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Homophobic Discourse: A ‘Popular’ Canadian Example

Abstract

This paper presents a critical discourse analysis of the writings of Canadian neo-conservative author, William D. Gairdner, focusing specifically on his discourse about homosexuals and homosexuality. I first examine Gairdner’s use of lexical choices, metaphor, and transitivity. Next, I quote a short sample passage from his writings and discuss the various linguistic features Gairdner employs in presenting his views about homosexuality. Following that linguistic analysis, I discuss neo-conservatism in Canada and Gairdner’s role in that movement, and then I contextualize my study within other social and linguistic research aimed at identifying and resisting homophobia and homophobic discourses. Finally, I conclude by illustrating the ways in which Gairdner’s discourse can be understood as part of the broader neo-conservative agenda with respect to gender, race, and sexual orientation. This paper fills a void in the published literature by focusing on a specifically Canadian example of homophobic discourse.

1. Introduction

This paper uses the techniques of critical discourse analysis to identify and explicate some of the linguistic devices prevalent in neo-conservative discussions of homosexuality and homosexuals.¹ Specifically, it focuses on the writings of William D. Gairdner, a contemporary Canadian writer of political and social commentary. Gairdner’s works include numerous essays and five popular (i.e. non-academic) books: *The Trouble With Canada: A Citizen Speaks Out* (1990), *The War Against the Family: A Parent Speaks Out* (1992), *Constitutional Crackup* (1994), *On Higher*

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Ground: Reclaiming a Civil Society (1996), and *The Trouble With Democracy: A Citizen Speaks Out* (2001). With the exception of *Constitutional Crackup*, which deals exclusively with the issue of the French separatist movement in Canada, all of Gairdner's popular books contain at least some discussion of homosexuality. Gairdner presents his longest and most explicit discussion of homosexuality in *The War Against the Family*, which includes two consecutive chapters on this theme. Those two chapters constitute the core data analyzed in this paper to illustrate the discursive strategies Gairdner employs in vilifying homosexuals and homosexuality.

This paper derives its theoretical and methodological framework from critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses on the social, political, and cultural dimensions of discourse, not simply on its structure (van Dijk 1990: 8). It is a diverse, multi-disciplinary approach to the study of texts, not a rigidly or narrowly defined theory or discipline. While CDA borrows many of the insights and tools of other branches of formal linguistics and discourse analysis, it differs from them in being critical, that is, in explicitly engaging in an analysis of the structures of power and dominance at work in the context of particular texts (van Dijk 1994). One of the major fields contributing to CDA is critical linguistics.

Critical linguistics seeks, by studying the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of the social and historical situation of the text, to display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language – and which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as 'natural' (Fowler 1991: 67).

Using the techniques of critical discourse analysis, I analyze some of the linguistic devices Gairdner uses in his presentation of homosexuals and homosexuality. First, I examine Gairdner's use of lexical choices, metaphor, and transitivity. Next, I quote a short sample passage from his writings and discuss the various linguistic features Gairdner employs in presenting his views about homosexuality. Following that linguistic analysis, I discuss neo-conservatism in Canada and Gairdner's role in that movement, and then I contextualize my study within other social and linguistic research aimed at identifying and resisting homophobia and homophobic discourses. Finally, I conclude by illustrating the ways in which Gairdner's discourse can be understood as part of the broader neo-conservative agenda with respect to gender, race, and sexual orientation.

An effort was made in preparing this paper to balance the negative characterization of Gairdner's writing as homophobic with evidence that might tend to neutralize this characterization; however, no mitigating evidence was found, either within the two chapters I focused on or elsewhere in Gairdner's texts. While my analysis strives to be academically rigorous and intellectually valid, in keeping with the critical agenda of critical discourse analysis, it does not purport to be value-neutral. This study has been undertaken not in order to foreground the discourse of William Gairdner that others might admire it, but rather, to expose it as being discriminatory and dangerous. This paper differs from most published critical discourse analyses, which focus on any number of text types including newspaper articles, news broadcasts, interviews, political speeches, advertising, courtroom transcripts, among others, but which rarely focus on texts of the specific non-fiction genre of the books under examination in this paper. It also seeks to fill a void in the published literature by focusing on a specifically Canadian example of homophobic discourse.²

2. Lexical Choices

Among the most striking features of Gairdner's lexical choices is the way he attacks homosexuals, particularly gay men, by attempting to define them out of existence. He employs a strategy which he dubs "the verbal substitution phenomenon" (Gairdner 1992: 450), while simultaneously criticizing his opponents for purportedly using that very same strategy. He explains the verbal substitution phenomenon in some detail:

One of the best ways to control a political or moral agenda, or simply a debate over cocktails, is to put the opposition on the defensive by being the first to define their behaviour negatively. This is achieved most effectively by forcibly substituting a negative word for an ordinary one; the word *intolerant* for the word *disapprove*, for example. Soon, if repeated often enough, the negative word becomes a cover term for any of the ordinary words previously used. Rendered speechless by this negative contamination of their vocabulary, ordinary people react by backing down. They are then effectively silenced, terrorized, and neutralized by the group with the agenda. (Gairdner 1992: 45)

² A search on March 27, 2005 of the *Linguistics and Language Behaviors Abstracts*, the *Modern Languages Association International Bibliography*, and the *Science Direct* database turned up just one reference to homophobic or heterosexist discourse or language or speech in Canada. This reference was Jacobs (1995).

This strategy that he claims is used by his left-wing opponents is exactly the technique that Gairdner himself uses and advocates with respect to terms such as *sexual orientation*, *gay*, and *homophobic*, discussed below. Since Gairdner has a graduate degree in linguistics, one must assume that he is aware that words acquire meaning not by fiat, but by usage. Thus, his attempt to dismiss homosexuality by unilaterally imposing meanings on terms associated with it is not merely ironic, but suggests a certain degree of manipulation on his part.

2.1 ‘Sexual orientation’

Gairdner signals his rejection of the concept of legitimate variations in human sexuality in part through his rejection of the term ‘sexual orientation’. In *The War Against the Family*, he attempts to justify this position.

