

OKLAHOMA, DRAG, AND LANGUAGE REGARD: ***A STUDY IN QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS***

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A Queer(ed) Science of Language
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was carried out on stolen land and at an institution that benefits economically from the continued destruction of Indigenous sovereignty. Specifically, this project was finished on land in the unceded territory of the Osage and Wichita Nations

TRIGGER WARNING

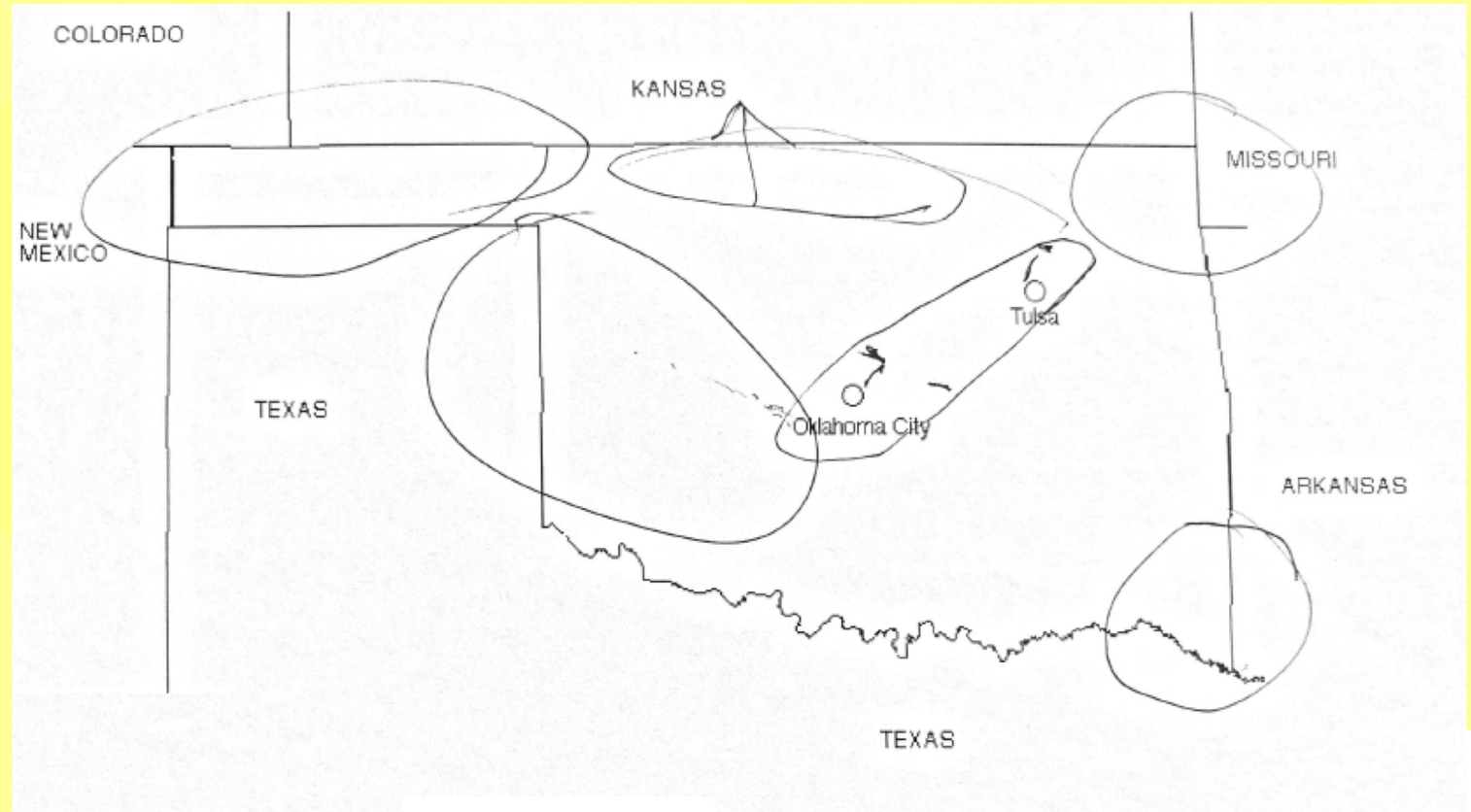
Explicit language in speech samples (cursing)

