OKLAHOMA DRAG

AND

QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: This dissertation studies the role language plays in a community of drag performers in Oklahoma City and how it contributes to identity construction. It reports on three years of observation and engagement with the community prior to recordings, which enhanced the design of the interview/discussion questions. It relies on insights from Folk Linguistics, Language Regard, Queer/Sociocultural Linguistics, and Raciolinguistics in the design of the study and in the collection, organization, and interpretation of the data. 12 sessions were recorded, some one-on-one and some in group discussions, and 6.5 hours were consulted for this dissertation, resulting in more than 25 thousand words of transcribed and analyzed speech. The analysis specifically focuses on performers' regard for drag-related speech (i.e., in-group language, "drag queen talk," etc.) and on the variable ways that intersectional identities are constructed in such discourse. Three important conclusions emerged: 1) Folk Linguistics/Language Regard are largely unprepared for studying Queer communities; 2) Sociocultural and identity-based perspectives on language regard data offer reliable, albeit complex, interpretive approaches to such data; 3) A synthesis of these perspectives strongly encourages the view that all discursive expressions of language regard require stancetaking and positioning, and contribute to identity construction. This project will be relevant to other work on queer communities in addition to future general work in Folk Linguistics and Language Regard.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTIONS

Despite having its long history, in one form or another, and its history of public interest and fascination, drag is not easily defined in one sentence. It is a form of entertainment, geared at an audience; it is also, however, a form of self-expression, representative of artistic self-reflection. It is political and often problematic. It can bring a diverse group of people with all different backgrounds and experiences together in LGBTQ+ communities of practice, yet it echoes many of the same sociocultural problems that exist outside of the those queer communities.

In a way, drag has always reflected the popular and folk culture of the area in which it exists, but perhaps now more than ever, the presence of drag *within* pop culture has created a unique space for local performers to navigate—that is, while many people are becoming familiar with drag culture and the language features associated with it, they are familiarizing themselves with it vis-à-vis popular media (e.g., shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race* and the performers who appear on the show; YoutTube videos; social media celebrities, etc.). Consequently, local performers have found themselves benefitting from a new and expanded interest in drag, but that is tapered by newer, younger crowds consistently comparing local drag to reality television—a phenomenon local performers are well aware of.

This phenomenon is something that has changed the terrain of drag culture in many communities and in many ways. It makes this a unique time to study what local performers think about this situation, about their own language and culture's spread to others through popular culture and media, and about the ways that they, as individuals, contribute to a diverse and thriving community of queer people. Most pertinent here, it's an interesting time to study the role that language plays within these communities and as a part of the process of navigating between local and global attention on drag. It is the purpose of this dissertation to provide such a study at such a unique and meaningful time, investigating a community of drag performers in Oklahoma City.

1.1 A brief review

At the Linguistic Society of America's 2019 Summer Institute, Lal Zimman taught a course in Language, Gender, and Sexuality, in which a particular lecture ("Performativity", Zimman 2019) focused on performance and performativity, specifically using drag as a way to understand it as a concept and as an important part of (queer) linguistic research. Below, I will borrow parts of his lesson as a way to introduce this dissertation topic, where it has been considered in other academic work, and where that has led us to today's understanding of drag within an ethnographic and (folk) linguistic framework.

Any modern research on drag will inevitably mention *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston 1991), a documentary about drag ball culture in Harlem. Zimman's (2019) important take on this film is one which recognizes what audiences and theorists felt at the time of its release and which complicates the important understandings that came from it. First of all, the documentary has a tendency to conflate gender identity and sexual orientation (something

which is somewhat problematic yet understandable given the particular situation and culture). Despite that issue, many people thought this film successfully showed gender for what it was: an act. Drag queens had demonstrated that the "norms" of gender performance and the assumed biological essentialism behind it were all moot. Anybody could engage with any form of gender performance. In a sense, many were claiming that gender was dead (Zimman 2019).

After it's release, the feminist and social activist bell hooks (1991) responded to the film, and to gender-theorists' praise of it, calling out some of the more problematic parts of it. Most notably, she mentions the history of "straight" men performing characteristic drag of African American women (e.g., Eddie Murphy, Martin Lawrence, etc.) and the ways that these performances demean African American women rather than do anything like liberating people from their assigned gender roles. A second criticism of hooks' is the way that wealth is displayed in the film and the way that performers of color displayed a longing for wealth and expressing their wish not to be poor. Naturally, these are both important criticisms to consider, criticisms which have largely gone unaddressed with the focus on gender performance. hooks tells of seeing the film in theaters and noticing most of the white audience laughing at certain scenes she found to be troubling and upsetting. There's no doubt that certain nuanced understandings are erased in the production of the film and that it's important to acknowledge that.

Judith Butler (1999) wrote a response to hooks' criticism, pointing out that to "appear" wealthy and to behave in the ways that the wealthy did (though this is often problematically conflated with whiteness in the film, just in the ways that sexuality and gender identities are) is precisely to point out the performative nature of identity. Butler, then, asserts that the same kinds of social gaze that creates gendered, racialized, socialized identities is subverted in the

overt drag performances (in particular, those performances of "wealthy white women") and thus prove the non-essential status of such labels/identities. Simply put, you don't have to have been assigned female at birth to *be* or to present yourself as a woman; conversely, you don't have to be white and rich to present or act like this archetypal "wealthy white woman" character.

Butler (1999) used the film as a way to talk about the performative nature of gender, the way that drag performers could subvert gender norms by performing them in ways that were either successful (for people performing a gender not assigned to them at birth) or in ways that seemed to make fun of the gendered behavior/performance in itself. This realization has echoed through many gender-related research, and (especially relevant here), through queer linguistics.

It's at this point that Zimman (2019) reminds us that Rusty Barrett (see 1999, 2017) joined the conversation, asking if drag queens linguistically are doing anything that the social theorists claim they are (or are not) doing. Barrett's (1999) work with drag queens in Texas demonstrated even more than that—the role of style-shifting in a single performance proved that drag queens were not only engaging in overt performance linguistically, but that they were juxtaposing different styles right next to each other (almost as a way of contrasting them) in ways that played up the performative nature of the drag persona being enacted. More specifically, pitch variation, lexical choices, and phonological variation provided the means to describe a "white woman style" used in conjunction with a more general African American English variety, often in different social-interactive settings and for comedic affect. Barrett's findings, then, prove that drag performers can indeed be active agents in the subversion of socialized categories and the behaviors we think they necessitate.