Perhaps one of the most insidious victories of the homosexual movement can be seen in the broad acceptance of the term “sexual orientation”, now used widely in our schools and in sociological and government documents. It was coined to replace the phrase “sexual preference”, which suggested that homosexuals were choosing their behaviour and therefore were responsible for it -- an implication most of them strive to avoid. They needed to find a word which suggested that just as the magnetic forces of earth pull the compass needle to North, something called “sexual orientation” directs homosexuals to indulge in the behaviours they enjoy as if they were a natural fact of life . . . The public would do well to reject this word . . . and to talk about “sexual choice” instead of “orientation”. And everywhere they see the former phrase, they should insist on the use of the latter, both privately and publicly. (Gairdner 1992: 378-379)

‘OUT!SPOKEN’, a Toronto-based action and advocacy group working to end media discrimination against lesbians, bisexuals, and gays produced a style guide in the early 1990’s for the print and broadcast media (OUT!SPOKEN n.d.: 1). This guide concurs with Gairdner that the term *sexual orientation* is the term most often used in anti-discrimination legislation to refer to an individual’s primary gender orientation (OUT!SPOKEN n.d.: 14), but not surprisingly it does not identify the term as problematic. In fact, whereas the OUT!SPOKEN guide generally identifies as controversial terms such as *queer*, *fag*, or *dyke*, which are not viewed or used by all gays and lesbians with equal degrees of comfort, it presents the term *sexual orientation* as unproblematic and uncontroversial (see also Jacobs 1995 & 1998). Thus, Gairdner appears to be attaching

controversy to a term which is not otherwise a site of contestation in discussion of gay and lesbian rights. Contesting otherwise uncontested terms is thus a strategy that Gairdner employs in order to deflect attention away from the serious issues of discrimination faced by gays and lesbians and onto the largely moot issue of whether being gay or lesbian is an inherent or a derived state.

2.2 'Gay'

Sexual orientation is not the only term Gairdner rejects; he also rejects the term *gay* as used by and about homosexual persons. *The OUT!SPOKEN Styleguide* offers the following explanation of the term *gay*.

The term that homosexual men and some women have used to describe themselves, and the currently preferred term to describe men whose primary romantic and physical attraction is to members of their own gender . . . Most gay people prefer 'gay' to the clinical word 'homosexual'. The term 'gay' may be used to refer to both men and women, but 'lesbian' is the preferred term for women. (OUT!SPOKEN n.d.: 12)

Challenging such neutral or positive uses of terms such as *gay* and *sexual orientation*, Gairdner asserts that

by altering the word-labels that describe their world, homosexuals hope to make their behaviour invisible, or at least so "normal" it won't be noticed. This is part of their campaign to morally desensitize the public. (Gairdner 1992: 376)

This explanation imputes sinister, or at least objectionable, motivations to gays and lesbians who use these terms, an idea on which Gairdner elaborates in the following passage:

Public acceptance of the word "gay" has been a great victory for homosexuals, for the word "homosexual" had always been a negative term to denote those who preferred to copulate with their own sex. But what homosexuals wanted was a word that elevated their behaviour to an admirable status, and they achieved this by taking a perfectly good English word -- now off-limits to normal people -- and appropriating it for their specific use. (Gairdner 1992: 377)

In both of the two preceding quotations, Gairdner appropriates the voice of homosexuals, purporting to know and understand their motives and their goals. Furthermore, in both of these quotations, he isolates homosexuals

from the mainstream, in the first case by contrasting them with “the public”, whom they purportedly wish to desensitize, and in the second case by contrasting them with “normal people”, who purportedly have been robbed of a “perfectly good English word”.

The choice of someone, particularly someone outside the gay and lesbian community, to use *gay* instead of *homosexual* to refer to gay men does, as Gairdner recognizes, have a significance, although not necessarily the significance he assigns it when he claims,

To them, the word “gay” suggests carefree, happy-go-lucky individuals who have a culture and a way of being all their own, which may in some secret way be superior to the hum-drum, sometimes un-gay world of the rest of humanity. The word suggests a special in-group with access to happiness the rest of us lack. (Gairdner 1992: 377)

The word does not, in fact, necessarily connote cheerfulness or good humour on the part of gays, but it does suggest a more positive and accepting attitude towards members of the group than does *homosexual* in many contexts, which is undoubtedly why Gairdner admonishes his readers not to use it:

Those who wish to defend the natural family and the core values of our society should strenuously resist the use of this word, and publicly replace it with the word “homosexual”, which is more honest. After all, most of these people are the furthest thing from “gay”. (Gairdner 1992: 377)

The contestation of the word *gay* both within and outside the homosexual community is not unlike the evolution of terms to refer to descendants of African slaves in North America, particularly in the U.S.A. Just as *gay* was at first primarily in-group usage by homosexual men before it became widely recognized and used outside the homosexual community, so was *African American* first used and discussed within the black community before it came to the attention of most Americans, and just as *gay* was not at first uniformly positively received (Ashley 1979: 226), neither was *African American* (Baugh 1991: 135). However, by the 1970’s, *gay* was becoming increasingly popular as a term for homosexual men, by the 1980’s it had begun to appear regularly in the mainstream press, and by the early 1990’s, the term *gay* was no longer even a source of debate within the homosexual community (Jacobs 1998: 195). The fact that Gairdner expends such effort over *gay* demonstrates that naming and the right to self-identification is a site of considerable ideological struggle, and is

contested by representatives of the dominant heterosexist patriarchy such as Gairdner.

2.3 'Homophobic'

In much the same way as Gairdner rejects the terms *gay* and *sexual orientation*, he also rejects *homophobic*.

