supposedly incompatible subject positions for the agent of seduction: a heteronormative one as a friend of the family and family father (*one of my father's boyhood friends; he was married and had a child*), and a non-heteronormative one as a man who experiences same-sex desire (*he tried to seduce me*) or potentially has a gay identity (*he might have been homosexual*). Hedging the identity statement with the modal *might* suggests that the narrator does not subscribe to the (today common) automatism that the expression of same-sex desire bestows a gay identity on a subject.

Other male same-sex configurations that do not involve the narrator are also common in the data. There are 12 scenarios featuring men seducing men (Extract 18) and 12 featuring men seducing boys (Extract 19).

(18)
*Most of the petty officers would prefer the younger men on the ship. They would spend a long time trying to **seduce** somebody. Any young boy on the ship was a butt. It was considered the thing to do to get him in the end. They tried to **seduce** me but I was afraid of venereal disease.* [pre-US-SVA-191-203-Louis E.]

Here, the narrator is talking about his time as a sailor on a ship. As this is a context that was all-male in the time before Stonewall, we can assume that the lexically gender-neutral personal reference forms (*officers, somebody, they*) in the extract refer to male people. In accordance with this, the passage also contains a number of lexically male forms (*the young men, any boy, him*), but no female forms. Extract 18 contains two comments on seductive activities. The first one sketches out male-male seduction in general, without specifying individual social actors (*they would spend a long time trying to seduce somebody*). Habitual *would* is used twice to construct these activities as a common practice on the ship (previous quote; *most of the petty officers would prefer the younger men on the ship*). The narrator even constructs male-male seduction as a normatively expected practice in this context (*it was considered the thing to do to get him in the end*). The second comment on seduction pertains more specifically to the men on the ship seducing the narrator (*they tried to seduce me*). In both instances, the verb *try* is again used as a presupposition trigger that gives us access to the illocutionary force of these acts. While we do not get to know anything about the perlocutionary effects of the first type of seduction (maybe because it is generic and, therefore, makes a whole range of effects likely), the second type, that involves the narrator as a target, evokes the reaction of a refusal (*they tried to seduce me but I was afraid of venereal disease*).

(19)
*He told me that his first sex occurred when Harpo Marx **seduced** him as a boy vacationing with his parents at Grossinger's. Sam boasted of the experience as a grown man, but if in fact it happened, it must have been unnerving for a boy of twelve.* [post-US-GAA-237-248-Adam Helms]

Extract 19 illustrates one of the instances in which an adult man is described as seducing an under-age boy in the data. The narrator here reproduces another gay man's story. The lack of an attempt-denoting verb in this passage (*Harpo Marx seduced him as a boy*) suggests that the seduction was not just intended but also successful, in the sense that desire expressions were reciprocated by the boy. The object of this seduction is said to have been proud of this experience as an adult, probably because the seducer was a celebrity (*Sam boasted of the experience as a grown man*). However, the narrator also expresses his doubts, not just about the truth of the story (*if in fact it happened*), but also about the perlocutionary effect reported by the protagonist. Therefore, he juxtaposes it with an alternative, more negative reaction as a perlocution that he deems more realistic (*it must have been unnerving for a boy of twelve*).

There are no scenarios involving under-age girls or female-female interaction in the gay men's narratives. Note that speech acts of seduction are never constructed as reciprocal in the data ("We seduced each other"). This indicates that seducing is in general connected to a power differential, with one person being the agent and the other one the object of desire. Related to this finding, it is interesting to note that there is a substantial share of seducing activities involving under-age people. 39 out of 137 seductive acts (28.5%) are constructed as involving a boy or a child, which indicates that age differences – and, connected to it, power differences – play a key role for this type of SSA. While 27 of these seductive acts involve boys as patients (see Extract 19), it is remarkable that 14 scenarios see boys in the agent role, which means that they are constructed by the narrators as having sexual power over them:

(20)
*I read homosexual literature and went to homosexual cafes but was only slightly tempted. Finally a magnificent youth **seduced** me. He jerked me off. I remember wondering why he did that. I leaned against his body and had my face against his cheek. Two nights later I asked him to take me to his room. I got on top of him and had an emission on his body. I said to myself, "This is what I've wanted all my life."* [pre-US-SVA-374-380-Will G.]