More recently in linguistics, Jeremy Calder (2017, 2019a, 2019b) has produced work investigating a community that they belong to, a group of gender non-conforming drag performers in northern California, particularly looking at the performance of non-binary gender identity. They found that both phonetic and other (non-linguistic) stylistic variation played a role in the performance of their personas. Additionally, they describe the intricate relationship between embodiment and linguistic variation regarding drag performers thus:

> conceptions of race, class, and gender each come with implications as to what types of language varieties, bodies, and other associated signs ideologically align with those categories. Using the SoMa queens to illustrate, visual modality can influence both a linguistic variant's indexical retrieval as well as the acoustic manifestation of a linguistic variant. This interaction between visual and linguistic elements can sediment into meaningful *cross-modal styles*, e.g., figures of personhood (Agha 2003, 2004) like the 'fierce queen'. (134, emphasis theirs)

The interest in visual, embodied realizations of performance has not left the realm of linguistic investigations of drag performers, and perhaps now more than ever we realize the more permeable boundaries of gendered categories even at the visual/presentational level. Indeed, the notion of static, dichotomous gender categories has been left behind by language, gender, and sexuality scholars (see Zimman, Davis, & Raclaw 2014), and more interestingly here, Calder (2017) demonstrates the way that non-binary identity subverts the problematic history of a dichotomous 2-gender system that society (and linguistics) has believed was essential for so long much in the same way the the traditional gender roles were subverted in *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston 1991). Additionally, they have shown that the visual cues from the (gender/ed) performance can directly affect the retrieval or indexical linking of a language

feature and a social association, something that has implications for the ways indexicality works for everyone and probably for many social categories (i.e., beyond just gender).

This dissertation owes a great deal of thanks to the scholars who have come before, and to the findings that their works offer. Like other research on drag performers, this project is interested in the production of speech and styles by drag performers in Oklahoma City, but perhaps more aptly, it is interested in the beliefs behind the community's own styles and ways of speaking. It is, of course, interested in the responses to such language use by other community members, and to the styles of speech around the community (i.e. more general Oklahoma dialects not necessarily associated with the LGBTQ+ community) and thus differentiates itself from other similar research with its folk-linguistic interests.

This current dissertation owes a great deal of thanks to the scholars who have come before, and to the findings that their works offer. Like other research on drag performers, this project is interested in the production of speech and styles by drag performers in Oklahoma City. Unlike other similar work, it is interested in the beliefs behind the community's own styles and ways of speaking, where they align with popular representations of drag performance, and where they differ. This project is also interested in the responses to language use by other community members, and to the styles of speech around the community (i.e. more general Oklahoma dialects not necessarily associated with the LGBTQ+ community) and thus differentiates itself from other drag-related research with its folk-linguistic interests.

1.2 Folk linguistics and language regard

The folk linguistic approaches used here aim to couple the production exampled in the recordings and responses to folk linguistic questions to understand more of the socio-cognitive

underpinnings of the variation in indexical uptake and linguistic manifestation related to identity presentation exampled elsewhere (e.g., Calder 2017, 2019a). That is, this study is not only interested in the ethnographic, (socio-)linguistic, and cultural understandings of the community in question; it is equally concerned with more folk linguistic-oriented phenomena. In addition to the interest in language production, this study concerns itself with the what people say about language production in the community (and nearby) as well as their reactions to it. A particular interest of this dissertation, which is not necessarily absent from other studies within folk linguistics and language regard, but which is made more explicit here, is the cumulative analysis of the three aforementioned phenomena (production, perception/reaction, and commentary) as it relates to a fourth point of interest: positioning and/or stancetaking.

Additionally, the identities of performers (i.e., queer and/or trans identifying people) and the locale (i.e., Oklahoma) provides a methodological and analytic impetus in terms of the explicit recognition of *experiential* factors relating to language use and discrimination—namely, that these factors must be explicitly acknowledged as ones which contribute to the modes of of folk linguistic awareness (this is discussed more in the next two chapters). To put more directly, this research is conducted in Oklahoma—not in San Francisco or other urban centers—the social realities for sexual/gender minorities in the state contribute to an environment which is quite different from the other locations in the linguistic research on drag performers. Thus, sensitivity to the often difficult and tenuous situations performers find themselves in is necessary to understanding the social, cultural, and linguistic situations that drag performers find themselves in. And that is something that queer Oklahomans are ready to talk about in folk/sociolinguistic interviews (McCleary 2016).

1.3 Queer Folk Linguistics

This project follows the footsteps of the researcher that came before it, looking at a group of drag performers in Oklahoma, performers who have different gender identities outside of drag, and whose drag personas are influenced by their personalities outside of life in the spotlight. Like Barrett's work (2017), it seeks to know the meaningful parts of performance, and like Calder (2017), it seeks the understanding of identity expression in different settings. It asks about the views of gender and performance in the community. And most importantly, it is the only folk linguistic work (that I'm aware of) done on drag performers.

Being a unique project, particularly situated within folk linguistic research questions, and specifically targeting LGBTQ+ people (non-linguists), many of whom are people of color, I found it necessary to rethink the methodology I was using by first consulting recent work in socio-cultural linguistics (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005, 2008), queer linguistics (e.g., Livia & Hall 1997; Hall 2013; Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013; Coates 2013; Zimman, Davis, & Raclaw 2014), including the unfortunately limited linguistic resources on trans-inclusive and –informed language and practices (Zimman 2017, 2018). As I am a member of the broader LGBTQ+ community, and from Oklahoma City, my involvement with the observation, engagement, and collection of data from this community is not entirely as an outsider. Still, I am not a member of this community of practice and thus drew on (linguistic) ethnographic and ethnography of communication research (e.g., Kvam 2017; Pérez-Milans & Preece 2016; Stofleth & Manusov 2019; Copland & Creese 2015) to inform my observational and participation practices as I spent time within the community.

Additionally, just as queer linguistics reminds us as language researchers that social science is as guilty as other institutions of society in overlaying categorical and rigid

gender/sex identities on the people we study, so too has the study of language and racialization (or raciolinguistics) taught us that people of color are *racialized* in society and very often by linguistic researchers as well (see Smitherman 2017; Flores, Lewis, & Phuong 2018; Charity Hudley 2017; Rosa & Flores 2017). Many of of the respondents who offered insights, sat down for interviews and group discussions, and held conversations with me are people of color; I find it especially important to explicitly bring in raciolinguistic perspectives to accompany the other influential theoretical contributions to this study. Perhaps more importantly, the language, slang, and performance among the members of this community are all heavily influenced by African American Language features and styles. For both these reasons, raciolinguistics is a necessarily implementation in this project.