Once they have defined themselves anew by rejecting society's generic "homosexual" label and established the "dignity" of being "gay", the next choice was to position normal people as frightened, bigoted, and irrational. This was achieved by inventing the nonsensical but extremely effective word "homophobic" and using it like a grenade to throw at anyone who dared to utter the slightest negative opinion. (Gairdner 1992: 377)

Gairdner attempts to argue away the reality of homophobia by rejecting the term itself. By suggesting that homosexuals invented the term, he is implying that they invented the concept that the term represents. In his statement "[m]ost people, of course, are not afraid of homosexuals at all. They're disgusted by them" (1992: 377), Gairdner reveals that his rejection of the term *homophobic* is based on the assumption that it means something like "fear of homosexuals". However, the root *phobe*, from which *phobic* is formed, is defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1982) as "not fond of, (person) disliking or fearing". Furthermore, in common usage, describing someone as homophobic is asserting that they hate, despise, and/or fear homosexuals and homosexuality. Finally, OUT!SPOKEN (n.d.: 13) defines *homophobia* as, "[f]ear of or aversion to homosexuals or homosexuality, including one's own homosexual feelings, and the hatred, disgust, and prejudice that fear brings". Gairdner cannot, by fiat, make the word stop meaning what it does mean, and he cannot erase the reality of homophobia with glib remarks such as the following. "After all, the truth is that it is not we who are homophobic, but rather homosexuals who are 'heterophobic,' 'moralphobic,' and 'familyphobic'" (Gairdner 1992: 378).

In his discussion of homosexuality, Gairdner challenges the use of the terms *gay*, *sexual orientation*, and *homophobic*. In fact, he attempts to disallow such terms and urges his readers to refuse to use them and to try to force others to abandon them as well (Gairdner 1992: 378). Gairdner recognizes that language is a site of ideological struggle, although he appears not to acknowledge that he is engaging in just the sort of linguistic manipulation he accuses his opponents of using. By trying to force his

meanings onto particular lexical items, to the exclusion of all other meanings, he is manipulating not just the language, but through the language the thoughts and emotions of the readers, attempting to generate in them the same sorts of homophobic attitudes that his writing expresses.

3. Metaphor: Disease/pathology

A prevalent metaphor in Gairdner's writings on homosexuality is that of disease and pathology. In a chapter entitled "The Gay Plague and the Politics of AIDS", Gairdner (1992) selectively interprets data about AIDS and other (potentially) sexually transmitted diseases, presenting them separately and collectively as "the gay plague". The word *plague* occurs four times in the text of this chapter, but it occurs an additional nine times if one counts the chapter title reprinted in the header of each odd-numbered page. Thus, the word and therefore the concept of plague are never far from the consciousness of the reader. In addition to the word *plague*, the chapter is saturated with terms denoting diseases and illnesses, among them cancer, amoebiasis, giardiasis, salmonellosis, shigellosis, hepatitis, tuberculosis, syphilis, AIDS, HIV, gonorrhoea, and others. Moreover, terms denoting illness and disease are repeatedly collocated throughout the chapter with the terms *gay* and *homosexual*, including such phrases as "the homosexual disease epidemic" (1992: 397).

The most explicit statements in the chapter are those that blame gay men for AIDS. For example, Gairdner writes that

homosexuality is an antifamily phenomenon, and AIDS in North America is still overwhelmingly a homosexual disease. Encouraging more of one will bring more of the other (Gairdner 1992: 401).

Gairdner contends that AIDS is primarily a gay disease spread through anal intercourse, but he also argues strenuously that it can be spread through non-sexual, casual contact (Gairdner 1992: 406-407). Rather than drawing the conclusion that since the virus can be spread through means other than gay sex, it is therefore not a gay plague, Gairdner uses the possibility of it spreading in other ways to further condemn homosexuals, claiming that they knowingly and callously pose a direct health risk to heterosexuals, and especially to children in daycare centres, all in the interests of promoting their alleged political agenda (Gairdner 1992: 404).

Not content to collocate homosexuals with physical diseases and pathologies, Gairdner also attempts to link homosexuality with the spread of social pathologies, particularly in daycare centres (Gairdner 1992: 368). Gairdner quotes psychologist Elizabeth Moberly (1983), who theorizes that homosexuality is a search for parenting that was absent or inadequate during a person's infancy. Since Gairdner sees it as primarily a mother's responsibility to provide the crucial nurturing to children, he exploits Moberly's view as another opportunity to blame feminists for what he perceives to be the destruction of human society.

If Moberly is correct, then from the egalitarian/feminist drive for tax-funded universal daycare we can expect to see a horrendous unintended consequence: tax-funded centres for sexual pathology. (Gairdner 1992: 368)

What Gairdner means here by *sexual pathology* is homosexuality. He is echoing the disease-and-death associations he made previously when he links homosexuality with such illnesses as cancer and tuberculosis. He is also drawing a conclusion about a purported causal link between daycare centres and homosexuality, between feminism and homosexuality, and between egalitarianism and homosexuality, none of which causal links have ever been demonstrated by him or by anyone else. If he cannot frighten readers sufficiently by implying that homosexuals will infect children with physical diseases, then he will attempt to frighten them by suggesting that daycare workers will socially condition children to become homosexuals.

As a final attack against homosexuals and on the excuse of doing a public service, Gairdner presents nine pages of graphic description of activities which gay men purportedly engage in, many of them violent. Although the text of Gairdner's description of alleged homosexual behaviours could be described at length and in detail on several different levels, the following discussion of Gairdner's use of transitivity is more than adequate to reveal the nature of his attribution of violence and disease to gay male sexual activity.

4. Transitivity

The following discussion of transitivity³ draws heavily on the insights of Fowler (1985), Simpson (1993), and Sykes (1985), all of whom employ Halliday's notion of transitivity as something much broader than the traditional notion that a verb can be either transitive (having a direct object complement) or intransitive (having no direct object complement). Rather, within critical discourse analysis, transitivity is a relative concept which is applied to a clause rather than just to a verb. Thus, rather than a clause simply being either transitive or intransitive, it can be judged as being highly transitive, somewhat transitive, relatively low in transitivity, with infinite gradations in between. Clauses that are deemed to be very highly transitive have three main characteristics: an animate subject, who deliberately performs an action, which affects a patient. The transitivity of the clause diminishes as one alters, obscures, or removes any of these three criteria.