The narrator here talks about his first same-sex sexual experiences, which could explain why he initially perceives himself to be in a position of lesser power. This makes it possible for a substantially younger male person to exert sexual power over him and perform the role of the sexual agent (*a magnificent youth seduced me; he jerked me off*). Before the seduction, the narrator's exposure to gay men did not involve physical contact (*I read homosexual literature and went to homosexual cafes*). In terms of the perlocutionary effect, the seduction, however, is constructed as a turning point in his behavior, because afterwards he does construct himself as the sexual agent (*I asked him to take me to his room; I got on top of him*).

Table 4, above, also presents the agency patterns connected to the SSA of flirting in the data. Flirting partly shows patterns that are absent from the patterns of seducing. For example, flirting may be grammatically constructed in a way that leaves out the patient and only involves the specification of the agent. Such constructions often do not use *flirt* as a verb but refer to the speech act through deverbal adjectives or nouns (constructions like *he is flirtatious, he is a flirt, his flirtations*), which suggests that flirting may be conceptualized as being connected to a lower degree of agency than seducing. Patientless constructions occur 15 times in the corpus: six times with the narrator as agent (illustrated in Extract 21), seven times with other male people as agents, and twice with a female agent.

(21)
*One evening out of fourteen was all I could spare for the female side of my being. But the balance of my waking hours were filled with blissful thoughts of my **flirtations** — memories which will last as long as I.* [pre-US-FIM-Werther1922 - The Female-Impersonators]

In Extract 21, the phrase *my flirtations* provides information on the illocutionary force of the speech acts commented on and positions the narrator as agent. We do not get to know who the object of this flirtation is (even though the stories narrated in other parts of the source and the reference to the narrator's *female side* suggest that it is men).

Another aspect that distinguishes flirting from seducing is that it occurs in constructions in the data that entail mutuality. Three such constructions can be verified in the data. One of them is provided in Extract 22:

(22)
*At any rate, she told me two years ago (in 1887) that she was perfectly well aware of my affection for her, but considered that no good could come of such a **flirtation** between an English gentleman and a Swiss girl.* [pre-UK-JAS-John Addington Symonds-ch.8]

The SSA is here again described with the deverbal noun *flirtation*, but a distinction between agent and patient is not made. The postmodifying prepositional phrase *between an English gentleman and a Swiss girl* rather constructs both parties as equally involved in the act of flirting (even though it could be argued that the initial syntactic position of the male conjunct within the binomial construction suggests a higher degree of agency; see [Motschenbacher, 2013](#)).

Most flirting activities in the corpus are performed by male agents (54 out 69; 78.3%), with almost half of them (26) seeing the narrator in subject position. The two most common patterns are the narrator flirting with a male person (Extract 23) and a male person flirting with the narrator (Extract 24).

(23)
I found myself being **flirtatious**, suggestive - the way I held a man as I danced, or moved my hips and pressed forward. [pre-US-IHO-48-64-The boy girl]

(24)
Of course, John immediately homed in on the fact that I was gay and used his **flirtatious** sexual manners. That whole evening he attended to me. He invited me to come back to Chapel Hill. [post-US-LOH-109-161-Quinton and Pat]

In Extract 23, the narrator refers to the SSA through a copula-adjective construction (*being flirtatious*), which on the surface may look like an identity-related description (rather than the description of an activity). However, as the co-text makes clear, the SSA in question is a highly embodied one and involves various types of physical action (holding, dancing, moving, pressing forward). This justifies an analysis of the SSA with the narrator as agent. In Extract 24, by contrast, a male person (*John*) is constructed as the agent of the flirting with the narrator. He forms the grammatical subject of all action verbs in this passage (*homed in on, used, attended to, invited*). Again, the verb *to flirt* is not used. Instead the narrator draws on the adjective *flirtatious* as a descriptor for the man's behavior (*used his flirtatious sexual manners*).