This seems particularly important in a time when intersectionality (Crenshaw 2016; Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson 2013) is recognized as a critical component of socio-culturally informed identity studies. I am not alone in hoping that linguistic research has room for improvement in the just and fair representation of members of minority communities (e.g., Bucholtz 2018; Leonard 2017; Zentella 2018) and I am not alone in believing sociolinguistics has a role to play in the fight for progress, justice, and equality for disenfranchised members of minority communities (e.g., Bucholtz forthcoming; LSA Statement on Race 2019; Wolfram 2018). I hope this project can at least attempt to contribute to those bodies of linguistic/social interests.

As all of the aforementioned theoretical and socially-informed influences are centered around experience, identity, performance, and perception, I find these sources of insight both compatible with folk linguistics and necessitating an identity-focused folk linguistic methodology. Such a methodology should aspire to a more holistic understanding of the

participants' experiential factors, stancetaking and positioning regarding the language material in question, as well as an understanding of the dynamic, variable, and multi-faceted nature of their identity expression. It is a goal of this dissertation to provide the first steps in forming a new (queer) folk linguistic methodology such as this, as well as to demonstrate some attempts to employ it in the analyses included. Below, I outline exactly how I plan to do that.

1.4 Where we're going

The next chapter will briefly account for how I came to realize the need for a queer folk linguistics, followed by a review of the central commitments to this theoretical and methodological framework, and finally ending with a revisiting of previous folk linguistic research addressing where queer folk linguistics could learn from them, or adjust them, or perhaps depart from them. Chapter 3 describes the ethnographic and linguistic methodology used for data collection and analysis for this project. Chapter 4 begins the analysis reported on here, offering a view of the community through a case study of one drag performer who has been a headliner for half a decade and who has performed in Oklahoma City, Texas, Missouri (and elsewhere) for over ten years.

Chapter 5 models a Queer Folk Linguistic investigation, with ethnographic and linguistic insight from the case study, and which turns to the folk linguistic data produced by several members of the community with varying levels of experience and positions within it. While the chapter focuses on the analyses of these responses, it also demonstrates localization and the importance of place, the usage and awareness of in-group language, and the spread and popularization of drag-related language. Finally, Chapter 6 remarks on some of the important takeaways from this study and notes what future directions this research can take.

CHAPTER II

QUEER FOLK LINGUISTICS

The idea for an updated version of folk linguistic framework came out of my own critical inspection of my previous work (McCleary 2016; 2018; 2019a; 2019b). In trying to compose a manuscript based on folk linguistic research of gay (mostly white) cisgender men in OK, I realized some methodological gaps within the more standard folk linguistic procedures, particularly when studying minority groups.

Below I will outline some of the history of folk linguistics, including Preston & Niedzielski's (2003) discussion of the modes of folk linguistic awareness and the factors which can contribute to them. This is followed by a brief summary of the results of a re-analysis of perceptual dialectological work with gay Oklahomans, followed by an explanation of how that led to an updating, or perhaps a *queering* (i.e., a "queer reading"; Butler 2007) of folk linguistics, proposing two new points of consideration: *perceived acceptability* as a mode of folk linguistic awareness, and *experiential factors* as something which can contribute to those modes of awareness. Finally, I will introduce 3 critical components of a queer folk linguistics (QFL) which will be employed in the analysis of the data covered in this dissertation. I suggest a revisiting of some of the various methodological approaches to folk linguistic analysis (e.g., perceptual dialectology, sociolinguistic interviews, etc.) with these new principles.

2.1 A brief history of Folk Linguistics

The early development of Folk Linguistics as a working subfield of linguistic science must inevitably mention Hoenigswald's (1966) proposal at the 1964 UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference. Though Hoenigswald's (1966) proposal is certainly an important piece of the history of folk linguistics, the discussion which followed with other sociolinguists at the conference where this proposal was presented is even more important. It includes a number of references to research that either demonstrated folk linguistic-like work, such as Polle's (1889) *Wie denkt das Volk über die Sprache?* (or, *How do the folk/people think about language*?), or other writings that have entered the conversation of folk linguistics (e.g., Grootaers' 1959 work on the subjective boundaries of dialects).

Bloomfield (1944) is also cited, particularly regarding his taxonomy of the types of responses to language ("Secondary and tertiary responses to language"); this taxonomy accounts for general production of language (*primary* responses), and the production of language *about* language (*secondary* responses; e.g., the "origin" of language, or the evaluation of a dialect, etc.). Bloomfield's specific characterization of the third taxonomic category is rather odd and reveals his limited view of the meaningful insight offered in non-linguists' beliefs about language. In the discussion included with Hoenigswald's proposal, Einar Haugen calls Bloomfield's point of view on these responses "definitely negative" (21). Here's what Bloomfield has to say of a linguist engaged in conversation with a non-linguist about language:

> The linguist's cue in this situation is to observe; but if, giving in to a natural impulse (or else, by way of experiment), he [sic] tries to enlighten the speaker, he [sic] encounters a TERTIARY RESPONSE to language. The tertiary response occurs almost inevitably when the conventional secondary response is subjected to question. The

> tertiary response is hostile; the speaker grows contemptuous or angry. He [sic] will impatiently reaffirm the secondary response, or, more often, he [sic] will resort to one of a few well-fixed formulas of confutation. (49)

This sort of perspective is reflective of the limited idea of who the "speaker" is. Additionally, when you consider how often Bloomfield (1944) refers to non-linguists, the general public, and their ideas as "simple," this writing is also reflective of the elitism that often accompanies discussions of how little non-linguists can/do know about language. Even by the 1964 conference, Hoenigswald and the others are aware of some of the problems with these views. Their discussion addresses this and sets the precedent for a targeted investigation of categorizing the kinds of responses to/about language, and of the ways those responses teach us about non-linguists' language-related awareness and organization. The discussion also focuses on Hoenigswald's three guiding questions of folk linguistics: what goes on (language); how people react to what goes on; and what people say goes on. Though the latter two are sometimes referred to as "secondary and tertiary responses" (20), they are clearly not quite as limiting as Bloomfield's (1944) categories.