Simpson (1993) formalizes the transitivity scale by characterizing it in terms of four types of processes, listed from highest to lowest levels of transitivity: material processes, verbalization processes, mental processes, and relational processes. According to Simpson, material processes are processes of *doing*, typically involving an ACTOR carrying out an observable act, often one that has consequences that are also observable. Verbalization processes, or processes of *saying*, are observable, but they involve a SAYER rather than an ACTOR and they are thus less highly transitive than are material processes. Mental processes are internalized processes of *sensing*, involving perception, reaction, or cognition. As such, they are less transitive than either of the first two types of process, which are at least observable. Finally, relational processes are processes of *being* and *having* (Simpson 1993: 90-92).

By applying Simpson's taxonomy of processes to one chapter of Gairdner's writings on gay men (Gairdner 1992, Chapter 13: "Radical Homosexuals vs. the Family"), one can demonstrate how Gairdner uses transitivity as one more tool with which to discredit homosexuals. Specifically, the images of homosexuals presented by Gairdner are chosen to maximize the image of homosexuality as violent and unhealthy. Gays are often placed as agents of transitive clauses and especially as agents of

³ This section on transitivity includes material adapted from Lillian (1997). Copyright rests with the author.

violent acts. Taken together, this paints a picture of gay men as actively carrying out material processes, especially those resulting in real or perceived harm or injury.

In the chapter under analysis, there are 47 predicates that represent the category of material processes with gay men in the role of ACTOR. Eight of these represent metaphorical rather than literal actions: “have broken the implicit pact”; “are intentionally attacking this pact” (1992: 357); “to destroy the natural family” (1992: 361); “taking a perfectly good English word”; “like a grenade to throw at” (1992: 377); “to destroy all moral hierarchy”, “can escape criticism”; “have imported the notion” (1992: 379). The remaining material processes represent literal rather than figurative activities: “homosexuals commit suicide” (1992: 375); “indulge in the behaviours” (1992: 379); “perpetrate child molestations”, “homosexual teachers commit pupil molestations”, “likely to molest”, “assaulted”, “killed”, “committed”, “raped, killed, then raped them dead”, “ate”, “use whips”, “tie up”, “beat”, “punish”, “use”, “are publicly beaten and ‘sold’”, “hurt”, “scratched”, “bruised”, “bloodied”, “hurt each other”, “hurt themselves” (1992: 388-389); “seldom stop to disinfect”, “ingest”, “licking”, “inserting”, “eating”, “rubbing”, “ingest”, “urinating on”, “defecating on”, “drank”, “urinated on”, “ate”, “received sperm” (1992: 394-395). With the possible exception of the processes “escape” and “import”, all these material processes, whether they are used literally or figuratively, convey violent or at the very least unhealthy (e.g. “ingest fecal material”) acts. This chapter paints a picture of homosexual men as violent and dangerous, a picture which is not altered by the following disclaimer near the beginning of chapter 13.

So this chapter is not about homosexual individuals who are minding their own business. Nor is it intended to hurt the feelings of otherwise proper homosexual citizens, many of whom are themselves extremely distraught by homosexual behaviour and the radical agenda. (Gairdner 1992: 357)

The import of this disclaimer is lost completely since, throughout the chapter, Gairdner attributes actions simply to “homosexuals”, effectively painting all homosexuals with the same negative brush.

Of the verbal processes attributed to homosexuals, several connote violence and aggression, as the following examples demonstrate: “chanting”, “threatening” (1992: 369); “‘homophobic’ . . . using it” [i.e. using the word] (1992: 377); “to justify it” (1992: 379); “promoting”, “declared war” (1992: 387); “admit to” (1992: 389). The mental processes

attributed to homosexuals are closely linked to the verbalization processes and tend to concern homosexuals' purported efforts to justify themselves and their actions and to convince other people to accept their views and actions. Thus we get: "homosexuals want [to destroy]" (1992: 361); "to alter the way the public thinks", "controlling", "wanted . . . a word", "appropriating it", "defined", "rejecting", "to position", "inventing" (1992: 377); "needed to find a word", "enjoy", "attempted [to justify]" (1992: 379); "choose" (1992: 387); "enjoy" (1992: 389). The only relational process assigned to homosexuals is "they are out in the open" (1992: 387), but even that is linked to the verbalization processes "promoting their 'lifestyle'" and "declared war" (1992: 387).

To summarize, in the chapter examined, homosexuals are associated 47 times with material processes, many of which represent acts of violence, 7 times with verbalization processes, 14 times with mental processes, and only once with relational processes. Gays are most frequently assigned roles in material processes which are high in transitivity and which often connote violence or aggression. The effect of this is that homosexuality is portrayed as an imminent, physical threat. Gairdner attempts to generate disdain toward all with whom he disagrees, but he is evidently out to generate in his readers a special fear and loathing of gay men. Damning gays (since he largely ignores lesbians in this discussion) as perverse, and attempting to generate feelings of revulsion among readers by his unfair and prejudicial association of gays with pedophilia, bestiality, and violence, Gairdner works to generate panic and fear among readers by portraying gays as dangerous not just to themselves, but to the health and well-being of the public at large.

5. Sample Analysis

This section presents a sample analysis of one excerpt from Gairdner (1992), demonstrating how a critical linguistic analysis can be applied to a text. This passage by no means represents the most extreme example of Gairdner's homophobic discourse. In fact, it represents some of Gairdner's least inflammatory anti-gay writing. It is often the more rational-sounding and seemingly 'neutral' discourse which is the more insidious, precisely because readers may be less likely to realize that through reasonable-sounding prose they are being led toward a radical position. The passage is taken from the middle of a 40-page chapter entitled "Radical Homosexuals vs. the Family" and constitutes one sub-section of the chapter. Prior to this

passage, Gairdner discusses homosexuality under the sub-sections: *Born Homosexual?*, *Made Homosexual?*, and *Homosexual by Choice?* (italics in original). In this passage, Gairdner distils from the cursory and brief presentation he has made of various theories of the origins of homosexuality his own view of the matter.