Only seven instances of flirting (10.1%) involve an under-age person, which suggests that age and power differences between interactants are less central for this SSA. Fourteen scenarios are heterosexual (20.3%). This indicates that with flirting the narrators orient even less to heteronormativity than with seducing. Extracts 25 and 26 illustrate the patterns male agent – female patient and female agent – male patient, which both occur four times in the data.

(25)
Publicity is annoying to some homosexuals because they enjoy living incognito. This allows them to practice a hoax upon society and particularly upon its women, with whom they carry on teasing **flirtations**. [pre-UK-NCS-Quentin Crisp]

In this extract, the narrator elaborates on the practice of closeted gay men to get involved in pseudo-romantic activities with women, which makes them appear heterosexual to the wider public. While the gay men are here constructed as the agents of flirting (*they carry on teasing flirtations*), the women are not just constructed as patients of this activity but also as the victims of the gay men's hoaxes.

At other times, women are constructed as the agents of flirting activities with gay men, which suggests that they may not be aware of the sexual orientation of their desired objects:

(26)
Salka brought Garbo up to lunch at Ivar Avenue. The girls were all a-flutter, and Garbo didn't disappoint them. She played up outrageously, sighing about how wonderful it must be to be a nun, and **flirting** with Swami, telling him about his dark, mysterious, oriental eyes. [pre-UK-DIA-262-331-Isherwood-1943]

Interestingly, this extract departs from some of the common patterns outlined above. It shows a female celebrity (*Greta Garbo*) as sexual agent, contains the actual verb *to flirt*, and provides information on the content of a flirting speech act – a compliment on a man's appearance (*telling him about his dark, mysterious, oriental eyes*).

As has been pointed out, the corpus contains comments on many more types of SSAs besides seducing and flirting. Extract 27 provides a cursory glimpse of two more of them: complimenting and flattering.

(27)
1 "You have a beautiful golf suit on."
2 "I shall never wear the rag again except to go skating in next winter."
3 "You must not do that. It sets your form off beautifully. You are the handsomest and the best-dressed fellow on the boat."
4 "Thank you. I'd give you a quarter for the **compliment** if I had the change."
5 "You appear to think I am **flattering** you, or making sport of you, but I mean what I say. You have a beautiful build, and know how to dress in good taste."
6 "From my hips down I am well enough built, but higher up I am too skinny."
7 "Not a bit of it. You are just perfection all over. Your form is as beautiful as that of Apollo." [pre-US-AUA-Werther1918 - Autobiography of an Androgyne]

The narrator here reproduces a flirting dialogue between himself and another man. As the passage is constituted by a sequence of direct quotes, we have here one of the rare cases in which the narrator provides us with evidence of the locutionary component of SSAs. The narrator here is clearly in the role of the agent, as all his turns (turns 1, 3, 5 and 7) contain utterances that pay the male addressee appearance compliments, either focusing on his clothes (*you have a beautiful golf suit on; you are [...] the best-dressed fellow; [you] know how to dress in good taste*) or on his looks and physique (*it sets your form off beautifully; you are the handsomest [...] fellow; you have a beautiful build, you are just perfection all over; your form is as beautiful as that of Apollo*). Research on complimenting behavior and gender has revealed that appearance compliments occur least frequently among men and thus carry a marked status in male–male contexts that indexes gay masculinity (Holmes, 1995; Motschenbacher, 2017; Rees-Miller, 2011). The turns of the other male interactant (turns 2, 4 and 6) show how he co-constructs the narrator's utterances as compliments. He shows typical compliment responses, ranging from acceptance (*thank you*) to deflection (*from my hips down I am well enough built, but higher up I am too skinny*) to rejection (*I shall never wear the rag again...*). He also explicitly classifies one of the narrator's utterances as a *compliment* (turn 4). In turn 5, the narrator refers to what he perceives to be the perlocutionary effect of the compliments in the hearer by saying that he may view them as flattery (*you appear to think I am flattering you*). This opens up a dichotomy between serious compliments and compliments that are not sincere but merely uttered to make the hearer feel good, and the narrator stresses that his utterance is of the former kind (*I mean what I say*).

