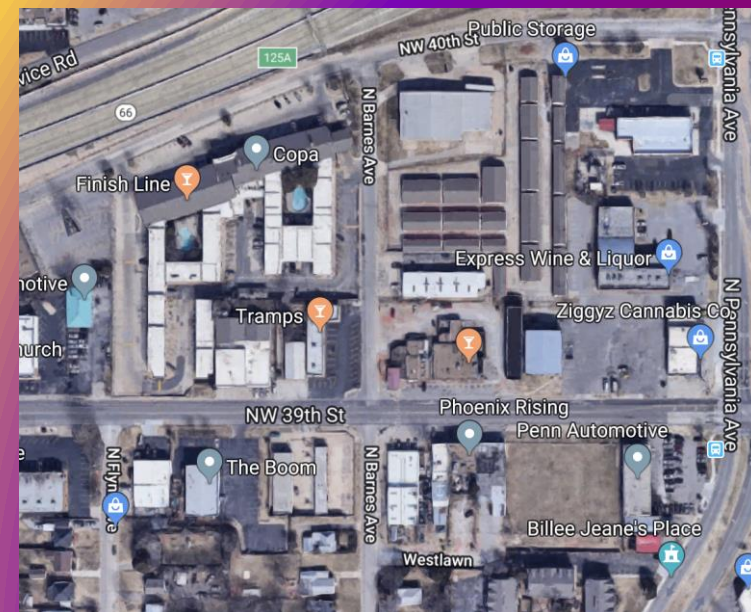
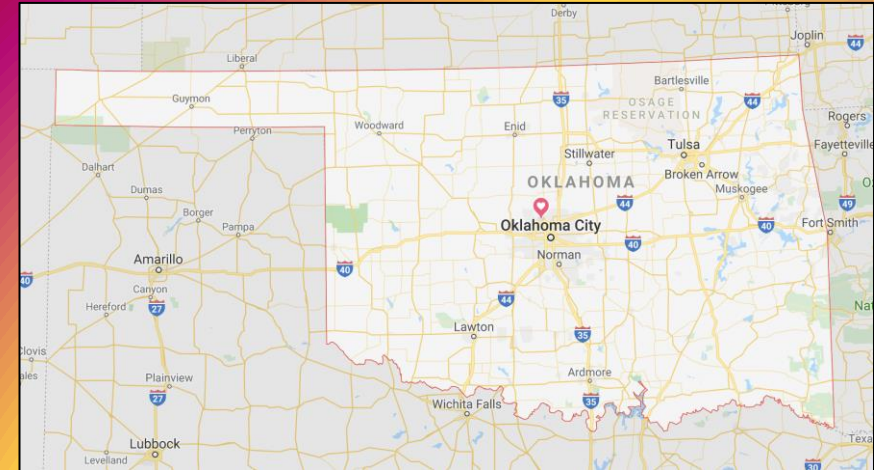


# QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS: LANGUAGE REGARD & INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITY

Bryce E McCleary (he/him; they/them)  
LSA-University of Kentucky Webinar on  
*Approaching Queer Dialectology*  
24 July 2020

# INTRODUCTION: OKLAHOMA DRAG & QFL

- This project began in 2016
- 3 years of observations and conversations
  - “the Gayborhood”
- 2 years of interviewing and recording
- Today’s talk:
  - 7 participants
  - ~6.5 hours of speech data
  - >25,000 words of transcribed speech



# INTRODUCTION: PARTICIPANTS

Performer	Experience (years)	Age (years)	Ethnic Identity (performer)	Gender Identity (performer)	Drag in a few words
<i>Kelly</i>	19	41	Caucasian	Male	“Glamour for the masses”
<i>Foxxi</i>	10	31	African American	female	“Booty”; “drag is my outlet”
<i>Gizele</i>	9	30	Black	Cis-Male	“Give zero fucks”
<i>Rae</i>	2	30	Black/ AA	Transgender	“Ravishing”
<i>Guin</i>	< 1	25	Caucasian	Transgender Woman	N/A
<i>Alexander</i>	> 1	22	White	Male	“Emo pretty boy”
<i>Celeste</i>	< 1	49	white	Male	“Rocker Chick”

# NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTIONS (CONVENTIONS)

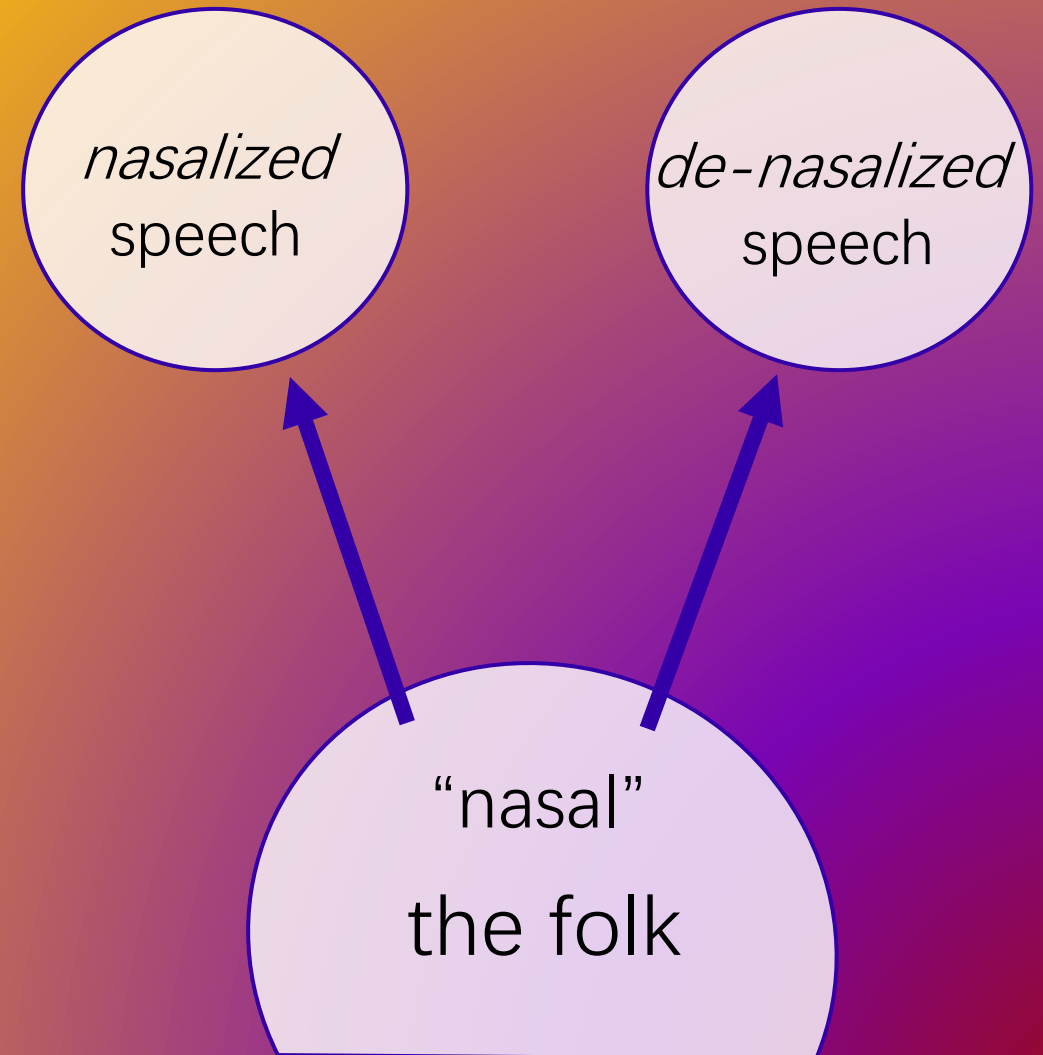
- Typical spelling conventions, community spelling of some words
- Intonation units (Du Bois et al. 1993), commas at the end of the phrases/units
- Noises (e.g., laughter, sighing, etc.) indicated by double parentheses: ((example))
- Quotative-performatives (e.g., Santa Barbara Papers; Du Bois et al. 1993): <Q *example* Q>

# NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTIONS (TW)

Explicit language in speech samples (cursing)

# LANGUAGE REGARD

- “A proposal for the study of Folk-Linguistics” (Hoenigswald 1966)
- Preston (1996): *folk vs technical* vocabulary
- Folk Linguistics (Niedzielski & Preston 2003):
  - Metalanguage & Language Attitudes
  - Presupposition and implicata



# “IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH?”

Gizele: I'd definitely say there is, um, there's a um, I feel like that we have a **code**, and **a lot of people** **wouldn't understand it** sometimes

# “DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH” AND SLANG

Slang	frequency
<i>bitch</i>	152
<i>tea</i>	30
<i>shade</i>	27
<i>*tongue pop*</i>	21
<i>live/living</i>	15
<i>jush</i>	14
<i>wig</i>	11
<i>read</i>	10
<i>boots</i>	10
<i>glitz/glam</i>	9
<i>werk</i>	7
<i>ya:s</i>	6
<i>beat</i>	6
<i>snatch</i>	5