In addition to Hoenigswald's proposal, the discussion that follows brought up several common, and persisting, ideas about folk linguistics. Dell Hymes, for example, praises the proposal as a way of getting at the values regarding language and "the ways that those affect the place of language in society" (20). This is perhaps the common thread that ties all folk linguistic research together. Einar Haugen mentions what all dialectologists now know: that not all dialects are regarded the same along perceptual lines (e.g., beautiful, ugly, intelligent, stupid, etc.). Interestingly enough, Charles Ferguson discusses the role that folk linguistic

questions have played and could continue to play within applied linguistics, a notion that appears to have had somewhat of a resurgence recently and which has helped shape the subfield of applied folk linguistics (see Albury 2016, 2017; Chavez 2009; Wilton and Stegu 2011). Finally, the latter portion of the discussion revolves around William Labov's idea of the "poverty-stricken" vocabulary of non-linguists (23), ultimately working towards a proposed goal of folk linguistics to dichotomize the things people do and the things people say they do. This is still an interest of folk linguistics today, but it also represents commonly misconceived ideas about folk, about their linguistic/cognitive abilities, and about the aims of the field.

Labov's example of this poverty-stricken vocabulary is the use of the label "nasal" for both very nasalized speech and very denasalized speech. There's no doubt that some linguistic elements of people's speech go unnoticed or perhaps unperceived altogether, but this particular example reveals the tendency for linguists to simplify folk understandings of language. Dennis Preston (1996) demonstrated that if you think of the folk term "nasal" to mean "inappropriately nasalized", then the issue of accuracy with vocabulary is "a trivial matter…simply a difference between the folk vocabulary and the technical one" (43). That is, the folk may be much more adept in talking about the things that they notice than linguists are willing to give them credit in fact, their insights on language could help identifying how features reach into the "indexical field" (Eckert 2008), to say nothing of their ability to tell us the actual realities of linguistic differences. The latter is something that has been uncovered by linguistic research more recently. Plichta & Preston (2005) were able to demonstrate the perception of monophthongized /ay/ to be a strongly perceived stereotyped, even in degrees of Southern-ness on a latitudinal line, and Plichta (2005) found that the common description of northerners to have more nasalized vowels to be based on an acoustic reality.

Dennis Preston has continued work in this brand of folk linguistics, including foundational research in perceptual dialectology (see Preston 1999, 2010) and a re-writing of Silverstein's (1981) modes of linguistic awareness (Preston 1996). This work has pinpointed serious and important matters in folk linguistics, such as the aims of what the field seeks to know: e.g., what's *available* to the non-linguist for commentary (on language); how *accurate* their commentary is; how *detailed* the commentary is; the *control* with which they can (re)produce what they comment on; and the factors that contribute to those modes of awareness. These aspects of folk linguistic inquiry constitute the bulk of what researchers in this field investigate, and the cognitive/linguistic realities revealed in these aspects often have the potential to illuminate, in Dell Hymes' (1966) words, "the place of language in society".

More recently, Preston has called attention to two important realizations within the field of folk linguistic research: (1) discoursal work in folk linguistics is needed, particularly because of the potentially crucial role of implication in folk linguistic data (i.e., non-linguists' talk about language; Preston 2018, 2019); and (2) that linguists would do well to remember that the variable response to elicitation conditions of folk linguistic data plays a very important role: "Any report of regard responses to linguistic stimuli of any sort should speak of 'an' attitude, not, as is all too often the case, 'the' attitude" (Preston 2016, 194). More specifically, attitudes and beliefs expressed in one experiment/conversation can (and often do) change in another.

Language Regard: Methods, variation and change (Eds. Benson, Evans, & Stanford 2018) constitutes a collection of more recent studies on language attitudes, folk linguistics, and perceptual dialectology. In it, Preston (2018) and the other authors exemplify the ways that language regard can play a role in understanding, or possibly predicting, the goings-on behind

language variation and change. The study of language regard is applied diversely to a wide range of topics. For example, Alfaraz (2018) re-examines Cuban immigrants' perception of pre- and post-revolution-Cuban dialects, with high regard for the former and low regard for the latter, even effecting listeners' low scores for "correctness" assigned to both standard and nonstandard utterances when listeners were told the speakers were residents in Cuba. Bayley et al. (2018) find that older signers of Black American Sign Language, in some cases, were more likely to chose standard forms taught in ASL classes than either younger black signers or white signers of any age; the researchers propose that this could be a result of an association between their own variety, Black ASL, with "the problems they encountered in inferior schools" during segregation (179). It should be mentioned that, although this dissertation operates under the nomenclature Queer Folk Linguistics, it is really more situated under language regard, as it is also interested in ideological, attitudinal, and implicit as well as explicit information regarding language.

These two examples offered above (Alfaraz 2018; Bayley et al. 2018), in a way, allude to two sides of language regard that I take to be of critical importance in a queer folk linguistics: sociocultural ideas and beliefs about people, places, and time can affect related ideas and beliefs about language; conversely, personal experience and positioning of the self with regard to language-related issues can be equally affective on language production and perception.

What all the aforementioned research has in common is, of course, the interest in what non-linguists think about language and what that tells us about the sociolinguistic realities of today's world. Most of them, however, are also connected by the gaps in types of people who are investigated, and in the methodologies that reflect that. That is, little-to-no language regard work has considered the question of sexual orientation/gender identity, nor any work at all

considering gender beyond the binary. Moreover, almost no folk linguistic/language regard research has specifically investigated queer populations (with a few exceptions; e.g., Mann 2012, 2016), and most of the work in folk linguistics and language regard operates on an oversimplified views of gender and often treat demographic labels as static and deterministic. This is a critical point of difference for QFL and will be discussed further below in section 2.3.

2.1.1 Modes of folk linguistic awareness

Preston (2996) outlines the modes of folk linguistic awareness as follows: *Availability*, *accuracy*, *detail,* and *control*. The first mode of awareness, *availability*, accounts for the linguistic facts which are, simply put, unavailable to the non-linguist, or the types of explicit linguistic knowledge which most non-linguists would probably not have the need to talk about. Preston (1996) references the fact that some people will comment on another person's "accent" but will then have no available information to describe it. We see this in Niedzielski (1999) with Detroiters struggle to distinguish Northern Cities vowels from more Peterson & Barney-like vowels, the so-called General American accent. On the other hand, much of my work in Oklahoma has found a strong belief that gay-related styles of speech are unavoidably "feminine", and yet a great many people have no linguistic facts to back up the claim (see section 2.2; McCleary 2016, 2019b).