OKLAHOMA: INTRODUCTION



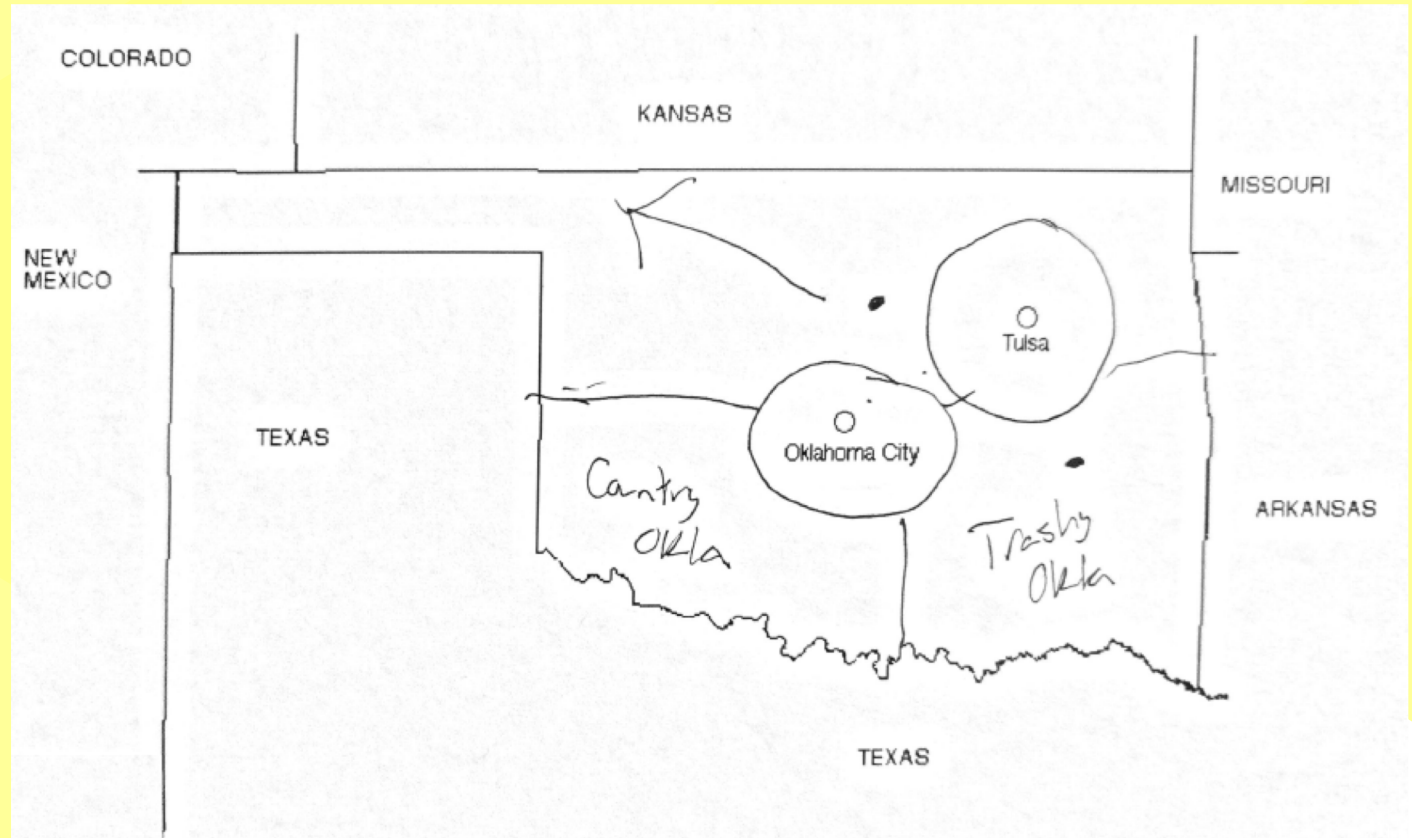
RESEARCH ON DIALECTS OF ENGLISH IN OKLAHOMA (RODEO)