- *tea*
- *shade*
- *boots*
- *glitz/glam*
- *werk*
- *snatch/ed*
- *jush*
- *okurr*
- *beat*
- *bitch*
- *\*TONGUE POP\**
- *wig*



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- **Nominatively**

- **Vocatively**

- **Self-Reference:**

Rae: <Q hey, how you doing child, yes, get turned up, get a drink, be yourself, and tip a **bitch** Q>

Foxxi: a **bitch** don't know no country by heart

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## Discourse Marker:

Foxxi: you know **bitch**, I couldn't lip sync to save my life **bitch**, if RuPaul's-- if that show was back then **bitch** I sure would have left cause **bitch** I couldn't, lip sync for shit

Gizele: I can do it in so many ways, you just learned the news, <Q ((gasps)) **bi:tch** Q>

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**Semantic/Functional variability may confuse some:**

Guin: **bitch** is an enigma

**Awareness of this variability emerges from some of the language regard data**

# “IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH?”

Foxxi: **there's so many words that can mean the exact same thing, I mean, so many different terms can mean one thing**

I: m-hm

Foxxi: **and then the way you say it could mean**

I: something else

Foxxi: **yeah something else** or a derogatory comment or, rude statement so I mean **it's the way you say it, who you say it to, which words you done said**

# LANGUAGE REGARD

“IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH?”

*drag-style; drag-language connection*

**Focus: “slang”**

“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TALK LIKE A DRAG QUEEN?”

*drag queens can talk in a certain way;  
you can “talk like” a category; drag  
queen-language;*

**Hypothesized focus: drag (lg) beliefs,  
ideologies**

# “WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TALK LIKE A DRAG QUEEN?”

Kelly: lie a lot

I: lie a lot

Both: ((laughing))

Kelly: yeah, **you have to lie a lot**

I: like what, like- like how

Kelly: um, **how wonderful everything is**

I: oh

Kelly: **how comfortable you are**, how,

I: mm

Kelly: you know, <Q *oh, this old thing* Q>, you know talking about your outfits and uh, <Q *does it hurt to dance in heels* Q>, <Q *oh no I dance in these all the time* Q> **when your feet are dying inside**

I: m-hm, m-hm

Kelly: so a lot of lying

I: yep

Kelly: you know **everything is positive and its limelight from the, moment you step out of the dressing room until you go back**

# GUIN: TALKING LIKE A DRAG QUEEN

## Metalinguage

“to **talk like a drag queen**, I mean I don't know **I've always been gay as hell, so, I've always, I guess kinda talked like that**, but I guess just like to have--, **to use terminology and know what it means where it comes from**”

**Presupposition/  
Implication**

**Explicit regard**

# GUIN: TALKING LIKE A DRAG QUEEN

## Metalinguage

"whether it's a straight friend who has never been out before or like, someone who's like new to coming out, or anything like that **to hear them say stuff, you're just kinda like** <Q *oh, like ((laughs)), no that's like that, that's not how you use that girl like that's not right like hang on just second Q>"*

**Presupposition/  
Implication**

**Explicit regard**



# LANGUAGE REGARD: SPECIFIC TAKEAWAYS

- Drag slang:
  - Community based lexicon
  - Structural/phonetic variation (i.e., *bitch*)
- Community-specific stylistics:
  - Polysemy; prosody/intonation; pragmatics
- Explicit regard:
  - Awareness/beliefs about slang
  - Monitoring of language use
- Implicata and presupposition:
  - Performance, community culture
  - In-group/out-group lg use

# LANGUAGE REGARD: SPECIFIC TAKEAWAYS

## **Sociolinguists:**

What about patterns across the group?  
What about variation across the group?

## **Linguistic anthropologists:**

What about identity and performance?  
What about *norms* in this community of practice?

# WHAT IS QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS?

## **Bridging Language Regard and Queer/Sociocultural Linguistics**

- A sociocultural approach to Language Regard
- A methodological supplement to research on LGBTQ+ populations

# WHAT IS QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS?

**Language regard** → stancetaking, positioning/footing, conversational context

└ **identity, performance, linguistic practice, and ideologies**

# ALEXANDER: DRAG SLANG AND LEARNING

Performer	Experience (years)	Age (years)	Ethnic Identity (performer)	Gender Identity (performer)	Drag in a few words
<i>Alexander</i>	> 1	22	White	Male	“Emo pretty boy”