The Author's Model

My view is that any human population could be made homosexual under certain extreme conditions. For example, a group of young children with no prior sexual knowledge, raised on a desert island by a homosexual, would likely end up fancying homosexual behaviour themselves. In other words, it is quite possible to train a young population to like homosexual behaviour. What prevent this from happening on a large scale is the social sanctions against it. Societies intentionally suppress homosexual behaviour so that such extreme situations cannot arise.

Secondly, there may be very small numbers of people with a predisposition, however caused, to choose homosexual behaviour. Notice that I used all the models here. Some may be predisposed, in the way an alcoholic may be predisposed to drink if drink is available. But nothing except personal desire makes the bottle (or the penis) jump into the mouth. After all, all societies have people with predispositions to all sorts of weird appetites and behaviours, whether homosexuality, suicide, drunkenness, killing, stealing, overeating, or bad temper. This has always been so, and it is not going to go away. We are only going to exhaust ourselves trying to figure out why, and we likely will always wind up in a conflict of expertise in which biased experts with warring political agendas dispute each other's findings for eternity. It's a dead end. (Gairdner 1992: 369-370)

The passage opens with the noun phrase "my view" as the subject of the main clause, with the content of his view itself being relegated to a subordinate clause. The proposition of the subordinate clause, which constitutes the substance of Gairdner's view, is that, "any human population could be made homosexual under certain extreme conditions". On its own, this clause conveys a modality of validity, reflecting a high degree of certainty and confidence on the part of the writer. "Any population" defines the broadest possible range of humanity, potentially including not just 'other' people, but also the reader and even the writer himself. Gairdner thus presents homosexuality as something which his readers cannot afford to ignore, since, according to him, they themselves could be vulnerable to being made homosexual "under certain extreme conditions". In one sense, the qualifying phrase "under certain extreme conditions" mitigates the modality slightly, but later in the chapter and in the following chapters, Gairdner argues that daycare centres constitute the

sorts of “extreme conditions” that generate homosexuality, so in practice, the qualifier does not significantly reduce the modal strength of the assertion Gairdner is making. On its own, Gairdner’s proposition makes a very strong claim, one for which he lacks supporting empirical evidence. Thus, he utilizes the syntax, placing his proposition in a subordinate clause, together with the personalized pronoun *my* in the main clause to alter the modality of the opening sentence of the passage such that he is not making an empirical claim, but rather is expressing his proposition in the form of an opinion.

In the second sentence of the passage, Gairdner gives an example to illustrate the claim he makes in the first sentence. He then presents a scenario which is so unlikely as to be absurd: a group of young children raised on a desert island by a homosexual. Nevertheless, as absurd as this scenario is, it serves as part of the foundation of ideas and impressions upon which Gairdner subsequently relies in trying to argue that homosexuals working in daycare centres are likely to cause inordinate numbers of children to become homosexuals themselves. In the sample passage, Gairdner suggests a cause-and-effect relationship between the sexual orientation of a care-giver and that of the children who are being cared for, writing that this hypothetical set of children “would likely end up fancying homosexual behaviour themselves”. The degree of certainty is mitigated by the modal adverb “likely”, which allows for the possibility of doubt. Gairdner also stops short of asserting that such children would irrevocably become homosexuals, claiming instead that they would likely “fancy” homosexual behaviour, a somewhat weaker claim. However, even modalized as it is, this sentence contains some insidious implications.

As he establishes the scenario, the desert island contains one adult (presumed to be male since Gairdner routinely uses *homosexual* for males and *lesbian* for females) and two or more children. The children are presumably quite young since they have no prior sexual knowledge. As the only adult, the caregiver would have no available adult sexual partner with whom the children might observe him engaging in sexual acts. That being the case, how could he model for them the “homosexual behaviours” they purportedly grow to fancy? The answer is clear: Gairdner is implying that the adult will engage in sexual acts with the children. Thus, even without saying it explicitly, Gairdner is planting in the reader’s mind an implication that homosexuals are pedophiles, and that in the hypothetical scenario, the homosexual care-giver would deliberately expose the children to homosexual acts. This implication is made more explicit in the third

sentence of the passage, "In other words, it is quite possible to train a young population to like homosexual behaviour". The verb "to train" implies a conscious and deliberate teaching, together with practice in the behaviour.

Sentences 4 and 5 turn the reader's attention away from the hypothetical example and back to the 'real world'. Both sentences utilize a modality of validity which is neither emphasized nor mitigated and which constitutes a sort of unmarked expository style. In terms of the content of these sentences, Gairdner may be reassuring the readers that societies prevent "this" (the child abuse implied by sentence 3), but he qualifies the assertion through the phrase "on a large scale" in such a way that he suggests that such abuse occurs on a small scale and that gay men must therefore still be considered a threat. Presumably, this suggestion is meant to justify what is asserted in sentence 8, which is that societies intentionally suppress homosexual behaviour. This amounts to justifying the persecution of homosexuals on the basis of a preposterous hypothetical scenario involving people stranded on a desert island. In the space of nine short lines, Gairdner has therefore moved the reader from an empirically unjustifiable proposition, through a preposterous hypothetical situation, to an unsubstantiated generalization about children being trained to become homosexuals, and finally to a justification for persecuting homosexuals on no grounds other than their homosexuality.