- Perceptual dialectological
- Socio-/folk linguistic interviews
 - Map tasks (Preston 1981)



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 - Reading passage/word list
 - Folk linguistic questions
 - Gender in Oklahoma

Gendered differences in OK

Chance (23); Idabel, OK

I think that **Oklahoma is still very set in the men and female gender roles and their stereotypes** and so I feel like a lot of people **if you don't have a very deep voice for a man they think differently** or **if you don't have a soft female voice they're like <Q oh she's not very classy Q> or something so**

RESEARCH ON DIALECTS OF ENGLISH IN OKLAHOMA (RODEO)

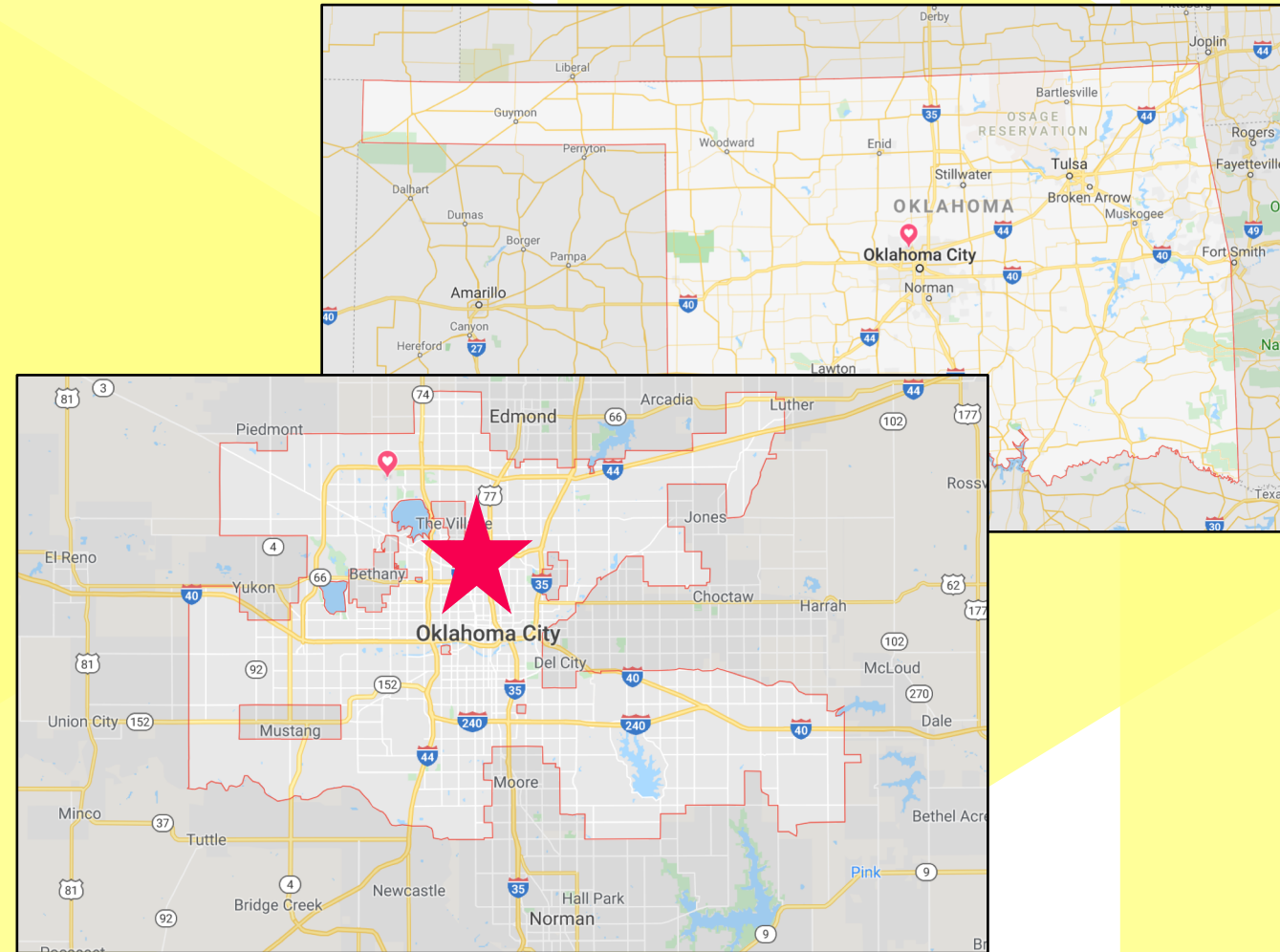
- Perceptual dialectological
- Socio-/folk linguistic interviews
 - Map tasks (Preston 1981)
 - Reading passage/word list
 - Folk linguistic questions
 - Gender in Oklahoma
 - Sounding gay in Oklahoma