- Initial hedging
- Metalanguage
- Learning slang

“um *I guess* we have *like* our own little slang”  
 “there is *kinda* that, style, there is *kind of* that slang”  
 we have *wer:k*, *ya:s*...we've been saying *read* all night...*shade*

**EFFORT**

**EPISTEMIC STANCETAKING** (Jaffe 2009)

**CREDIBILITY**

we'll be *sitting backstage* and somebody's like <Q oh we're gonna run it Q>, and *it took me forever to understand* that that means,  
 <Q we're not talking in between, once I call your name you go Q>

# ALEXANDER: DRAG SLANG AND LEARNING

Performer	Experience (years)	Age (years)	Ethnic Identity (performer)	Gender Identity (performer)	Drag in a few words
<i>Alexander</i>	> 1	22	White	Male	“Emo pretty boy”

inexperienced

working in the scene

something to prove?

# ALEX AND RAE: MONITORING DRAG SLANG

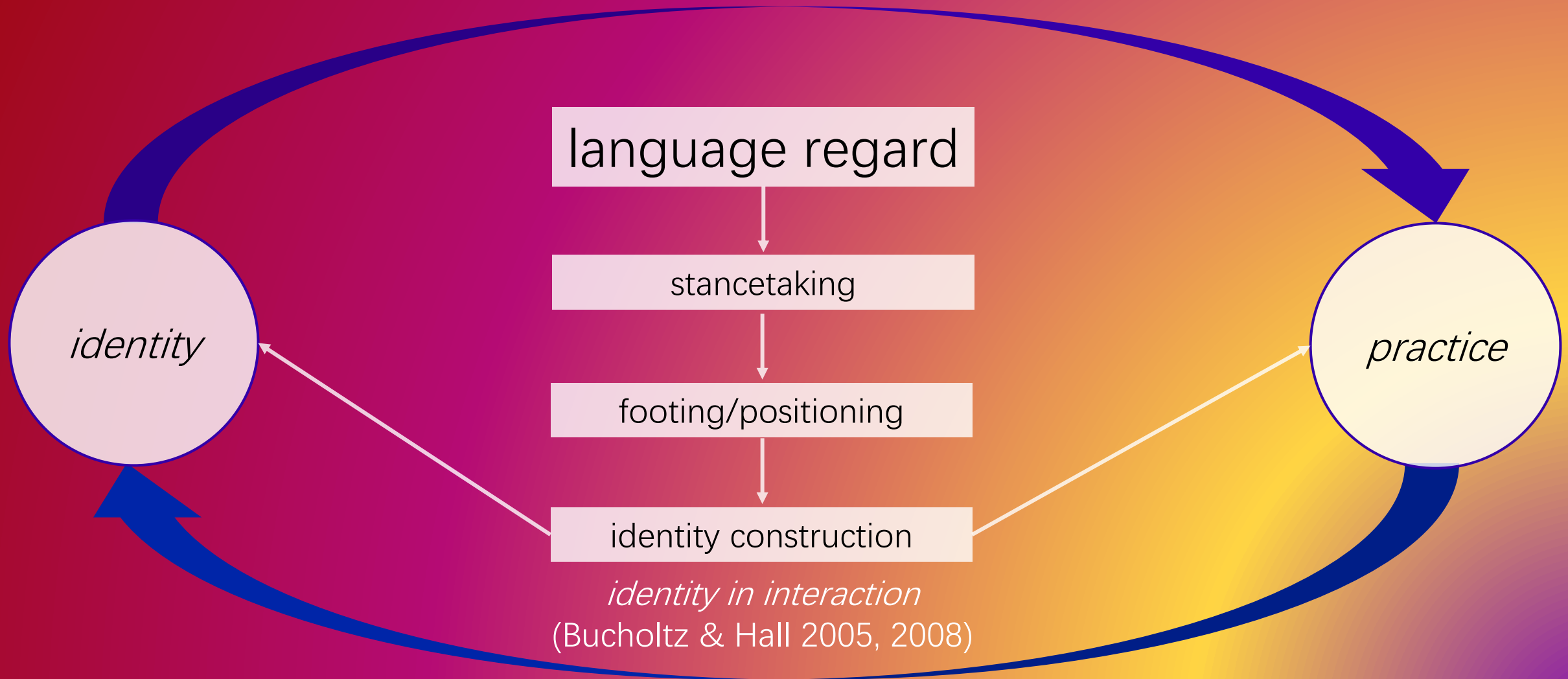
- Alexander: which a lot of these are coming out into, normal speech, for, most of, most everyone
- Rae: [yeah]
- Alexander: [because] of *RuPaul's*, um, but **I'm tired of people comparing, drag, close to them, to RuPaul's**, so like they'll come up they'll see one of us in drag and be like, <Q *werk* Q>, and it's like <Q *you don't even know what that means, fuck off, thank you, bye: Q*>
- Rae: **if you don't know the slur, don't say it**, okay, just
- Alexander: ((laughing))
- Rae: rewind that again , <Q *if you don't know the slur, do not say it* Q>
- Alexander: <Q *say it again for the people in the back* Q>
- Rae: <Q *if ya don't know the slur, do not say it* Q>