Still, a less localized example is perhaps found in American English obstruent devoicing. While English does not have phonological obstruent devoicing in coda position (like German or Russian), some research has demonstrated that obstruents in coda position, particularly when phrase- or utterance-final, can devoice (Dmitrieva 2014; Walker, Southall, & Hargrave 2017). For example, / bæt̄ / and / bæːd̥/ have differences in vowel length, which

may be enough to distinguish them. This type of awareness is unlikely to come up in conversations about language with non-linguists. It's not impossible, but in Silverstein's (1981) words, the "limit" of this awareness "is not taken purely negative, but rather as characterizing relative ease and relative difficulty" (382). Thus, this kind of information is not necessarily readily available and easily accessible the way that, say, "the gay lisp" (fronted /s/) or Southern US monophthongization might be. Preston (1996) explains further that things may be unavailable, (easily) available, suggestible (i.e., not necessarily something that would be brought up by a non-linguist but available with the right context), or otherwise common topics of folk linguistic discussion.

The next mode of folk linguistic awareness is *accuracy*, or how well/poorly the folk linguistic comment/thought lines up with scientific linguistic experience or knowledge. Preston (1996) points out right away that this doesn't have any effect on the value of the folk linguistic data (41), but rather juxtaposes the folk understanding of language with a linguistic understanding and asks about where things line up. While this easily bleeds into the next mode (*detail*), the difference here is that people sometimes have ideas about language that are based in culture/stories/stereotypes/etc. rather than linguistic facts. One example of this can be found in the folk etymology of some words. I have a family member who frequently cites this cautionary adage: "When you *assume* you make an *ass* out of *u* and *me*." It's a wonderful trick if you, like me, sometimes stumble with spelling, but it's somehow been picked up by this family member as the etymology of the word, or at the very least, an acceptable alternative etymology of the word. Perhaps that etymology is more meaningful or functional than one tracing back to Latin *adsumere*, but it is nonetheless linguistically and historically inaccurate.

The third mode of folk linguistic awareness is *detail*, or the specificity with which non-linguists can/will describe a linguistic event/feature. The detail might be more *global*, in which case a non-linguist might be able to talk about something (e.g., an accent), but not very specifically (some specific phonetic feature of that accent). It might also be the case that non-linguists do exhibit a more *specific* level of detail, as is such cases with things taught in prescriptive grammar lessons (e.g., double negatives, velar and alveolar productions of the present progressive morpheme, etc.). A more relevant example could be extended to the more specific awareness of linguistic variation exhibited by gay Oklahomans in map drawing tasks (as discussed below in section 2.2), compared to the more global detail given in questions concerning "typical Oklahoma". It is easier to understand *detail* as a mode which exists with more or less fine/coarse granularity rather than one which exists with discrete categories.

The fourth mode of linguistic awareness, and the final one for Preston (1996) is *control*. This mode simply refers to a non-linguist's ability to personally reproduce the particular language phenomena they are able to talk about. Naturally, as is the case with all of these modes of awareness, this is related to the others. A feature which is available and specifically detailed (though it need not be accurate) is probably more likely to be (more-or-less) controlled by the folk linguist—but not always. This is of concern when asking people to (re)produce linguistic features or styles, or when asking to do an impression, which does come into play in the analysis of the data in this project and which is explicitly joined with the identity-oriented approach to understand the particular nuances of performance.

2.1.2 Factors that contribute to the modes folk linguistic awareness

The factors that contribute to the modes described above are also described in Preston's (1996) work. Briefly, they are *communicative primacy*, *formal training/knowledge, linguistic structure and cognitive abilities, correctness, publicity,* and *folk culture artifacts. Communicative primacy* simply refers to the fact that most speakers, perhaps especially non-linguists, are primarily concerned with the semanto-pragmatic functions of language. After all, language is a communicative tool, and thus the message is often given more attention than the medium. My grandmother, in the middle of my subjecting her to a class experiment on personal datives and growing tired of the apparently "hick-ish" sentences I presented, looked at me puzzled when I asked her, "Could you say *I'm gonna go to the grocery store and get me some groceries*". After a minute, she said "What the hell else am I gonna get at the grocery store, Bryce? What kinda question is that?" Thus, the semanto-pragmatics of the question far outweighed the attention to the grammatical features in question.

Training or *knowledge* refers to exactly that—whether the person in question has had training or experience in the language matters in question. I want to point out, though, that while Preston (2016) includes "formal" in this factor, I don't think that strictly formal training in linguistics is necessary for it to have a potential role in the modes of awareness. A high school dropout with a passion for spoken-word poetry might, for example, be more attentive to language matters than someone who received more formal training. Secondly, this should not be misconstrued as training or knowledge in *any* field of interest. That is, doctors, lawyers, and CEOs can all be folk linguists, too; the distinction made here is whether or not someone has been to exposed, more or less, to language study or linguistic science, which could contribute the ability to be "more" aware of language matters than others who have note. (Here

you must cite: Paveau, Marie-Anne. 2008. Les non-linguistes font-ils de la linguistique?: Une approche anti-eliminativiste des theories folk. Pratiques 139-140, 93-110, (Special Issue: Achhard-Bayle, Guy/Paveau, Marie-Anne (eds) Linguistique populaire. Available at: http://www.pratiques-cresef.com.) She deals with this extensively. I'll send you a to-appear paper of mine in which I review her list of "linguists."

Linguistic structure and cognitive abilities builds on Silverstein's (1981) "Limits of awareness", in which Silverstein delineates a classification system of what types of linguistic "facts" are probably, and relatively, easier to be aware of: *unavoidable referentiality, continuous segmentability, relative presuppositionality, decontextualized deducibility,* and *metapragmatic transparency*. Preston (1996) both reviews these and demonstrates that they can be effective in predicting or understanding what linguistics phenomena non-linguists are aware of. However, Preston also proves that cultural belief systems and folk belief systems can include, support, and inform the types of linguistic facts that non-linguists attend to, and so, Silverstein's classification system is not all-encompassing.

Correctness or perhaps even "*pureness*" refers to the, at times prevalent, folk belief that certain varieties/forms of language are more or less "correct" than others, likely a symptom of many languages with standard language ideology (Lippi-Green"). This factor, then, can play a role in that non-linguists will pay attention to things which signal to them as incorrect, or "ungrammatical", or "slang", because they are a part of the folk belief system which ranks language varieties along a continuum of any number of perceptual categories.