“Sounding gay” in Oklahoma
Darrin (24); Tulsa, OK

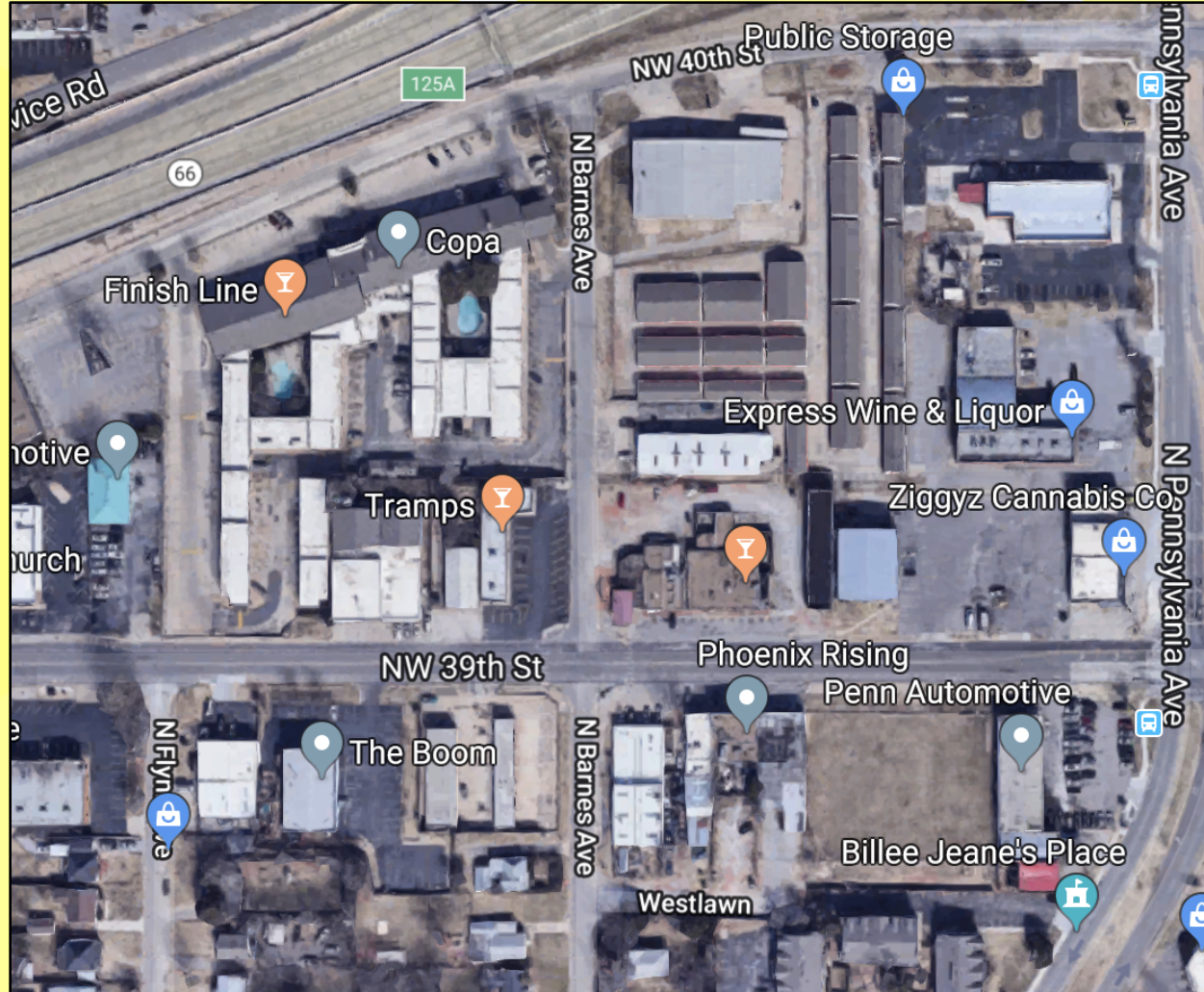
like if I immediately left a group of gay people and walked over no I think personally **I would be more wary of how I sounded** like literally last night I was walking and... and I kind of like bumped into someone and I said <Q sorry Q> **my voice got really low** I was like <Q *sorry* Q> you know like **sometimes if I’m not paying attention, but also if I don’t feel secure I try to like present more masculine**

