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## From TV Personality to Fans and Beyond: Indexical Bleaching and the Diffusion of a Media Innovation

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*This article focuses on the role of indexical social meaning in the adoption, circulation, and diffusion of a mass media innovation. The analysis is a case study of the phrase “lady pond,” a euphemism for women as objects of desire. The phrase’s use was popularized by a television personality on the cable network Bravo and has spread beyond those who demonstrate recognition of its media origins. Through a detailed analysis of the phrase in use on Twitter, I investigate the properties of the phrase as it “travels” from Bravo to Bravo fans and beyond. I show that the phrase is used with the same form and meaning as on Bravo, and it is semantically and stylistically integrated into users’ repertoires. However, it loses its indexical links to Bravo through “indexical bleaching,” which I argue is an outcome of the phrase’s recontextualized circulation and a facilitator of its further diffusion. [mass media, circulation, indexicality, sexuality, language change]*

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### Introduction and Background

Everyday speech acts are full of cultural idioms, stock phrases, frequent grammatical constructions, and stylistic features that make intertextual reference to other speakers, conversations, styles, or cultural artifacts. One source of such features is the language used in mass media, which can become what Spitulnik (1997) calls “public words” circulating in a mediated culture. The influence of the mass media on language and language change has recently received focused attention within sociolinguistics (see, e.g., Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Sayers forthcoming; Androutsopoulos forthcoming). Mass media can be mechanisms for the spread of both new, media-generated innovations (Spitulnik 1997) and existing, incipient changes-in-progress (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013). In this article, I consider the role of changing indexical social meaning in a case study of mediated linguistic diffusion, from the innovation of a phrase by an iconic television personality to its use by “ordinary” speakers. The case study is the phrase *lady pond* as a playful euphemism for women as objects of (typically same-sex) desire.

In many contemporary large-scale societies, speakers spend a good deal of time engaged in situations of asymmetrical linguistic experience enabled by mass media, such as watching television. But these experiences are not only receptive. Media consumers actively engage with media sources on informational, affective, psychological, and economic levels (Baym 2000; Goebel 2012; Jenkins 2009; Tovares 2006) as well as on linguistic ones (Spitulnik 1997; Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Turbide et al. 2010).

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One outcome of linguistic engagement with mass media is media language becoming part of individuals' and communities' "verbal repertoires" (Gumperz 1971).

Spitulnik's (1997) seminal study shows how speakers in Zambia "recycle" stylistic features of radio announcers' talk, and through the circulation of these linguistic forms—like trademark phrases and show titles—the Zambian speech community is mediated by the radio, which provides "common linguistic reference points" for audience (community) members. Knowledge of and linguistic reference to media sources become part of the fabric of community discourse, and part of communicative competence is the ability to recognize this intertextuality. Schulthies (2009) analyzes a similar process within the family unit, where Lebanese and Moroccan families serve as "interpretive communities" for "media scripts." By using linguistic features from media sources within household dialogues, family members perform identities that are indexed by the media language.

The present study examines more systematically the role of indexical meaning—that is, social meaning—in the spread of linguistic innovations from mass media sources to their audiences and beyond. Spitulnik and Schulthies show that language forms taken up from media sources provide resources for speakers to enact identities that index the media sources, simultaneously indexing membership in an interpretive community. Likewise, in his analysis of "ethnolectal German" among German youth, Androutsopoulos (2001) suggests that for speakers, features used in mass media stereotypes index "media competence" and knowledge of popular culture. Similar processes are described in analyses of the appropriation of hip-hop language, either in "crossing" by whites in the United States (Cutler 1999) or the global "flow" of hip-hop cultures (Androutsopoulos 2009): hip-hop language is taken up and circulated in order to index hip-hop knowledge or related cultural personae. In a different line of inquiry, sociolinguists seeking to understand the role of media engagement in language change-in-progress have proposed that indexical social meaning can "kick-start a language change" (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013:527), in mediated as well as face-to-face processes of diffusion.

My concern with the indexical properties of media language arises from larger questions underlying this study: How far can mass media innovations spread into use *beyond* those who consume and recognize the media, and what are the conditions that could facilitate such spread? To address these questions, I will distinguish between three related processes: adoption, circulation, and diffusion. *Adoption* is the uptake of a linguistic feature directly from the mass media by consumers of the media. *Circulation* is the use-in-practice of the feature by adopters, who are media consumers. *Diffusion* is the spread of the feature from adopters to new users, who may or may not be media consumers.

Here, I explore the hypothesis that while media innovations are *adopted* and *circulated* precisely because of their indexical links to media sources, their *diffusion* requires a loss (or at least weakening) of that indexical linkage. Thus, it is media innovations that are capable of undergoing indexical change in this way—to be structurally, semantically, and pragmatically integrated into existing repertoires without reference to their media source—that have the potential to influence language in longer-term and wider-ranging ways. Put a bit differently, I am suggesting that the use of media language is only the use of "media language" if it retains its indexical link to the media source and is recognized as such in its usage. If it ceases to retain this link, it ceases to be "media language," and becomes instead just "language."

I call this process, whereby a feature retains its semantic meaning and pragmatic force but loses its social meaning, *indexical bleaching*. This is on analogy with the concept of semantic bleaching within studies of language change (specifically grammaticalization), whereby a word loses its semantic meaning but retains its grammatical function and frequently strengthens its pragmatic meaning. Bybee and Thompson (1997:380) write of semantic bleaching: "Words or phrases that are much repeated lose their semantic force, which, in a spiraling effect, allows them to occur more often, which in turn conditions further semantic bleaching." Similarly, I suggest

that indexical bleaching happens through repetition in use, and the outcome is a feature that ceases to carry the marked indexical meaning that once accrued to it (though it may, of course, acquire other indexical meanings along the way). As a result, the range of contexts and speakers for whom the feature is deemed usable is broadened.

Indexical bleaching happens through moments of decontextualization and recontextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Spitulnik 1997). When a text is decontextualized and reused, it is also transformed, bringing some attributes of its earlier context with it and leaving others behind. Bauman and Briggs (1990:75–76) offer that in instances of recontextualization, a text may be transformed (at least) in its framing, form, function, deictic centering (what they call “indexical grounding”), translation (including modality), and the emergent structure of the new context (for recent treatments of recontextualization of media texts, see, e.g., Jones and Schieffelin 2009; Squires 2011; Turbide et al. 2010; Wahl 2010). My analysis elaborates on changes in indexical social meaning, demonstrating that such change may accompany semantic and pragmatic stability as a media innovation is de- and recontextualized.

Bucholtz (forthcoming) also uses the term “indexical bleaching,” showing how it is a technique of deracializing ethnically-marked names in exercises of dominant power. As she points out, while much work over the last decade has studied enregisterment, or the accrual of social meaning to linguistic features (Agha 2003, 2007; Johnstone and Kiesling 2008; Silverstein 2003), the weakening or loss of indexical meaning has not been centrally theorized. For mass media language in particular, this seems important to consider, because the mass media is a site where linguistic features easily develop especial sociolinguistic “prominence” (Spitulnik 1997:167), by the existence of “iconic speakers” (Mendoza-Denton 2008) who produce imitable “characterological figures” (Agha 2003, 2007). Though the uptake of mass media language seems tightly connected to this kind of prominence, iconicity, and characterological alignment, adopters’ recontextualization of mass media language can loosen the link between the language and those media meanings. Below, I advance a hypothesis that such indexical loss facilitates an innovation’s diffusion beyond media consumers into broader repertoires.