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how the investigation of narrated SSAs can help to shed light on the relationship between language and sexuality from a pragmatic point of view. Even though gay men's narratives were used as data here, it is obvious that the analysis of SSAs is relevant for other types of sexuality-related communication as well. Seducing and flirting are expressions of desire that are available to people of all sexual identifications. This is equally true for coming out, even though the contexts in which heterosexually identified people have to come out as straight are limited (in LGBT-dominated contexts, such a coming out may be deemed necessary).

The analysis of comments on SSAs does not constitute an observation of actual communicative behavior, and the comments in general do not tell us much about the formal make-up of the concrete utterances involved. In other words, such data yield a poor representation of the locutionary speech act level. By contrast, the accessibility of the speech acts at the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels turned out to be fairly high in this kind of data – higher than in a first-hand observation of actual speech behavior. When people come out, seduce or flirt, they usually do not make these communicative functions explicit in their utterances (they will not normally say “I hereby come out...” or “I am seducing you...”). However, when they narrate such events, they convey their understanding of what they or other people have done with their utterances, and which consequences these have had. Speaker intentions, recipient interpretations and reactions of both parties often take place at the mental level or manifest themselves non-verbally. In addition to this, the consequences of speech acts are frequently not immediately obvious and may, therefore, require an assessment that takes place much later than in the context where the speech act in question occurred. Using narrative data in which people comment on speech acts, however, addresses many of these problems.

In the realm of identity-related SSAs, future research may pay closer attention to communicative behaviors that do not constitute a verbalization of one's (true) sexual identification, but rather serve to cover it up. Such behaviors include SSAs that involve the claiming of a fake sexual identity (e.g. denying, disguising, passing as straight, pretending to be straight, playing straight) or not talking about one's true sexuality (e.g. hiding, concealing, staying in the closet, staying silent, keeping secret). Such acts also occur frequently in gay men's life narratives and form an essential part of gay men's experiences.

It is clear from this data, that desire-related SSAs are typically not restricted to the verbal level but incorporate para-linguistic and physical ways of meaning making, and thus require further exploration in future research. As the extracts in this study show, this multimodal nature of SSAs surfaces only marginally in narrative data, but it is likely to yield more evidence when observational language data are studied. Against the backdrop of such an analysis of SSAs, it may even be thinkable to extend the multimodal analysis to other, non-sexual speech act types, for which a non-linguistic component on the surface seems less straightforward.

For identity-related SSAs, the data analyzed in this study show that a traditional handling of the perlocutionary act with a sole focus on the recipient (Chirrey (2003: 31), for example, treats perlocutionary acts as a matter of “altering reality for others”) is not feasible, because it ignores substantial information. Speech acts that involve self-identification often have important consequences for the speakers as well.

Finally, in order to relativize the strength of the identity-desire binarism in language and sexuality studies, it may be worthwhile to consider whether there are SSAs that orient to other sexual aspects. One such aspect could be romantic relationships. Proposing, marrying, dumping and breaking up could then be conceptualized as relationship-related SSAs (see Sypniewski, 2006). Another aspect may be sexual practices, that is, all speech acts that are used to perform (for example, in pornography, phone sex or online sex chats), initiate or terminate sexual acts (see Kukla, 2018; Kulick, 2003 on sexual consent and refusal) could be viewed as sexual-practice-related SSAs.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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