THE *GAYBORHOOD* OF OKLAHOMA CITY

- This project began in 2016
- 3 years of observations and conversations
 - “the Gayborhood” (“The Strip” Bachhofer 2006)
 - History of queer culture (1920s)
 - Thrived in 1940s and 1950s
 - Police brutality and harassment in the 1960s and 1970s
 - Rioting and protesting
 - 1980s: majority of OKC’s gay/queer bars were located here



THE *GAYBORHOOD* OF OKLAHOMA CITY



THE *GAYBORHOOD* OF OKLAHOMA CITY

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”

“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
30, 9 years exp like that we have a **code**, and **a lot of people**
wouldn't understand it sometimes

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

Foxxi: I mean **there's, so many terminologies**— yes, it's--,
31, 10 years exp there's **drag slang** of course

Alexander: drag style of speech, we have like **our own little slang**
22, ~1 year exp

Guin: **do you mean slang?**
25, ~1 year exp

Kelly: **there is**,...not anything different than the real, you
41, 19 year exp know **like in the gay community**

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

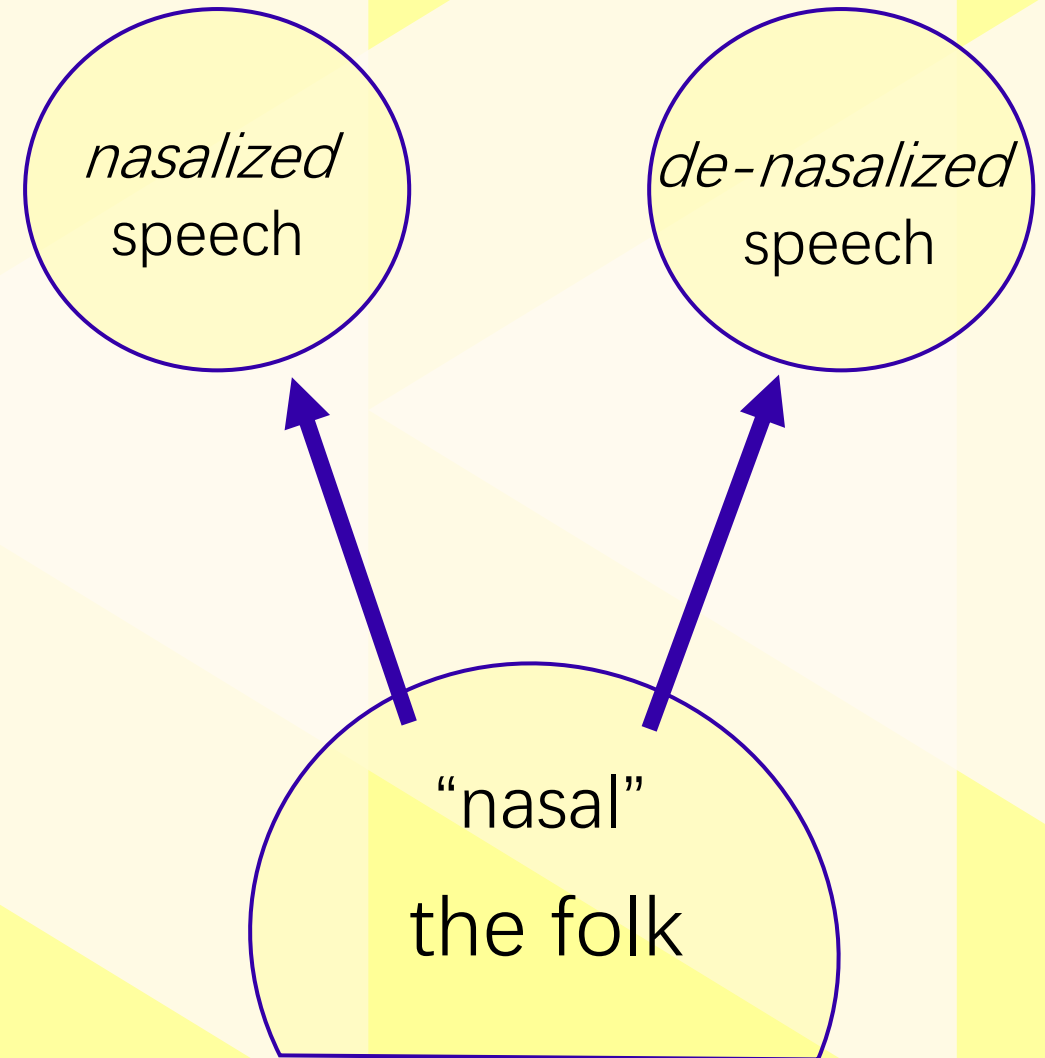
● *jush* ● *okurr* ● *beat* ● *bitch* ● *wig* ● *tea*