I illustrate these ideas with a case study of the phrase *lady pond*, which metaphorically references women as objects of desire. First, I demonstrate the emergence of *lady pond* in the discourse of the Bravo TV network, popularized by an iconic media personality, Andy Cohen. I also provide evidence that since its initiation into Bravo discourse, the phrase has appeared in other mass media artifacts, including other TV shows, that do not index Cohen or Bravo. Second, I systematically examine the circulation and diffusion of the phrase by analyzing a corpus of posts from Twitter. These posts (called “tweets”) show semantic and pragmatic stability in the phrase’s use as it “travels” beyond Bravo discourse to broader groups of speakers, but they also show indexical change that I argue constitutes an important loss of media reference. Before proceeding, I give more context about Twitter as a site of evidence.

Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is a social media platform through which users post short text messages (limited to 140 characters), photos, and Web links. Started in 2006, Twitter now has over 645 million registered users worldwide (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/twitter-statistics/>; accessed February 2, 2014). Twitter’s user base is vast and diverse, encompassing celebrities, politicians, and journalists, as well as “ordinary” people from teens to adults (Page 2012). Its uses span interpersonal communication, self-promotion, activism, education, journalism, and content discovery. Twitter has come to play a complementary role during mass media broadcast events, particularly on TV, as it is frequently used to “live-tweet” during television shows, awards shows, political speeches, and sporting events. Sociolinguistically, Twitter can be characterized as a site of vernacular written practice—it is institutionally unregulated. Therefore one finds stylistic heterogeneity and nonstandard forms coexisting with Standard Written English (Squires and Iorio forthcoming; Zappavigna 2012).

For this project, I leverage the public availability of Twitter posts to get a sense of the use of *lady pond* among what I consider to be “ordinary” speakers. Twitter as a domain of linguistic practice does not necessarily reflect one’s spoken or written practice elsewhere, and to fully engage the questions here, one would want a much broader sampling of media texts, spoken language in interaction, and more. Nonetheless, Twitter is a significant site of colloquial linguistic exchange for those who use it, and because of its frequent use as an interface for responding to and commenting on (and, increasingly, producing) popular culture, it provides an especially useful site in which to investigate the adoption and circulation of media language. It is not only a convenient source of data, but an empirically important one to examine as a component of contemporary processes of mediated linguistic diffusion.

### Media Innovation

I first became aware of *lady pond* as a phrase used by Andrew “Andy” Cohen in his capacity as an interviewer on the Bravo network. In 2011, I began noticing the regularity with which Cohen used this phrase to inquire about the sexuality of cast members of *The Real Housewives*, a Bravo reality series. The phrase serves as a playful euphemism referring to a metaphorical “pool” of women as objects of desire, and by Cohen, it is typically used to inquire about whether straight women have had—or would have—lesbian experiences. Because I had never heard this phrase before, I investigated it using Web searches, and discovered that most online uses of the phrase were recent. This seemed a clear and interesting case of media language in circulation: while there was a clear link to me between the phrase and Bravo/Andy Cohen, many of the uses I found bore no relation to Bravo or Andy Cohen viewership. While it is all but impossible to identify the true “first speaker” of any bit of language, the evidence suggests that Cohen’s repeated use of *lady pond* codified its form and meaning and catapulted its circulation among (and beyond) Bravo viewers.

Bravo’s television niche is lifestyle reality programming, frequently showcasing American affluence and elitism (in the sense of Jaworski and Thurlow 2009; see Copple Smith 2012; Cox and Proffitt 2012). Titles of some of its shows are illustrative of this focus, including *The Millionaire Matchmaker*, *Million-Dollar Listing*, *Princesses: Long Island*, *Fashion Queens*, *Shahs of Sunset*, and *Top Chef*. Bravo is known especially for its appeal to female and gay male viewers (e.g., Gamson 2014; Lamphier 2009). Currently, much of Bravo’s airtime is occupied by two shows that are central to my analysis: *The Real Housewives . . .* and *Watch What Happens Live*.

*The Real Housewives* is a reality series that has since 2006 followed casts of upper-class women in seven different American locales. This predominantly homosocial series displays the Housewives pursuing the shared ideal of an elite lifestyle centered on family and “class” (see Wu and McKernan 2013), though the different casts vary somewhat in the personae represented, with the distinctiveness of the geographical locales being highlighted (for example, Beverly Hills versus Atlanta versus New Jersey). The title is nonliteral, because several “housewives” are divorced or never-married, and many have professions outside of the home. The Housewives franchise has led to several spin-off series, it has catapulted some of its cast members to their own success away from Bravo, and it has been parodied or referenced on many other TV shows.

*Watch What Happens Live* (WWHL) is a late-night talk show hosted by Andy Cohen, an openly gay television host, producer, executive, and best-selling author. WWHL has been on air since 2009 and currently airs five nights a week. WWHL’s format puts Cohen in an intimate sit-down setting with celebrity guests in the “Bravo Clubhouse.” Typically, at least one guest is a Bravo personality (called “Bravolebrities” by the network), including Housewives, and much of the 30-minute show is devoted to discussing Bravo programming (Copple Smith 2012). Cohen and guests play games; receive drinks from a bartender; and answer calls, tweets, and e-mails from fans. In addition to his role on WWHL, Cohen also hosts cast reunions at the end of each

season of *The Real Housewives* and other shows. Since taking the screen as an on-air personality in addition to producer, Cohen has become a celebrity in his own right—something of an icon of the Bravo channel (his Twitter account currently is listed to have 1.32 million followers, while Bravo’s main account has only 589,000).

Cohen and WWHL are at the center of Bravo’s strategy to foster a distinctive style and loyal audience members (see Jenkins 2009, on “loyals”). Bravo viewers invest even more in the shows they already watch by participating in WWHL via text messaging polls, call-in segments, and tweet-in opportunities. As Copple Smith (2012) notes, Cohen is positioned as a fan himself who voices the questions and concerns of other fans. Through him, “the channel offers an example of what it means to be a Bravo fan—Bravo fans act like Andy Cohen” (Copple Smith 2012:296). The present study suggests that one part of viewers’ performance of Bravo fandom is a linguistic alignment with stylistic attributes of Cohen’s linguistic style. Viewer uptake of the phrase *lady pond* provides one such example.