In order to understand more completely Gairdner's use of the noun "predisposition", one must look to sentences 8 through 10. In sentence 8, a predisposition to homosexuality is equated with a predisposition for an alcoholic to drink if drink is available. By equating homosexuality with alcoholism, Gairdner pathologizes it and presents it as inherently harmful and unhealthy. Gairdner then portrays both alcoholism and homosexuality as simply matters of desire. "But nothing except personal desire makes the bottle (or the penis) jump into the mouth" (sentence 9). The assertion "nothing except" conveys a strong modality of certainty and leaves no room for evidence or argument to the contrary, such as evidence that alcoholism may be a disease with a physiological basis, or that sexual orientation may be something over which a person has no control and which is innate. Still not satisfied that he has sufficiently denigrated homosexuals, in sentence 10 Gairdner collocates "predispositions", the noun he has used in connection with homosexuality, with "all sorts of weird appetites and behaviours". The impression that Gairdner is engaging in an undisguised attack on homosexuals is strengthened by the list of items

with which he collocates homosexuality in exemplifying what he describes as weird: suicide, drunkenness, killing, stealing, overeating, and bad temper. What the items in this collocational set have in common is that they all represent negative states or activities. Beyond that, there are subsets of items from the list that may be related, but the list as a whole does not form any particularly natural or transparent set. Killing and stealing (and in some jurisdictions suicide) constitute illegal acts. Suicide and killing both pertain to death. Drunkenness and overeating both pertain to indulgence in the appetites of the palate and/or gullet. Bad temper cannot be linked in any apparent way with any of the other items in the list, nor can homosexuality. Nevertheless, there is a strong tendency for a reader/hearer to attempt to find some semantic link between items enumerated within a list. The negative judgement made about all the items in the list is the only obvious link. Still, linking homosexuality with such things as overeating and bad temper compounds the negativity by also trivializing it and holding it up to ridicule.

In sentence 11, Gairdner begins to move away from the particularization implied by his use of the first person singular, toward a claim for universality, and then in sentence 12 he moves from first person singular to first person plural, as if to imply that what started out as Gairdner's view is being extended to encompass a larger group. The context does not explicitly indicate whether the pronoun *we* (used twice) is intended to include or to exclude the reader, but given that just seven lines earlier, the reader was addressed in an imperative clause, the default assumption is that the reader is meant to include him/herself in the pronoun. The final sentence of the sample passage states, "It's a dead end" (line 22). The context would lead to an interpretation that the academic debate is a dead end, but that in turn leads to an interpretation that finding out the origins or causes of homosexuality is a dead end. An interpretation that is not ruled out by the context is also that homosexuality is itself a dead end, and this interpretation is in fact consistent with Gairdner's use elsewhere of imagery of death in connection with homosexuality.

The passage analyzed in this section constitutes only a very small sample of the many pages that Gairdner has written about homosexuality, but this analysis is sufficient to demonstrate the range of devices that Gairdner employs in his anti-homosexual rhetoric: lexical choices, metaphor, modality, syntax, mood, modality, pronoun choice, collocation and implication.

6. Neo-Conservative Ideology in Canada

The ideology reflected and reproduced in the popular writings of William Gairdner is that of neo-conservatism. Neo-conservatism, or the 'New Right', seeks to protect the interests of the dominant elites in Western countries including, but not limited to, Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. Trevor Harrison characterizes neo-conservatism as

[...] an amalgam of classical liberal economic and political theory with traditional conservative social and moral doctrine. Specifically, neo-conservatism is said to promote capitalist socio-economic structures and beliefs (the free-market system, individualism, a minimal state, and private ownership of property) while espousing a belief in natural inequalities and natural authorities (the Christian church, the family, and the state). (Harrison 1995: 20-21)

Rather than being associated directly with any one political party or one social group, the neo-conservative movement actually comprises a *de facto* alliance of sorts among at least three different sectors of society: the international corporations, assorted smaller forms of capital which favour a libertarian, ultra-free enterprise version of capitalism, and fundamentalist religion (Marchak 1988: 187).

Particularly within North America, the 'family values' constituency, often associated with evangelical Christianity, makes up a significant core of the New Right, although not all who support the so-called family values agenda of the New Right are themselves evangelical or even necessarily Christian (Peele 1984: 25). In both its Jewish and Christian origins, however, it is on the cluster of social family values issues that the religious right has its strongest impact. Despite some differences in emphasis and origin, the different strands of neo-conservatism have in common that they privileging white, heterosexual, English-speaking males above all other individuals and groups (Marchak 1988).

The neo-conservatism in Great Britain and in the U.S.A. peaked in its influence during the 1980's under Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister from 1979 - 1990) and Ronald Reagan (President from 1980 - 1988), but it still exerts a strong influence in American politics in the 1990's and beyond, as evidenced by the Republican Presidential victories of George W. Bush in 2000 and in 2004. The neo-conservative movement was slower to gain a foothold in Canada than in either Great Britain or the United States, however, and did not begin to manifest itself as a force to be reckoned with until the 1990's.

Jeffrey attributes the slower development of neo-conservatism in Canada to four factors. First, she argues that Canada's political culture tends to be further to the left than that of the United States, as illustrated by programmes such as its public health system, making Canadians slower to embrace neo-conservatism. Second, she argues that Canadians tend to exhibit a greater respect for authority and deference to elites than have Americans (Jeffrey 1999: 45). Third, Jeffrey explains that,

[w]ith a much smaller population and far less capital for private-sector investment, state intervention in the economy and the provision of government-sponsored social programs through the welfare state came to be not only strongly supported, but expected. Many Canadians considered it a right of citizenship. Risk-taking and entrepreneurship, by contrast, never figured prominently in the Canadian identity. (Jeffrey 1999: 46)

Finally, the fact that Canadians have tended to perceive neo-conservatism as being a predominantly American phenomenon has also made them less inclined to adopt it. Jeffrey notes,

[s]ince most Canadians define their national identity as one that is emphatically not American, they have been very unwilling to import American political baggage. (Jeffrey 1999: 47)

To date, neo-conservative governments have been elected in Canada's two wealthiest provinces, Alberta and Ontario. In 1992, neo-conservative Ralph Klein won the leadership of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party and assumed the premiership of Alberta. Klein went on to win the 1993, 1997, and 2001, and 2005 provincial elections and at the time of this writing is still Premier of Alberta. In Ontario, Mike Harris and his far-right Progressive Conservative Party won the provincial election in 1995 and immediately began instituting the measures outlined in his party's neo-conservative manifesto, the Common Sense Revolution. Harris' government was re-elected in 1999 and served one more term in office before being defeated by the Liberal Party.