The last two factors Preston (1996) mentions are potentially related: *Publicity* refers to the relative attention given to a variety and/or feature(s) in media/pop culture. The more exposure, the more non-linguists are likely to be able to talk about it. The last factor is whether

or not the feature or variety exists as a *folk artifact*: ask anyone to imitate a Southerner in the US, and a monophthongized /ay/ is bound to show up, perhaps along with the word "ain't" and content words that have to do with rurality, conservativism, etc. Of course, these are based on stereotypes, but the stereotypes exist within the folk/cultural system in place. (Enregistered? Johnstone)

Finally, the work of reanalyzing and reconsidering the data from perceptual dialectological research with gay Oklahomans led to two additions to this theoretical groundwork: *perceived acceptability* as a mode of folk linguistic awareness, and *experiential factors* as something which can contribute to those modes. Below, I briefly summarize some of this work, the important findings, and how those led to a rethinking of folk linguistics.

2.2 Lessons from Folk Linguistic work with gay Oklahomans

My work with the Research on Dialects of English in Oklahoma Project (RODEO) began in 2014, and when I started fieldwork, I specifically targeted openly gay men from different parts of Oklahoma in hopes of capturing perceptual dialect boundaries from a population yet unstudied in Oklahoma—in fact, unstudied in most perceptual dialectological research. Seeking what these non-linguists thought about "gay speech" and identifying someone as gay based on their speech, I included questions that pertained more to social dialect boundaries in addition to those that pertained to region. By the end of data collection, I had over a dozen respondents participate. Of them, nine were included in the analysis that became my master's thesis (McCleary 2016). Table 2.1 below displays the respondents who were a part of the study, separated by rural/urban hometown status (R/U), with age and hometown population information given.

Table 2.1. Gay RODEO respondents with age, hometown, and population

Respondent	**Age**	**Hometown**	**Population**
Ernest	25	Oklahoma City	*631,346* (U)
Levi	27	Tulsa	*403,505* (U)
Darren	24	Owasso	*34,542* (U)
Patrick	33	Sand Springs	*19,783* (U)
Chance	23	Idabel	*7,007* (R)
Marcus	25	Marlow	*4,594* (R)
Jim	24	Kingston	*1,632* (R)
Pepper	23	Westville	*1,567* (R)
Francis	28	Quapaw	*906* (R)

These respondents completed the standard RODEO folk-/sociolinguistic interviews (see Appendix A), focusing on sociolinguistic situation across Oklahoma. A set of supplemental questions was implemented (Table 2.2 below) to follow the folk linguistic questions of the RODEO interview. These supplemental questions specifically targeted the folk linguistic insights of "sounding gay," about what that means in Oklahoma in particular, and asked about the compatibility of gay and Oklahoma speech styles. The semi-structured interview design allowed for participants to further elaborate and tell stories about being gay in Oklahoma; all of them did.

Table 2.2. Supplemental RODEO questions for gay cisgender male respondents

- Are you able to tell if someone is gay based on how they talk?
- If so, what gives it away?
- Do you think you sound gay?
- How would you describe "sounding gay"?
- Is there a way to sound gay *and* Oklahoman? Are they compatible?
- How do you feel about those ways of talking?

Much of the early investigation of this work centered on comparative models of analysis, looking at the gay respondents and comparing them to the 100+ other RODEO interviews collected. As sociolinguistics and folk linguistics has a history of this sort of thing (i.e., men vs women, Southern vs Northern), this is not unexpected, but it is also not necessarily the best way to understand this data and can be riddled with problematic assumptions. Prior to this work, nobody had thought to ask RODEO participants about their sexuality. To assume that everyone who had been interviewed before was definitively heterosexual (or cisgender for that matter) would be presumptuous at best. Furthermore, to assume that there *would* be differences based on such things could easily push the researcher to "see" differences regardless of the data. Hence, in the years following the publication of my master's thesis (2016), I abandoned the comparative model, then reviewed, reanalyzed, and reconsidered the respondents answers to the interview questions with the help of socio-cultural and queer linguistic research.

2.2.1 Insights from map-drawings

One of the most iconic tasks used in folk linguistics is that borrowed from Preston (1981): the draw-a-map task. This type of task has been used quite productively at getting broad patterns

of language regard that non-linguists' hold toward regional varieties (see Niedzielski & Preston 2003 for a descriptive overview). Given that this current dissertation work draws on identity-focused research, and especially situates itself within a community-of-practice-oriented approach to language study (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), one might think that the broad scope of regard patterns that often result from this task might be unproductive for this brand of (queer) folk linguistics. On the contrary, while there is certainly variation across this small group of gay Oklahomans in terms of the perceptual boundaries they draw on their maps, they all readily stated that not everyone talked the same across the state. There were remarkable and important similarities among the maps produced by these non-linguists (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2 below.), not least to say that they all display a level — or a particular granularity of detail (Preston 1996) — regarding their awareness of linguistic variation throughout Oklahoma.

One important fact was that certain regions were almost always identified. For example, the southeast corner is always separated, sometimes referred to by its colloquial name "Little Dixie" and sometimes referred to in terms of stereotypical associations with more Southern-sounding speech (e.g., "trashy," "ugly," "uneducated," etc). In all maps the two biggest cities (Oklahoma City and Tulsa) are marked as separate from the rest of the state. Perhaps most important is the fact that all respondents display awareness of the linguistic diversity throughout the state, though not necessarily when they are asked explicitly to comment on it.