# MONITORING DRAG SLANG

Performer	Experience (years)	Age (years)	Ethnic Identity (performer)	Gender Identity (performer)	Drag in a few words
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# QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS



# INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

## **1. Intersectionality** (Crenshaw 1989, 1994):

*"intersectionality theory, or the belief that no one category (e.g., 'woman' or 'lesbian') is sufficient to account for individual experience or behavior"* (Levon 2015)

## **2. Raciolinguistics** (Alim, Rickford, & Ball 2016):

analysis of "the ongoing rearticulation of colonial distinctions between populations and modes of communication that come to be positioned as more or less normatively European" (Rosa 2019)

# INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

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# FOXXI: TV, *DRAG RACE*, AND LANGUAGE SPREAD

Foxxi: on TV it's all about, I mean, it's, universal so, of course, there's straight people, gay people, you know **everybody watch TV so, if you never been around that before it's like** <Q *oh my gosh but she's so funny, I've never heard that before* Q>...they lookin at us like <Q *girl have you heard what what's-her-name said on the gay show* Q>, (3s) <Q *I said that last night ((CLAPS)) when I was drunk ((CLAPS))* Q> you know, <Q *I said that last night at the bar with my homegirl* Q> you know like bitch

# SPREAD OF DRAG CULTURE, LANGUAGE

- Alex: *don't use our slang incorrectly*
- Rae: *if you don't know it, don't say it*
- Guin: *that's not how you use that*
- Foxxi: *the language on TV didn't come from TV*

# “IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A DRAG STYLE OF SPEECH?”

Gizele: I'd definitely say there is, um, there's a um, I feel like that **we have a code**, and **a lot of people wouldn't understand it sometimes**, a lot of- I think **a lot of it, actually comes, more from *Paris Is Burning***, and um, and **then it's spreading out into mainstream**, and ***RuPaul's Drag Race*** when you see it, now that it's on, in on the screens people are, seeing those words, and **now they're rolling out into other, communities now**, and **a lot of, our slang and stuff, I think a lot of it comes from the South**, cause I was watchin, when I was watchin the Housewives of Atlanta, they say a lot of stuff and I'm thinkin like, <Q *they got this from the gay community* Q>, I was like <Q *you know what's funny, I think the gay community got this from the South* Q> I think, like “*what's the tea*” and all that stuff, that's these, Georgia Peaches used to sit down and drink tea, **so I think we get that a lot from, Black women**

# SPREAD OF DRAG CULTURE, LANGUAGE

- Alex: *don't use our slang incorrectly*
- Rae: *if you don't know it, don't say it*
- Guin: *that's not how you use that*
  
- Foxxi: *the language on TV didn't come from TV*
- **Gizele:** ***it's spreading through pop culture but it came from Black women***

# INTERSECTIONALITY: ROLES

## DRAG FAMILY

*father*

*parent*

Foxxi

Gizele

Rae, Alexander, Celeste

Guin

“talk like a drag queen”

I mean I don't know I've always been gay as hell, so, I've always, I guess kinda talked like that, but I guess just like to have--, **to use terminology and know what it means [and] where it comes from**



# INTERSECTIONALITY: ROLES

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# INTERSECTIONALITY: SOME TAKEAWAYS

1. No single demographic or category label can account for language use, variation, or experience
2. Intersectionality and identity span **place, role, gender, race**, and other **sociocultural categories**
  1. **Intersectionality is necessary in the consideration of sociolinguistic patterns, interpretations, and explanations**
3. This data is rich with language regard material, but there are important measures to be taken in its interpretation

# CONCLUSIONS

- Language regard is a worthwhile source of investigation
- Queer Folk Linguistics situates language regard within the study of **identity**
  - Requires sociocultural, queer, and raciolinguistic perspectives
  - Requires sensitivity and intersectional approaches to the data
- These approaches have can lead to a growing understanding of lg use, lg variation, and lg ideologies, centering on identity work and performance
- This work in grounding the study in community leaves ample opportunity for future research, some of which is already underway (ask about it!)

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