On the national scene, during the 1980's, an assortment of neo-conservatives based in western Canada dreamed of pursuing their own agenda in Canadian federal politics. Finally, in November 1987, they founded a new party, The Reform Party of Canada, acclaiming Preston Manning as its first leader. Manning held that position until 2000, when the Reform Party of Canada morphed into the new Conservative Reform Alliance Party of Canada, which in turn merged with the Progressive

Conservative Party of Canada in 2003 to form the Conservative Party of Canada. The Reform Party embraced not only the sort of fiscal conservatism pursued by the neo-conservative governments of Ontario and Alberta, but also a very strong social and moral conservatism (Jeffrey 1999: 50). With each reincarnation of the party, it adopts less extreme policy platforms and moves closer to the centre of the Canadian political spectrum, but to date it has not succeeded in winning a federal election.

William Gairdner had a strong influence on the neo-conservative movement in Canada, particularly in its early days, and his role in the Reform Party was considerable during its formative years. In fact, Trevor Harrison places Gairdner among the most influential core members of Reform (Harrison 1995: 209). For example, Gairdner was a keynote speaker at the 1991 Reform Party's Assembly in Saskatoon. Murray Dobbin reports that *The Trouble with Canada*, upon which Gairdner's speech was based, had become "the de facto manifesto for Preston Manning's Reform Party" (Dobbin 1992: 134). Dobbin further reports that Gairdner's 1991 Saskatoon address was only the first among many such speeches to Reform audiences and that "Gairdner is one of the party's most frequent guest speakers at rallies" (Dobbin 1992: 118). Gairdner has not run for elected office, but through his books, speeches, and media appearances, his influence over the agenda of neo-conservatives in Canada has been considerable.

Gairdner attempts to portray himself as just an ordinary Canadian, but there can be little doubt that he speaks from a position of social power, being wealthy, white, male, heterosexual, and highly educated, holding a Master's degree in Structural Linguistics, a Master's in English/Creative Writing, and a doctorate in English Literature, all from Stanford University. He is also a former Commonwealth and Olympic decathlete, one-time professor of English, former President and owner of The Fitness Institute of Canada, former Chair of The Gairdner Foundation, and current President and owner of Gairspar Investments, Ltd. Gairdner has social and linguistic power and he wields it in his writing in order to induce other people to adopt his political and social policies. This makes his books appropriate for critical discourse analysis, particularly because he somewhat problematically positions himself as opposing academic approaches to knowledge, even though it is his training within academia that in large measure gives him the credibility to have his books published.

7. Homophobia and Homophobic Discourse

The discursive strategies apparent in Gairdner's writings are representative of the ways in which neo-conservatives express particular attitudes, not only toward homosexuals, but also toward other groups with which they are at odds. Critical theorists have argued that neo-conservatism promotes and enables racism, sexism, and homophobia; however, fewer academic studies have been published on homophobic discourse than on either racist discourse or sexist discourse. Barbara Smith notes that

[h]omophobia is usually the last oppression to be mentioned, the last to be taken seriously, the last to go. But it is extremely serious, sometimes to the point of being fatal. (Smith 1993: 99)

The relative paucity of linguistic analyses of homophobic discourse may, at least in part, reflect this tendency for homophobia to be prioritized below racism and sexism as forms of oppression to be challenged both within and without academia. Ironically, according to Smith, while the anti-oppression forces of the left may sometimes fail to recognize the full impact of homophobia,

for the forces on the right, hating lesbians and gay men, people of color, Jews, and women go hand in hand. *They* make connections between oppressions in the most negative ways with horrifying results. (Smith 1993: 100)

Elizabeth Morrish, writing about Great Britain, observes that there is a certain cumulative effect to public discourses about lesbians and gays.

In the case of discourse about lesbians and gays, there is a clear cumulative effect that leads to an atmosphere in which homosexuality is deemed 'unnatural' and threatening to the dominant culture and in which homophobic acts are held to be justified and in the interests of the 'general public'. (Morrish 1997: 335)

Morrish notes two recurring themes in public discussion of homosexuality, namely family life and disease (Morrish 1997: 338). She observes that, "...most often in contemporary discourse, the term family has become a codeword for the exclusion of homosexuality" (Morrish 1997: 339). Both themes, family life and disease, are also prominent in William Gairdner's discourse on homosexuality.

Gayle Rubin likewise links right-wing politics with narrow definitions of appropriate sex.

Right-wing ideology linking non-familial sex with communism and political weakness is nothing new. During the McCarthy period, Alfred Kinsey and his Institute for Sex Research were attacked for weakening the moral fibre of Americans and rendering them more vulnerable to communist influence. (Rubin 1993: 7-8)

Rubin's term *non-familial sex* includes same-sex relationships. According to her analysis, dominant North American views divide sex into a hierarchy consisting of "the charmed circle", seen as Good, Normal, Blessed Sexuality, consisting of sex that is heterosexual, married, monogamous, procreative, non-commercial, in pairs, in a relationship, same generation, in private, no pornography, bodies only, and vanilla, versus "the outer limits", seen as Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural, Damned Sexuality, and consisting of sex that is homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, commercial, alone or in groups, casual, cross-generational, in public, pornography, with manufactured objects, and/or sadomasochistic (Rubin 1993: 13). William Gairdner's characterization of sex into acceptable and unacceptable varieties corresponds closely to the model described by Rubin.