Confirming the phrase’s relative novelty and its use in colloquial discourse settings, there are no tokens of [lady pond] in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008-; January 27, 2014). There is one token in the Global Corpus of Web-Based English, from a blog post about non-Bravo celebrities in 2012 (Davies 2013-; January 27, 2014). To examine the phrase’s occurrence on the Web over time, I used Google’s date search tool to search for the phrase [“lady pond”] in yearly increments since 2000. Every instance before 2008 refers clearly to a place name. Beginning in 2008, there are a handful of instances in which “lady pond” is used as a euphemism for vagina; a definition posted on October 29, 2009 on UrbanDictionary, a collaborative online slang dictionary, defines “lady pond” as “A small wet area of a females anatomy; a vagina” (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lady+pond>; accessed February 10, 2014). When searching for the time increment 2009–2010 and later, the search results become more robust, most of them include the determiner *the* preceding *lady pond*, and a connection to Bravo clearly emerges—though certainly not all results come from Bravo contexts. Many reference Andy Cohen’s use of the phrase, and many contain the larger phrase “swimming in the lady pond” or “dipping in the lady pond.” These forms reflect the timing of Cohen’s initiation of the phrase into Bravo discourse.

Cohen’s first on-air usage of *lady pond* appears to have been in a February 2010 episode of WWHL. During a video chat, Cohen asked *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* star Kim Zolciak about her current relationship status. In excerpt (1), Zolciak has just said that her relationship with an on-again, off-again male partner called Big Poppa is “null and void.” Novelist Jackie Collins is the other guest. (Transcription conventions are listed in the Appendix and are modified from Wahl 2010.)

- (1)
- |    |          |  |
|----|----------|--|
| 1  | COHEN;   | Speaking of your great space,  |
| 2  |          | I- you know that I like to fish around on the internet and I was reading |
|    |          | tha-   |
| 3  |          | I hear:d . . that you . . have been . . swimming around in l:ady ponds.  |
|    |          | (1.5)  |
| 4  | ZOLCIAK; | Huh?   |
| 5  | COLLINS; | Ooo::: ^   |
| 6  | COHEN;   | Are you opening yourself up to- to ladies? (1.5)                         |
| 7  | ZOLCIAK; | I’ve . . not *been* with a woman . . in my [li:fe].                      |
| 8  | COHEN;   | [Okay]   |
| 9  | ZOLCIAK; | [Um]   |
| 10 | COHEN;   | [All] right, OK.   |
| 11 | ZOLCIAK; | Are you-   |
| 12 |          | Who are you referring [to?]  |
| 13 | COHEN;   | [I ] don’t know,   |
| 14 |          | You intimated it when I saw you at Splash and then I went in             |

15

... and then I... read other stuff about that.  
 (http://www.bravotv.com/watch-what-happens-live/season-2/videos/  
 prostitution-whore-little-bitch-girl; accessed February 11, 2014)

Splash is a gay nightclub in New York City; Zolciak goes on to explain that she had joked to Cohen about her date for the evening possibly being a woman. Cohen refers to plural “lady ponds” (line 3). The plural is anomalous in Bravo uses; Cohen’s intent here may be as a metaphor for “vagina,” as in the pre-2010 instances mentioned above. The excerpt shows the emergence of the phrase before it became codified as referring to desire for women in general, which would come to be signaled by the fixed singularity of the noun phrase and the presence of determiner *the*. Assuming that Cohen’s production of “swimming around in lady ponds” is indeed spontaneous here (see (8) below), the water metaphor seems to be a continuation of the metaphor begun in line 2, where reading things on the internet is characterized as “fishing around.” Zolciak’s surprise at Cohen’s question in line 4, and Cohen’s elaboration in line 6, indicate the phrase’s nontransparency of meaning during this interaction.

According to searches for the earliest occurrence of *lady pond* on Twitter using the service Topsy (http://topsy.com), the episode in (1) was tweeted about by Bravo’s main Twitter account. Note that the <@> symbol is the way of indicating a Twitter username, and I have bolded the Twitter username responsible for the tweet in all examples below. The tweet reads:

- (2) @Bravotv: @bravoandy asks @kimzolciak if she’s been “swimming in the lady pond.” Find out what she said: [link to video] (March 1, 2010)

Rather than repeat Cohen’s direct words from the episode, @Bravotv uses what would become the canonical form of the phrase (which may indeed have been used on air in the weeks between the episode and this tweet). The use of quotation marks to metalinguistically highlight the phrase suggests its perceived novelty. (Perhaps attesting to his status as a media power broker, Cohen’s Twitter name has since changed from @BravoAndy to just @andy.)

There is additional evidence that at this time, *lady pond(s)* was not yet widely recognized. The tweet in (2) was retweeted by Cohen and several of Cohen’s Twitter followers; that is, it was rebroadcast by other users. One of these retweeters called attention to the phrase by prefacing the retweeted content with “LADY POND, oh my god.” And, on a blog covering pop culture from a lesbian/bisexual perspective, a writer discusses the episode in (1), calling attention to the phrase’s opacity:

- (3) On a *Bravo Watch What Happens Live* segment earlier this month, Andy Cohen told Zolciak that he’d “heard [she’d] been swimming around in lady ponds,” which rightfully confused her, because what? Is that a thing people say? So he pressed on and asked her if she was “opening [herself] up to ladies.” (Hogan 2010)

But by later in 2010, “the lady pond” had become a clear component of Cohen’s repertoire on WWHL. In March 2010, Kim Zolciak revealed publicly that she had indeed had a relationship with another woman, DJ Tracy Young. Excerpt (4) is thus from an April 2010 WWHL episode in which Cohen asks Zolciak about dating women. By this time, it was public knowledge that Zolciak and Young had been together but were no longer. Cohen and Zolciak are again video chatting; the other guests are New York City Housewife Alex McCord and her husband, Simon van Kempen.

- (4)
- |   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | COHEN;  | Hey listen Kim.  |
| 2 |         | What’s are- what’s happening with the lady pond, are you still swimming in it, |
| 3 |         | or are you with Big Poppa,   |
| 4 |         | or what’s [happening].   |
| 5 | MCCORD; | [Now *that*] would be an interesting wife swap @@@ . . .                       |
| 6 | COHEN;  | What’s happening . . . Kim.  |

- 7 ZOLCIAK; Really funny Alex. Um . . .  
 8 @@@  
 9 MCCORD; I'm [tea:si:ng]  
 10 ZOLCIAK; [Tracy and] I are really great-  
 11 COHEN; [Kim what's] happening? . . .  
 12 ZOLCIAK; Tracy and I are really great friends we always will be,  
 13 I- I had a- a connection to her and . . . she's a great girl . . .  
 14 I told my story and um . . . I'm in a great place I adore her . . .  
 15 [but I'm in a great place]  
 16 COHEN; [What's happening with] Big Poppa?  
 (<http://www.bravotv.com/watch-what-happens-live/season-2/alex-mccord-simon-van-kempen-and-kim-zolciak>; accessed February 5, 2013)

At this point the phrase has been fixed with the determiner *the*, and the meaning is broadened such that asking about *the lady pond* now represents the generic potential of sexual/romantic relationships with women. It is no longer opaque—its intent is recognized by all present, evidenced by McCord's response in line 5 and Zolciak's answer in line 10.