● **TONGUE POP** ● *shade* ● *boots*

● *glitz/glam* ● *werk* ● *snatch/ed*

LANGUAGE REGARD: NON-LINGUISTS AND LANGUAGE

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



LANGUAGE REGARD: *BITCH* IN DRAG STYLISTICS

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

- **Nominatively**

- **Vocatively**

- **Self-Reference:**

Rae: <Q hey, how you doing child, yes, get turnt 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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<i>ya:s</i>	6
<i>beat</i>	6
<i>snatch</i>	5

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>

LANGUAGE REGARD: IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT 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?”

Guin: to talk like a drag queen I mean it just, 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, it's—cause it's funny, like if, like 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>

LANGUAGE REGARD: IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT REGARD

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

drag-style; drag-language connection

Focus: “slang”; in-group language

“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*

*Focus: “correct” usage; in-group status;
language-queer identity connection*

A QUEER(ED) APPROACH TO LG SCIENCE AND LG REGARD

Bridging Language Regard and Queer/Sociocultural Linguistics

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

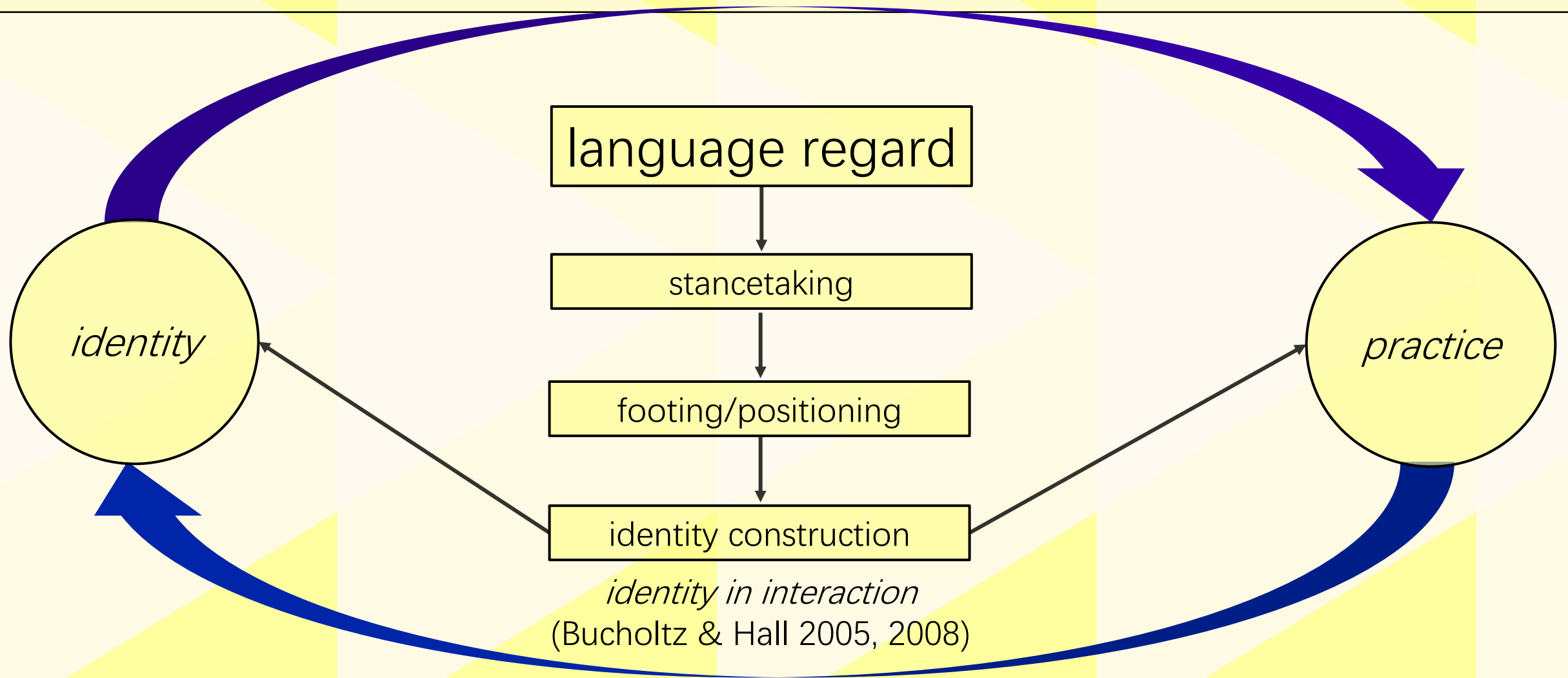
LANGUAGE REGARD AND IDENTITY

- 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>

LANGUAGE REGARD AND IDENTITY: PRESCRIPTIVISM

Performer	Exp.	Age	EthID	GenID
<i>Kelly</i>	19	41	Caucasian	Male
<i>Foxxi</i>	10	31	African American	female
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LANGUAGE REGARD AND IDENTITY



LANGUAGE REGARD AND IDENTITY

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)

THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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 looking at us like <Q *girl have you heard what what's-her-name said on the gay show* Q>, <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

THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- 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*

THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Kelly: they [audiences] have to understand that, you know what is seen **on TV there's a lot of smoke and mirrors** and, **cuts and edits** and, **what we are doing here is live and raw**

Kelly: **there is**,...not anything different than the real, you know **like in the gay community**

THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- 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*
- Kelly: *TV isn't real; we are real...drag lg is gay lg*