In "The Gay Agenda: Marketing Hate Speech to Mainstream Media", Marguerite J. Moritz identifies some of the extreme anti-homosexual rhetoric of the religious right in the U.S.A. as hate speech (Moritz 1995: 58). Some of the most egregious forms of this propaganda include calls for the death penalty for homosexuals, whom these propagandists purport violate Biblical laws and principles. According to Moritz, these extreme forms of rhetoric gain little support for the anti-gay lobby outside of fundamentalist circles, so the radical right has moderated its rhetoric somewhat to appeal to mainstream audiences, often reframing their arguments as a special rights issue (Moritz 1995: 58). Marian Meyers echoes the observation about the use of a category of 'special interest group' to marginalize gays and lesbians and to distance them from the so-called mainstream of America (Meyers 1994: 340). Although William Gairdner's own anti-gay rhetoric at times becomes quite extreme, his use of the special rights argument against gays and lesbians also links him to the forces Moritz refers to as the radical right. The fact that Gairdner's anti-gay rhetoric is not isolated, but rather forms part of a wide continuum of such discourse makes it all the more potent. Many Canadians, especially those who adhere to far-right political and/or religious positions, are accustomed to reading American perspectives on issues and thus find that Gairdner's writings resonate with ideas and even styles of language with which

already feel comfortable. Gairdner sows his seeds of hatred in ground that has been already tilled by the years of homophobic propaganda that various right-wing elements have been circulating throughout North America.

Vasu Reddy (2002), analyzing print and electronic news sources in Africa, identifies homophobic discourse as hate speech.

The point here is that homophobia, externalized as hate speech, is not merely an emotional response but a political, social and cultural response to the increasing visibility of homosexuality as a real and lived experience of African gays and lesbians. (Reddy 2002: 164)

Reddy examines seven examples of homophobic discourse from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Egypt. What is clear from these examples is that homophobia and homophobic discourses are phenomena not constrained by geographical or political boundaries. Rather, homophobia manifests itself internationally and cross-culturally, threatening the physical and psychological safety of lesbians and gays worldwide.

8. Conclusion

The scorn William Gairdner expresses toward gay men as he propagates his homophobic agenda to his readers is both unmistakable and overwhelming. In reality, homosexuals reflect the same range of diversity as heterosexuals do in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and politics. They are also diverse in their sexual practices, as are heterosexuals. Yet Gairdner dismisses the majority of homosexuals and then presents a gruesome and often violent picture of homosexual behaviour as if that represented the norm.

And I know that there are a lot of respectable, kind-hearted, talented homosexuals out there. But that's not the issue here. The issue is that homosexuals have broken the implicit pact of a conservative society, which has always been to tolerate unnatural private behaviour, but never to approve of it; nor allow it any public weight; and certainly never to force acceptance of it upon the citizens at large. . . . So this chapter is not about homosexual individuals who are minding their own business. Nor is it intended to hurt the feelings of otherwise proper homosexual citizens, many of whom are themselves extremely distraught by homosexual behaviour and the radical agenda. (Gairdner 1992: 356-357)

These condescending and insulting disclaimers in no way counter-balance the pages of negative and violent imagery which are presented to the

readers as simply a description of 'homosexual' behaviour. The repeated pairing of homosexuality with pedophilia and bestiality, the images of violence and disease, and the erroneous identification of AIDS as *the gay plague* become indelibly imprinted in the mind of the reader even though they are distorted, exaggerated, and unrepresentative of gay practices and values. This treatment of homosexuals is consistent with one of the hate strategies identified by Rita Kirk Whillock:

Another strategy the rhetor may use is to vilify the out-class in ways that make it difficult to elicit the support of others in mounting a response. The villains in a hate story must, therefore, be made to appear as evil, opposing the values of the audience. (Whillock 1995: 40)

Homosexuals are presented by Gairdner as one-dimensional beings entirely consumed by insatiable sexual desire, not as people. The reason he presents them this way is clear: he wants to eradicate homosexuality altogether, so he works hard to discredit homosexuals. Gairdner has four main strategies for getting rid of homosexuality. His first strategy is to get rid of feminism, since he thinks that feminism causes homosexuality.

It is no simple coincidence that homosexuality is thriving in a time of sexual egalitarianism and feminism. The two go together like the two sides of a coin. (Gairdner 1992: 318)

Gairdner's second approach to eliminating homosexuals is to 'cure' them (Gairdner 1992: 373). Obviously, any discussion of curing homosexuality presupposes that it is some sort of disease or addiction, analogous, perhaps, to alcoholism or drug abuse: "[s]ome may be predisposed, in the way an alcoholic may be predisposed to drink if drink is available" (1992: 370). That the evidence does not support this supposition does not deter Gairdner. A third approach Gairdner advocates in his campaign to eliminate homosexuality is to censor sex education programmes in schools so that they either teach against homosexuality and hold up married heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual choice, or else simply avoid mentioning homosexuality entirely. Gairdner's fourth strategy for eliminating homosexuality would be to make practising it illegal. Along with advocating making certain sexual acts illegal, Gairdner proposes actively limiting the rights and freedoms of homosexuals. Although he 'only' advocates *repression* of homosexuals, he nevertheless writes approvingly of the *oppression* they are subjected to in China.

This [claiming that homosexuals are curable] amounts to saying that all human societies have engaged in -- and must continue to engage in -- a civilized *repression* of socially unsavoury behaviour as a matter of course, for the sake of self-protection and child protection. Some, like China and other socialist states, actually engage in *oppression* of such behaviour, which seems to do the job. (Gairdner 1992: 374)

Gairdner contends that homosexuals are not entitled to the full range of benefits available to other people in our society. He states unequivocally,

I should state my view that as citizens of a free country, homosexuals ought to have the same legal *protections* as any other citizen, as long as they keep their proclivities to themselves, but never the same *privileges*. (Gairdner 1992: 356)

He advocates, in effect, designating homosexuals as second-class citizens and repressing them such that they must hide their true identities in public.

Clearly, in the case of homosexuality, it is far better for a normal society to be unfair to homosexuals in the name of its own social health, than to be unfair to the entire society in the name of fairness to homosexuals (or any other pressure group.) (Gairdner 1992: 361)

Based on the evidence I have presented in this paper, Gairdner's discourse can and must be identified as nothing less than homophobic propaganda. Homophobia may not get the same wide coverage as racism and ethnicism, yet the discrimination faced by sexual minorities is every bit as devastating as that faced by any other oppressed group, and we as critical discourse analysts must work every bit as hard at identifying and challenging homophobia as we do at identifying and challenging racism and sexism.

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