A third illustrative Bravo usage is from a few months later, in September 2010. This time, it is an audience caller who uses the phrase to ask about the guests' sexuality in line 6; the caller's use is ratified by Cohen's approving response in line 7, and his repetition of the question and its wording in line 9. The guests are New York City Housewife Ramona Singer and (Washington) D.C. Housewife Cat Ommanney. Note that this segment currently appears as a "Bonus Clip" on Bravo's website with the title of the clip simply "Lady Pond."

- (5)  
 1 COHEN; Caller what's your name and where are you calling from?  
 2 CALLER; Hi my name's Jay from New Jersey?  
 3 COHEN; Hey Jay, what's your question?  
 4 CALLER; My question is for Ramona and [Cat].  
 5 COHEN; [oh] ((takes drink))  
 6 CALLER; I was wondering if either of them had ever swam in the lady pond?  
 7 COHEN; Mmm ^ ((smacks lips)) I like your question Jay.  
 8 @@@@  
 9 COHEN; Have either of you ever swum in the lady pond? . . .  
 10 SINGER; Absolutely not.  
 11 COHEN; Cat? . . .  
 12 OMMANNEY; Well my children might be watching so [no].  
 13 COHEN; [Okay] @@@@  
 14 @@@@  
 15 COHEN; I \*love\* it <[et<sup>h</sup>]>!  
 16 This show needs to be an hour tonight I can't handle it.  
 17 @@@@  
 (<http://www.bravotv.com/watch-what-happens-live/season-3/videos/lady-pond>; accessed February 11, 2014)

By this time, WWHL fans were aware enough of Andy Cohen's use of the phrase to use it themselves. The phrase's illocutionary intent is transparent to all participants in the interaction. The question is one of gossip and is perceived as inviting a potentially taboo response: Singer adamantly denies having ever "swum in the lady pond," while Ommanney suggests that her truthful answer would not be appropriate for her children to hear.

It is worth discussing a bit more the discursive frame in which "the lady pond question" tends to be asked on Bravo. Bravo is in many ways a progressive media outlet for representations of LGBT identity, devoting programming space to representations of real gay people, publicly supporting gay rights, and portraying straight people who talk about and show their love for gay friends and family (Cohen has also

taken guests to task for apparent homophobia and biased language). However, as Gamson (2014:236) says, “lesbians are rarely found” on Bravo, and *The Real Housewives* in particular is largely heteronormative in its portrayal of female gender and sexuality. The franchise has much in common with American daytime soap operas, in which heterosexual relations and affluent social class are linked (Queen 2012). Gay males do often appear on *The Real Housewives*, frequently in the form of assistants or stylists, in what Gamson (2014:236) calls the “Best Gay Friend” role. (Gamson characterizes Andy Cohen as epitomizing this style-conscious role as “BGF-in-chief.”) Lesbian friends or family members have been given substantial space in recent seasons of *The Real Housewives*, but the billed cast members have always been women in or seeking long-term relationships with men. “The lady pond question” is about potential departures from these norms, framing same-sex activity as a temporary “swim.”

The frequency with which the question has been asked on WWHL reveals that female-female desire makes for especially juicy gossip—Andy wants to know, and so do fans. This aligns with an American cultural sensibility in which female-female sex is eroticized, while lesbianism itself is often erased from public discourse. For fans, the Housewives’ lives and choices become a focal point for psychological engagement with the show (Wu and McKernan 2013). As with soap operas, gossip about cast members can serve as a pleasurable social activity and also provide a “safe” way to discuss what may otherwise be “taboo” social topics, such as sexuality (Baym 2000; Tovares 2006). The playful phrasing of *the lady pond* adds to the sense that the question does not have particularly serious stakes—which at once normalizes and trivializes the existence of same-sex female desire. Andy Cohen’s positioning as both a fan and an out gay man licenses his asking of the question, because he can display curiosity about the possibility of the women’s lesbian experiences without seeming crudely titillated by it.

Recipients of questions about *lady pond* within Bravo discourse are not limited to the Housewives. Cohen and fans have also asked other guests, including gay men, about their experiences with women. A gender-switched related phrase, *the man pool*, was used to ask one of the Housewives’ husbands if he had had gay experiences. Cohen’s inquiries about “the lady pond” go beyond even Bravolebrities—as of February 2014, the current top hits for the phrase on Google are from Cohen’s interviews with Lady Gaga and Oprah Winfrey, mega-celebrities from outside of the Bravo universe. For regular WWHL viewers, this question became an expected, or at least unsurprising, element of Cohen’s interviews.

Did Andy Cohen perceive himself to be the innovator of the phrase? Or did he acquire the phrase from another source? When I presented initial results from this project at the New Ways of Analyzing Variation conference in October 2012, an audience member tweeted about the presentation, as shown in (6). Within minutes, another Twitter user, who was not at the conference but was following conference tweets, continued the conversation with the tweet in (7). Minutes after that, @BravoAndy responded with the tweet in (8).

- (6) @TSchnoebelen: Not all ppl who use “lady p\_” know it comes from @BravoAndy (“indexical bleaching?”) [link] #nwav41
- (7) @SirMattypants: @TSchnoebelen where did @BravoAndy get it? /bettingonthe#gaysphere
- (8) @BravoAndy: @SirMattypants @TSchnoebelen It honestly just came out of my mouth one day—thought I was making it up!  
(https://twitter.com/Andy/status/262278028019773440; accessed January 27, 2014)

Cohen, then, acknowledges the phrase as part of his repertoire and appears not to perceive an external source. (This incident also demonstrates the way that Twitter can potentially obviate the audience-celebrity barrier, or in this case, the academic-celebrity barrier—my request to Bravo to interview Cohen was unacknowledged.)

Evidence of the post-2010 sociolinguistic currency of the phrase (or its variants) can be found in other popular culture artifacts aside from those affiliated with Bravo,

though space precludes discussing them in depth here. There are many tokens in online blogs, magazines, and message boards, and a few tokens in print newspapers. In many of these uses, the context and conditions for interpretation do not involve Andy Cohen, Bravo, or pop cultural knowledge. Most strikingly, I know of three scripted television series that have incorporated the phrase into episodes: *Emily Owens, M.D.* (CW), *Silk* (BBC), and *All My Children* (AMC). Excerpt (9) shows how this phrase was used in the pilot episode of the hospital dramedy *Emily Owens, M.D.*, which aired October 16, 2012 on the CW network. The characters are Emily Owens and her colleague Tyra Dupre.

- (9)
- |    |        |   |
|----|--------|---|
| 1  | DUPRE; | She keeps staring at me   |
| 2  |        | I can't tell if she's staring at me because she likes me or because I'm the |
| 3  |        | Chief's kid   |
| 4  |        | so I need you to suss it out  |
| 5  | OWENS; | Suss . . uh ?   |
| 6  | DUPRE; | Whether she's gay or straight.  |
| 7  | OWENS; | Oh, haha.   |
| 8  | DUPRE; | Come on. I helped you.  |
| 9  | OWENS; | Why can't you do it?  |
| 10 | DUPRE; | Cause my dad doesn't exactly know that I swim in the lady pond.             |

Interestingly, in looking for information about this episode, I found an article about the writer that mentioned her being a fan of *The Real Housewives of New York City*, suggesting a possible link to Bravo for her adoption of the phrase (Ng 2012). In the phrase's occurrence on this television show (and the others), however, its connection to Bravo discourse is neither apparent nor necessary for interpretation—illustrating indexical bleaching. From this broadcast, new adopters could potentially take up the phrase from this source with a new media indexicality, in a multilayered process of mediated diffusion.