THE ORIGINS OF DRAG SLANG

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**

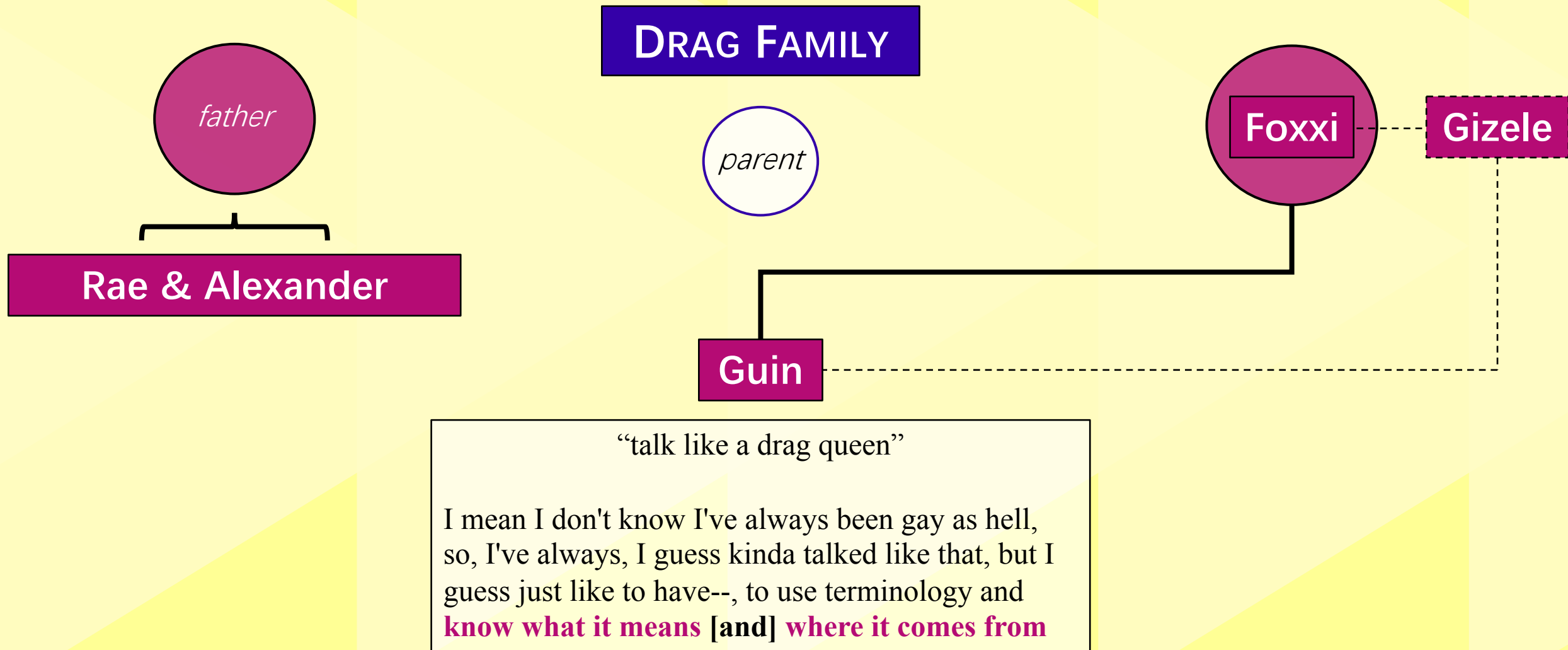
THE SPREAD OF DRAG LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- 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***
- Kelly: *TV isn't real; we are real...drag lg is gay lg*

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DISCOURSE USES OF *BITCH*

Discourse Marker:

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

DISCOURSE USES OF *BITCH*

	Frequency of <i>bitch</i>						
Performer	<i>wordcount</i>	<i>total</i>	D-M	VOC	NOM	ACC /DAT	N/A
<i>Kelly</i>	2693	3	-	-	2	-	1
<i>Foxxi</i>	7587	99	49	14	13	2/1	20
<i>Gizele</i>	3503	28	15	5	3	3	2
<i>Rae</i>	1014	3	-	1	1	1	-
<i>Guin</i>	6020	18	8	6	3		1
<i>Alexander</i>	1477	4	-	3	-	1	-

CONCLUSIONS: *QUEERING* LANGUAGE SCIENCE

- Nonlinguists' regard for language is a crucial part of the study of language variation and change
 - 3rd wave sociolinguistic interest in the motivation behind variation and change
- Language regard is best studied when situated within the study of **language** and **identity**
- Queer Folk Linguistics (QFL) situates language regard within the study of **intersectional identity**
 - Requires sociocultural, queer, raciolinguistic, and trans linguistic perspectives
 - Requires sensitivity and intersectional approaches to the data (especially ethnographic work)
- QFL can inform where to observe and study linguistic phenomena
- QFL here demonstrates the importance of community/relational *roles* as a component of identity
- This project demonstrates the complexity of place as it intersects with other complex identity components

SELECTED REFERENCES; THANK YOU!

BLACK LIVES MATTER

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