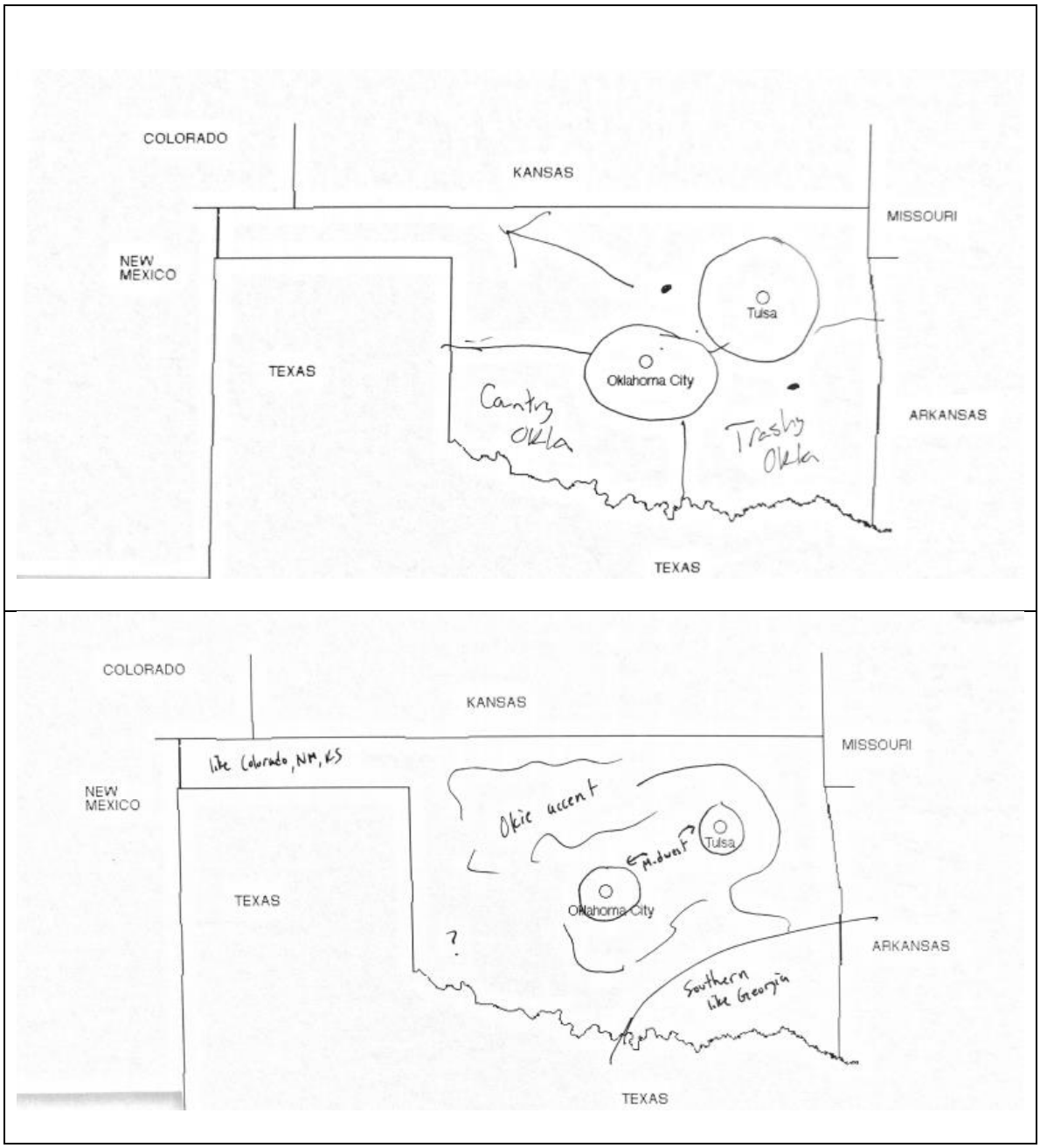

Figure 2.1. RODEO hand-drawn maps from two Oklahoman respondents from urban hometowns. Darren, 24 (above) and Patrick, 33 (below).

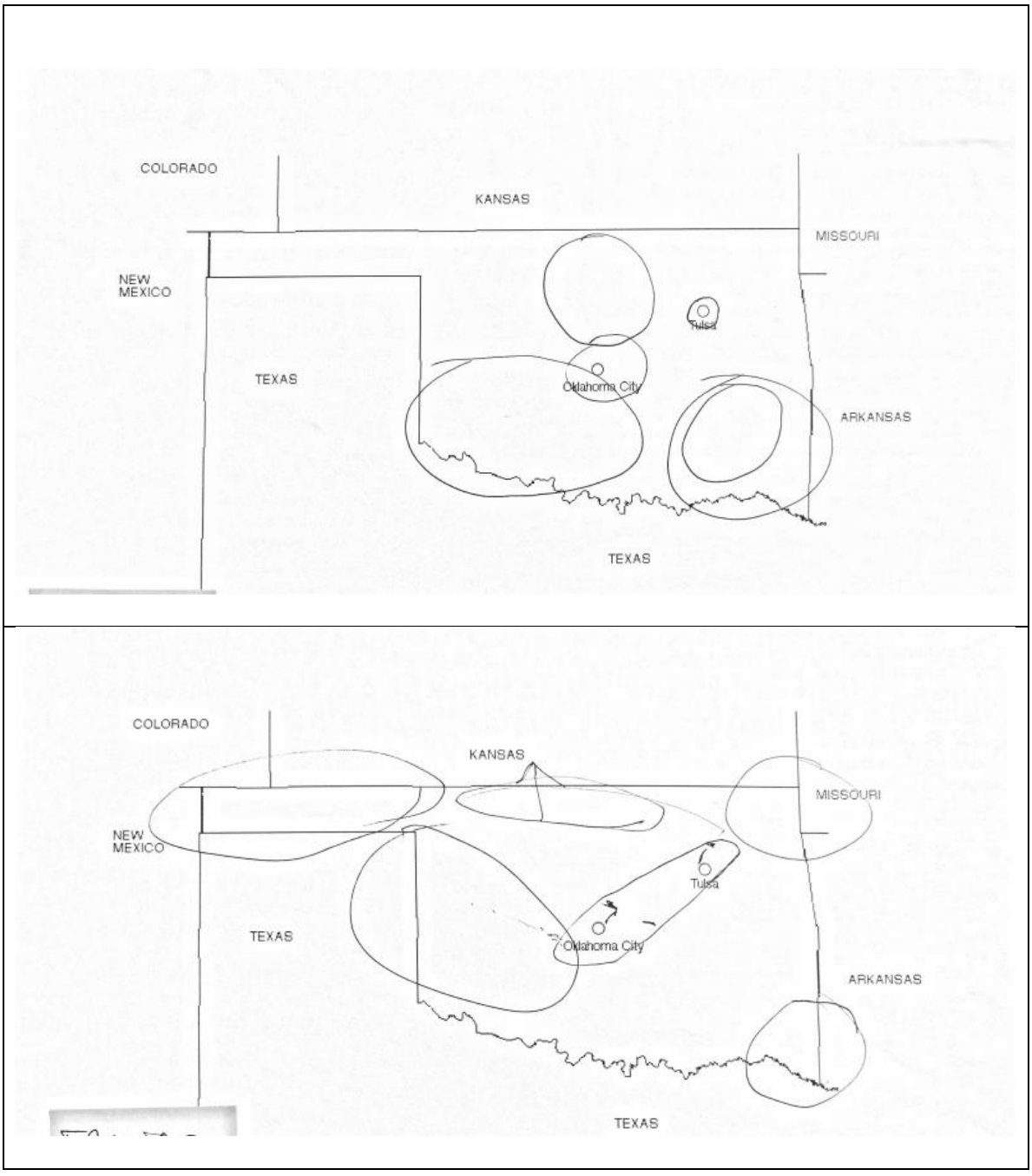

Figure 2.2. RODEO hand-drawn maps from two Oklahoman respondents from rural hometowns. Marcus, 24 (above) and Francis, 28 (below).