### Circulation and Diffusion

The remainder of this article presents examples of *lady pond* in wider use in a corpus of Twitter posts, demonstrating the phrase's detachment from Bravo discourse. I describe the corpus itself, then I analyze four properties of the phrase's use in the tweets: the breadth of diffusion across domains of discourse, its formal and referential stability from Bravo to Twitter, its metalinguistic status, and its stylistic integration into multiple "speech" styles of Twitter users.

### Data

A corpus of tweets was collected using ContextMiner (<http://contextminer.com>), which queried Twitter for tweets containing the search words [lady pond]. Tweets were collected from November 2011 to December 2012. Once the data were collected, tweets were sorted by hand and only a subset was retained for analysis. To be included, tweets had to contain the collocation "lady pond" authored (in the sense of Goffman 1981) by the Twitter user who also animated (or broadcasted) the tweet. In order to not duplicate content, tweets that were simple retweets of another tweet were removed, because they constitute simply a reanimation (rebroadcast) of the same text but no new authoring. However, the fact that there were such retweets means that the number of people contributing to the phrase's circulation is even broader than what I show here. Retweets were retained when the retweeter also used the phrase in their own authored text, for instance as commentary on the retweeted material that followed. Tweets that used the phrase to clearly refer to place names or individuals were also removed, as were three tweets that were related to my academic presentation of this work. The final corpus contained 1,238 tweets produced by 1,056

unique users. Four came from Twitter accounts of Bravolebrities. Each tweet was coded on several dimensions, discussed in detail below.

**Breadth of Diffusion**

My primary empirical question about the spread of media language is how far beyond its media source media language diffuses. To investigate this, I coded the “discursive domain” of each tweet. A tweet’s discursive domain is the context and set of cultural references within which the tweet’s content is rendered interpretable. Because I was specifically interested in the extent to which the phrase is limited to Bravo fans, I first coded whether each tweet made apparent reference to any Bravo entity—such as a show or Bravolebrity. This breaks the corpus into two large domains: Bravo and Non-Bravo. We can think of Non-Bravo uses as having “traveled farther” from Bravo as the site of innovation.

As shown in Table 1, Bravo tweets comprise a minority of those in the corpus—just over a quarter. These are nearly evenly divisible into two subdomains: those that address Andy Cohen’s Twitter account and those that do not. Over 13% of the tweets address Cohen and most of these entreat him to ask one of his WWHL guests about *the lady pond*. Thus, the phrase serves as a touchstone for viewer participation in Bravo discourse and culture. Other Bravo tweets also use the phrase in reference to Bravo subjects, but without addressing Cohen. Examples of each type of tweet are given in Table 2. Though all collected tweets were publicly available at the time of collection, for privacy, Twitter usernames are not given except for those of celebrities.

The majority of tweets do not make reference to Bravo. Within the Non-Bravo tweets, a substantial number nonetheless reference popular entertainment culture, such as actors, singers, or TV shows. Thus, the non-Bravo tweets can be divided into

**Table 1**  
Tweets by Discursive Domain

Domain	Subdomain	Percentage of tweets
Bravo	Andy Cohen	13.33
	Other Bravo	12.12
	Total Bravo	25.44
Non-Bravo	Entertainment	14.3
	Interpersonal	60.26
	Total Non-Bravo	74.56

**Table 2**  
Tweets from Each Discursive Domain (Note: @sonjatmorgan, @catommanney, and @Kandi are Housewives; @JanetJackson is a singer; Christina Hendricks is an actress)

Domain	Tweet
Bravo: Andy Cohen	@BravoAndy @sonjatmorgan @catommanney Is it true about Ramona and Sonja swimming in the lady pond? How did that shower break in Miami?
Bravo: Other	Shoutout to @Kandi for saying if she took a dip in the lady pond it would be with @JanetJackson owwww! Werk!
Non-Bravo: Entertainment	I would totally dip in the lady pond for Christina Hendricks.
Non-Bravo: Interpersonal	Dudes suck I’m about to start swimming in the lady pond ugh

those referencing Entertainment subjects and those who make no such overt reference, which I call Interpersonal. Interpersonal tweets comprise the largest share of the corpus altogether, over 60%. It is notable that the Interpersonal tweets are the most common, as these represent the most “ordinary” uses of the phrase, not tied to specific cultural references. These Interpersonal tweets constitute a discursive sphere much broader than Bravo.

Because I only have access to the tweets’ surface forms (and they are substantially decontextualized), it is not possible for my coding of context to be completely accurate—I do not know every aspect of entertainment culture that Twitter users might reference, and I can only cautiously ascribe reference in cases of ambiguity. Nonetheless, the performative effect of using the phrase is clearly different between Bravo and non-Bravo tweets, as the examples in Table 2 illustrate. Including a Bravo reference brings the phrase’s original context into its recontextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Without such a reference, that history is—at least momentarily, in this text—erased.

In tweets addressed to Andy Cohen, the phrase indexes his style, performing Bravo fandom by aligning with him (Copple Smith 2012). Because of the tight universe of Bravo’s brand-related stylistic markers, a related if not identical indexicality holds for those using the phrase for Bravo subjects, even if they are not addressing Andy. The phrase indexes Andy Cohen, Bravo, or a cultural style that they embody or promote.

For tweets that fall outside of the Bravo domain, the phrase does not necessarily carry this same indexicality. The phrase is not anchored to Bravo or Andy as an intertextual reference point, and its users do not presuppose a recognition by the audience of a targeted style, though they do presuppose recognition of the intended (metaphorical) meaning. Indeed, if the indexicality of Andy or Bravo were consistently present, it would be unlikely to prosper as an innovation among anyone but direct Bravo viewers who recognize it as such. It could, of course, still be indexing popular culture, or “hip” and innovative language—slang, even. But the crucial point here is that most uses of *lady pond* are detached from Bravo topics; this detachment implies a weakening of its meaning as a Bravo-specific feature. This is what I mean by indexical bleaching.

As this innovative feature travels outward from its iconic media source, its indexical ties to the innovating media are weakened, by its use between speakers in “speech chains” (Agha 2003, 2007). The transmission of *lady pond* from Andy Cohen to Bravo viewers is a one-to-many speech chain; one speaker exposes potentially millions of other speakers to the innovation in an instant. These speakers may then themselves participate in more one-to-many speech chains, such as those created through Twitter, multiplying the audience for media innovations far beyond the original viewers. Indeed, one effect of interactive media platforms such as Twitter is that anyone with an internet connection can become a source of “mass” media, and those media provide mechanisms for the diffusion of linguistic innovations.

### *Formal and Referential Stability*

If an innovation’s indexical meaning changes as it diffuses from its media source outward, do its form and referential meaning also change? That is, to what extent does it count as “the same” feature? One way of quantitatively addressing this is to examine whether the preceding linguistic context of the phrase matches with its typical context on Bravo. I coded each tweet for two features that would indicate consistency with Andy Cohen’s usage on Bravo: a determiner before *lady pond* and a verbal lemma describing metaphorical action towards or in *lady pond*. Table 3 shows the percentage of tweets in which *lady pond* occurs with the relevant preceding features.

For determiners, the use of *the* is most consistent with Bravo usage, and this is by far the most frequent pattern, in 87.4% of tweets. A possessive name or pronoun

**Table 3**  
**Determiners and Action Lemmas in Corpus**

Feature	Word	Percentage of tweets
Determiner	<i>the</i>	87.4
	possessive	3.15
	other/none	9.45
Action lemma	<i>swim</i>	49.11
	<i>dip</i>	29
	<i>dabble</i>	2.18
	other/none	19.72

narrows the meaning to a euphemism for a specific woman's vagina (e.g., *my lady pond*, *your lady pond*, *Ciara's lady pond*), which is reminiscent of the pre-2010 occurrences of the phrase. Only 3.15% of tweets use this narrower meaning. The remaining tweets contain an assortment of other determiners (such as *that* or *a*), while a small number contain no determiner. In all, the way in which the reference of *lady pond* is restricted by determiners indicates vast consistency with the canonical form on Bravo.

For action lemmas, I coded whether the phrase was preceded by either a verb or noun that indicated action towards, away from, or into the metaphorical *lady pond*. This includes collocations like *swim in the lady pond*, *swimming in the lady pond*, or *take a dip in the lady pond*. As shown in the examples in the preceding section, the canonical usage on Bravo includes *swim* (excerpts (1–3) and (5) above), though *dip* has also been used numerous times. In the Twitter corpus, these two lemmas comprise the great majority of tweets. *Dabble*, which further emphasizes the temporariness of female-oriented desire, is also represented in a small portion of tweets. Just under 20% of tweets have either a different verbal action lemma or none. In its uptake and circulation on Twitter, the form and meaning with which the phrase is used on Bravo remain stable in the great majority of cases—it is “the same” feature as used on Bravo and as it has been diffused to a broader set of speakers.

### *Metalinguistic Status*

If the kind of process I've been portraying is on track, and if indexical bleaching is enabled by and enables the “outward” diffusion of media language, we should see evidence in the corpus of the phrase's differing indexical status among users. Those differing statuses should in some way relate to how “near” or “far” the phrase is from its media source. The use does not have to be embedded within a reference to Bravo in order to be keyed as novel or as coming from a specific cultural domain—in other words, as having a specific indexicality (which may or may not be explicitly marked). Other forms of metalinguistic highlighting can indicate that the phrase is not fully integrated into one's repertoire, but rather is used for performative or indexical effect (Coupland and Jaworski 2004).

I coded each tweet for whether its use of *lady pond* constituted a “metalinguistic mention,” rather than a semantically integrated use. These include instances in which the specific phrase is attributed as direct reported speech, appears in scare quotes, or co-occurs with a metalinguistic comment about the phrase elsewhere in the tweet. To count as a mention, it had to be unambiguous that the author was metalinguistically flagging the precise phrase itself, not just the reference or force behind it. In metalinguistic mentions, the phrasing is not taken for granted as a component of either the author's or the audience's competence; the metalanguage points to an external source. Metalinguistic highlighting can indicate either unfamiliarity with the

phrase at all or familiarity with the phrase as specifically indexical. In either case, the phrase is treated as “special” and as a distinct feature.

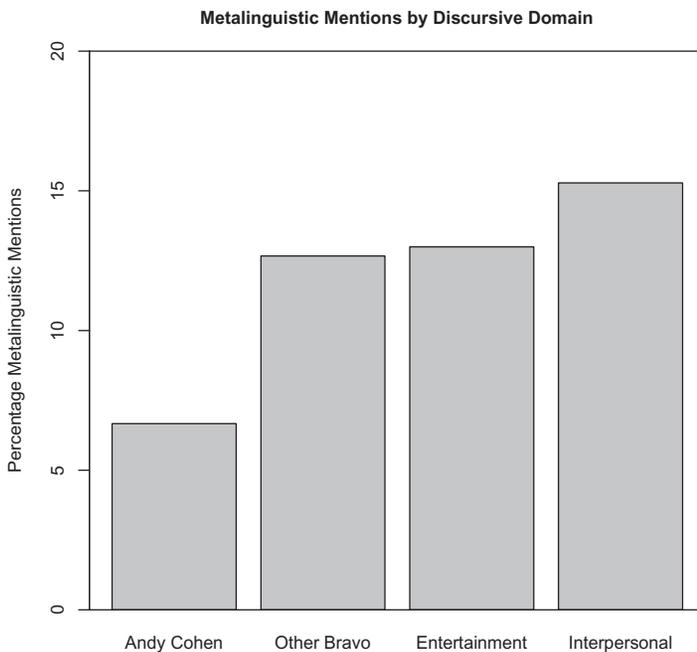
Overall, just 13.49% of the tweets contain metalinguistic mentions. Example (10) below shows a metalinguistic mention that links the phrase to Andy Cohen, and is thus also a Bravo tweet; (11) and (12) are Interpersonal tweets with metalinguistic mentions.

- (10) Urgh so sick of men right now!&no that doesn't mean I'll be swimming in the “lady pond” in my Andy Cohen voice. Lol  
 (11) I do not swim in the “lady pond” thanks&goodnight!  
 (12) [name] said lady pond!! Lol never heard it called that

The overall low proportion of metalinguistic mentions indicates a high degree of semantic integration. Perhaps more importantly, users have a high degree of confidence in the audience's ability to understand the phrase—an underlying belief in its commonality.

The proportion of metalinguistic mentions varies across discursive domain. As shown in Figure 1, Bravo tweets addressing Andy Cohen show a much lower rate of metalinguistic mentions than Other Bravo tweets. Other Bravo tweets and Entertainment tweets pattern similarly, while the Interpersonal tweets have the highest percentage of metalinguistic mentions. A logistic regression model shows that the Interpersonal tweets have a greater likelihood of being metalinguistic than the Andy Cohen tweets (estimate = .9264, SE = .3283,  $z = 2.822$ ,  $p = .0048$ ); the other levels are not significantly different.

The users of *lady pond* addressing Andy Cohen do not metalinguistically mark their use, which supports the idea that these users are adopters of the phrase directly from the media source. By contrast, tweets with Interpersonal content—no reference to Andy Cohen, Bravo, or Entertainment culture—are more likely to question the phrase's origin or meaning, or to draw attention to it as a novel bit of language. This suggests that as the phrase becomes more detached from the domain of its media



**Figure 1**  
 Percentage of Metalinguistic Mentions within Each Discursive Domain

reference, its indexicality becomes more opaque. Users speaking directly to the iconic speaker take the phrase's meaning and currency for granted, and the further away from that speaker the phrase gets, the more likely a user is to acknowledge that the phrase is not already embedded within a discourse context of common reference.

For a Bravo fan, the fact that the phrase is uttered in relation to Bravo entities (and often even *toward* those entities) itself constitutes indexical linkage to Bravo culture. Also, as shown in (10), many of the Bravo tweets that *are* metalinguistic are so precisely because they invoke Andy Cohen as the source of the phrase. For a non-Bravo fan, on the other hand, the keying of the phrase as intertextual suggests that it has an ambiguous indexicality. That is, the fact that the phrase *has* a source other than the speaker is apparent, but the source itself is not. The phrase thus moves from being used in alignment with a certain set of discursive practices to being used to discuss matters in the larger world, separate from those practices. The fact that the predominating use of the phrase is *not* metalinguistic indicates that it is integrated into most of these users' speech practices, whether they are referencing Bravo or not. That some uses are more integrated than others reflects both the media origins and ongoing processes of adoption, circulation, and diffusion.

It is possible that some of the tweets I have categorized as Non-Bravo do, indeed, come from Bravo adopters and even that their users intend them to reference a Bravo-related style. But indexicality is indeterminate, interpretive, and negotiated in any case: one's intent to index Bravo only works upon an audience recognizing its source, and on the flipside, a speaker who has no knowledge of Bravo may nonetheless have an audience who construes *lady pond* to relate to Bravo. What is important here is that at least on the surface, the content of most tweets simply does not reflect an assumption of audience recognition of the phrase as linked to Bravo or Andy Cohen. This is an interesting contrast to most of the instances discussed by Spitulnik (1997), in which the success of speech acts involving recycled media language hinges on the audience's recognition of them as such. I return to this difference in the Conclusion.

### *Stylistic Integration*

This final analysis focuses on other sociolinguistic features that surround *lady pond* in use. Broadly, I use the notion of linguistic style to try to map the range of different types of speakers using the phrase. That is, I take linguistic style as a marker of identity or cultural style. I operationalize "style" as a cluster of textual features (e.g., Mendoza-Denton 2008) available for the use of stylistic performance in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Prior research has shown that linguistic style on Twitter is correlated with a user's social networks and discourse topics (e.g., Bamman et al. 2012; Schnoebelen 2012). However, while there is a growing body of research that applies quantitative techniques to Twitter texts, there is no agreed-upon set of features that are sufficient for examining stylistic variation on Twitter. Therefore, I chose features based on my own experience with Twitter, my prior work on variation in CMC, and what has been reported elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Callier, 2011; Gouws et al. 2011).

I coded each tweet for two sets of features: nonstandard spellings and informality markers. Table 4 displays the individual features constituting each set. Nonstandard spellings are spellings that deviate from the conventions of Standard Written English (see Squires and Iorio forthcoming). Informality markers are those used to mark the tweets as interpersonal or casual in other ways—by displaying affect (laughter, punctuation, or emoticons), using an acronym indexical of CMC (see Squires 2010), or using a "taboo" word. At some level, both sets of features index an informal register associated with CMC in general or Twitter specifically (see Zappavigna 2012). However, the nonstandard spellings are more like traditional sociolinguistic variables in the sense of having clear (standard) alternative forms available, while the informality markers do not have the same definable envelope of variation. Because (with few exceptions) I only have one tweet per speaker in the corpus, I coded each tweet for the

**Table 4**  
**Stylistic Features in Tweets**

Category	Feature	Percentage of tweets containing feature
Nonstandard spellings	<n> for <i>in</i> or <i>and</i>	2.91
	<-in> or <-in'> for <-ing>	3.55
	<b> for <i>be</i>	.48
	<r> or <u> or <ur>	6.95
	<d> for <th>	1.45
	alphanumeric spelling	1.37
	<wanna>-type contraction	3.63
	<tryna>-type contraction	1.45
	clipping	1.37
Informality markers	emoticon	6.7
	acronym	3.07
	taboo word	7.19
	laughter	19.71
	punctuation doubling, e.g. <!?!>	9.53

presence/absence of each feature, without regard to how many times in a tweet the feature occurred (note that tweets are typically short, being limited to 140 characters).

The percentage of tweets containing each individual feature is listed in Table 4. With the exception of laughter variants, a very low percentage of tweets used any one feature. Thus, in all analyses reported here, I collapsed all features into two all-or-nothing variables, and each tweet was coded for whether it contained any of the nonstandard spellings and any of the informality features. Altogether, 18.09% of the tweets used some nonstandard spelling feature, while a larger proportion, 38.21%, used some informality feature.

The likelihood of using nonstandard spellings or informality features is correlated with a tweet's discursive domain—and the pattern is identical to that shown above for metalinguistic mentions (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 2, tweets addressed to Andy Cohen had the lowest percentage of both nonstandard spellings and informality markers, while Interpersonal tweets had the highest percentage, with Other Bravo tweets not far behind. Entertainment tweets were again in between.

Using the Andy Cohen tweets as a reference level, logistic regression models were run to test whether discursive domain predicted the use of stylistic features. The model estimates are given in Table 5. Both Other Bravo and Interpersonal tweets were significantly more likely to have nonstandard spellings and informality markers than were Andy Cohen tweets. Entertainment tweets were not significantly different.

Tweets addressed to Cohen are more “standard” and “formal” than the others, and Interpersonal tweets are the most stylistically variable. Stylistic practice on Twitter offers further evidence of *lady pond*'s circulation outward from Bravo: as it moves into domains of discourse that are not functioning to align with Andy Cohen or Bravo, it becomes integrated into a wider range of stylistic repertoires.

Interestingly, the Entertainment tweets have numbers similar to Andy Cohen tweets, while the Interpersonal and other Bravo tweets are more similar. This is counter to expectation, because it was expected that both types of Bravo tweets would look alike, while both types of non-Bravo tweets would look like. One explanation may be that many Entertainment tweets are addressed to celebrities (just as the Andy Cohen tweets are), and thus they may also be more likely to exhibit standard or

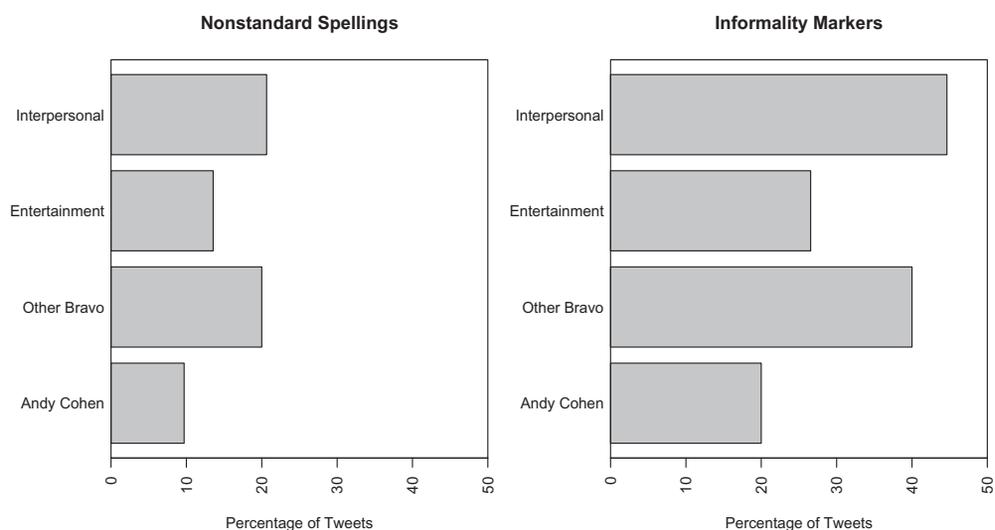


Figure 2  
Stylistic Features by Discursive Domain

Table 5  
Logistic Regression Models for Text Features Predicted by Discursive Domain

Text feature	Factor level	Estimate	SE	z-value	p-value
Nonstandard spellings	(Intercept)	-2.231	.263	-8.483	<.001
	Other Bravo	.845	.333	2.538	.011
	Entertainment	.379	.343	1.106	.269
	Interpersonal	.885	.278	3.181	.002
Informality markers	(Intercept)	-1.386	.195	-7.123	<.001
	Other Bravo	.981	.256	3.828	<.001
	Entertainment	.369	.259	1.427	.154
	Interpersonal	1.171	.208	5.627	<.001

formal language as a way to secure attention from the celebrities they address (to be taken seriously). The other Bravo tweets, on the other hand, likely also serve more interpersonal functions, but happen to be about Bravo topics, and thus the language is more relaxed than that addressing Andy Cohen. The relationship between discourse topics, indexical orientation, and sociolinguistic style in social media is a fruitful area for future research.

These data suggest a relationship between sociolinguistic style and breadth of diffusion. The more-broadly circulating instances of the phrase are more likely to be surrounded by less-standard and less-formal text. The fact that Bravo tweets are more standard than non-Bravo tweets is intriguing, but it is only incidental for my argument. The pattern could be reversed with the same implication: the point is that the phrase is in use among different speaker groups. This finding establishes the phrase as a component of multiple sociolinguistic styles on Twitter, not just a narrow group of speakers aligning with Andy Cohen/Bravo style.

### Conclusion

In concluding, I want to consider what makes *lady pond* a good candidate for indexical bleaching and uptake beyond the media source of its innovation. After all, there are

countless innovative phrasings and stylistic traits used by speakers in the mass media, but only a handful of these are adopted (and most seem destined for brief lives). In describing the properties that give media discourse potentiality for circulation, Spitulnik (1997:170) suggests that the playfulness and drama of radio phrases makes them enjoyable for listeners to reuse. She also notes that the circulated chunks are compact—using the terms of Bauman and Briggs (1990), media texts are made “detachable” by their entextualization within frames of media discourse, making them targets for decontextualization. Additionally, Spitulnik suggests, the media language that is circulated has semantic meaning that is not opaque and is pragmatically applicable to circumstances outside of radio discourse itself (though metapragmatically, radio discourse often needs to be invoked and understood in order for the feature’s use to have the intended force).

These same features hold for *lady pond*: it is a playful, compact, transportable phrase that makes a metaphorical reference whose meaning is, if not immediately transparent, easily inferred in context. Further, it performs an appealing kind of social work: it offers a softened means of discussing sexuality, a domain of human experience around which discourse is often uneasy. More specifically, it allows referencing women’s same-sex romantic/sexual experiences without actually invoking lesbian identity (or, in the case of gay men, straight male identity). It thereby can separate identity from practice or desire (though in some cases, it does point to a stable identity, i.e. “I (don’t) swim in the lady pond”). It is just this separation that seems to appeal to Andy Cohen: the question presumes that while *Housewives* (for instance) claim a heterosexual identity, that claim does not preclude same-sex desire. The phrase’s wider use reveals the perceived pragmatic utility of encoding sexuality in this way, and this encoding itself could be a component of a particular sociolinguistic style.

Beyond its form and function, the phrase’s tie to Andy Cohen is a catalyst for the phrase’s diffusion not only to Bravo fans, but also to other figures responsible for mass media content (see (3) and (9) above). But unlike in most of the cases discussed by Spitulnik (1997), recognition of that media source is not a required part of the context in which *lady pond* is interpretable—it is a compact noun phrase in which no proper names or specific references are involved, so it integrates syntactically, semantically, pragmatically, and stylistically into existing repertoires. This positions it to move beyond those who are aware of the media source, as it has clearly done. It is possible that a phrase with even more transparency of meaning would need to undergo less indexical bleaching in order to spread in use, because it would seem less marked and appear less tied to a style or persona. The relationship between degrees of transparency of meaning, strength of indexicality, and degree of indexical bleaching needed to diffuse an innovation is a compelling topic for future research.

In this paper, I have articulated a framework for understanding a particular facet of linguistic engagement with the mass media: how media language “travels” from the media to media consumers and beyond. In sum, I’ve argued that indexical strength catalyzes uptake, but indexical loss facilitates diffusion. I hope these ideas may prove useful for thinking about social meaning, linguistic diffusion, and language change. Innovations by iconic speakers, indexical alignment, and the recontextualization of innovations are present in everyday, face-to-face social networks just as they are in the media. Mass media, however, magnify the scale and prominence involved, hence I have found myself focusing on indexical bleaching as an important process in the media’s sociolinguistic influence. Here, the mass media are responsible for the innovation itself (or so I have argued), not just the diffusion of changes already occurring (as in Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Sayers forthcoming). Such media-innovated language seems to have a more condensed temporal relationship to indexicality than speech features in other contexts.

A local dialect pronunciation, for instance, may come to be enregistered as a metapragmatically salient dialect feature because of its associations with local speech (see Johnstone and Kiesling 2008). It could take years or even generations for

communal metapragmatic awareness of such a feature to develop. Once enregistered, the feature can be performatively deployed in stereotypical portrayals of the dialect or its speakers. In a way, the diffusion of media innovation represents the reverse process. At the point when speakers first encounter the feature, it strongly indexes its media source, as its entextualization comes ready-made with a certain marked, persona-linked quality. If noticeable (as lexical and phrasal innovations frequently are), a feature can then be adopted and incorporated by the audience precisely because of that indexicality: for alignment with the media source's style or content, for displaying media competence, or for indexing a related style that is otherwise appealing.

But if the feature only has utility as an index of certain media knowledge, its impact will logically be limited to one of highly specific speech acts, where the indexicality is both recognized and perceived as appropriate, and where the indexicality itself does part of the social action. For wider use to occur, the feature must shed that particular media meaning, becoming incorporated into contexts where it can index something different (or nothing at all). This semiosis happens by transmission from those who recognize and reference its media source to those who do not. I suspect that in cases where the social meaning of an innovation is not as initially salient, the role of indexicality will be different—though no less important.

### Appendix. Transcription Conventions

^	rise-fall intonation
.	terminal intonation
?	question intonation
...	long pause
..	medium pause
( )	specified pause (with seconds)
@	laughter
[ ]	overlap
=	latched utterances
*	emphasis
!	exclamatory sentence ending
:	prosodic lengthening
<[ ]>	phonetic transcription of prior word
(( ))	speaker action or directed speech
#	uncertain transcription
-	truncated word

### Note

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