Although it might seem to contradict the suggestion above that comparative research is unproductive, one of the interesting things about these maps is that they are a lot like most of

the other RODEO respondents'. In his dissertation, Jon Bakos (2013), for example, found similar areas drawn and similar labels ("country," "hillbilly", etc.). These insights into Oklahomans' level of awareness of linguistic diversity throughout the state shed some light on the kinds of awareness and thought that are triggered given a particular folk linguistic task, but the differences in characterizations of Oklahoma in different tasks and the relvance of that to the approach taken here is discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.2.2 "Typical" Oklahoma and other ways of talking

Bakos' (2013), in addition to map-drawing tasks, asked 100 undergraduate students to give some words to describe "typical Oklahomans." Although many unique words and phrases were given, most could be fit into common trends, Some words, however, occurred much more than others: "country," "friendly," "cowboy," "farmer," "redneck," "hick," "conservative," "laid-back," and "nice."

These labels resemble descriptors of Southern speech (see Niedzielski & Preston 2003), and many Oklahoman undergraduate respondents also spoke openly of the stigmatization of Oklahoma varieties of English, similar to Southern speakers (Bakos 2013; Niedzielski & Preston 2003). Most importantly, however, is the recognition that the map drawing tasks reveal a detailed, dialectological, if not stylistic, awareness representative of Oklahomans' sociolinguistic knowledge, and that representation is quite different from descriptions of "typical" Oklahoma, which appear to lean more heavily on these archetypal depictions of the state, rather than the levels of sociolinguistic awareness exhibited in maps.

The nine gay respondents were also asked about their descriptions of "typical" Oklahomans, and elsewhere alluded to "typical" or "stereotypical" ideas about Oklahoma

throughout their interviews, offering characteristically similar descriptions. Almost every respondent used the word “country” — a word that very frequently occurs throughout the discussions of Oklahoma speech. In extract 2.1 below, Pepper’s discussion of the expectation of gender differences in Oklahoma, notice the use of “country” and “stereotype” in his response.

Extract 2.1. Pepper on gendered expectations in Oklahoma

1 I think um just because like I said it always goes back to my small town
2 experiences but um I would say that women tend to not have as much of the
3 stereotypical Oklahoma but there's such like this pressure on Oklahoma men to just
4 be like country and strong and so they kinda tend to fall more into the stereotypes

The detailed granularity of the variation mapped throughout the state does not match the comparatively discussions of “country” and “(stereo)typical” aspects of Oklahoma (speech). One way of interpreting this is to view the discussions of “typical” Oklahoma as abstractions from the fine-grained details, particularly a in setting in which respondents are attempting to describe an umbrella category that captures an overall picture of the state, drawing on the most obvious or salient associations — those which are stereotypical and ideologically linked.

When the none gay respondents were asked whether they thought they talked like other Oklahomans, a pattern emerged which distinguished (most) rural respondents from (most) urban respondents (see Table 2.3). No urban respondents claimed to talk like other Oklahomans, save one who said he only talks like other people from his city (Tulsa) and made efforts to distinguish that from anywhere else in the state. All but one rural respondent claimed that they speak like most other Oklahomans, and that one outlier linked his not *being* like

anyone from Oklahoma to be a cause of that — an understandable sentiment for someone who had been harassed for being/sounding/looking "too gay" in his small hometown.

This pattern makes sense for the urban participants, who live in the most metropolitan areas of the state. Given that the "typical" Oklahoman appears to conjure ideas of rurality and agrarian lifestyles, it makes sense that urban respondents would distance themselves from such speech styles.

Table 2.3. Speakers' responses to whether or not they think they talk like other Oklahomans, and if they think that they "sound gay", organized by rural/urban hometown

	Respondent	Oklahoman?	Gay?
Urban	**Ernest**	**No**	**Yes**
	Levi	**No (Tulsans)**	**Not really**
	Darren	**No**	**No**
	Patrick	**Not Anymore**	**Not Anymore**
Rural	**Chance**	**Yes**	**Yes**
	Marcus	**Probably**	**Yes**
	Jim	**Yes**	**No**
	Pepper	**No**	**Yes**
	Francis	**Yes**	**Yes**

Perhaps rural speakers are ready to say they *do* sound Oklahoman because they have all moved into bigger towns or to college towns bigger than their hometowns and are aware of their hometown's influence on their variety of Oklahoma English.

The results of the question “do you sound gay?” produced similar results: all but one urban speaker said “no” and all but one rural speaker said “yes” (see Table 2.3). Intuition might have led to the expectation that urban respondents would embrace gay identity (and speech) to further distance themselves from stereotypical Oklahoma. This is not the case. Just as the inexistence of a homogenous “Oklahoma dialect” didn’t stop respondents from talking about “typical Oklahoma” and whether or not they sound like “other Oklahomans” at large when asked to describe gay speech, there was an overwhelming similarity here: everyone said “feminine,” “effeminate,” or “flamboyant” (some defined “flamboyant” as “over-the-top” or “in-your-face” femininity). Of course, there’s no such thing as a unified, singular “gay style,” but because the question frames the information in such a way, respondent accommodation to the interview setting allowed them to make the same move towards abstraction, drawing on common associations for “gay speech,” even if they couldn’t name any features which made gay speech feminine.

Most of the urban respondents agree that they can tell is someone is gay based on how they talk — even if that is not necessarily a socially acceptable thing to do (see Extract 2.2 in Appendix C). Most of the rural speakers complicate the question, saying that this is a problematic practice that relies on stereotypes. This re-analysis of the patterns found in the data suggest an interpretation that is more complicated than what at first seems to be urban-distancing and rural-aligning with gay and Oklahoma speech styles. Rural speakers aren’t just different because they are from small towns. Most of them discuss having left hometowns to escape discrimination, only to find themselves being made fun of for sounding country in the cities they moved to. They appear to be both more aware of linguistic variation and more sensitive to the issue pf labelling people (and the relevant consequences for labels).

Urban speakers probably have had more experience categorizing people, perhaps a result of the greater diversity in cities than in rural OK, and may think less about the problematic systems of labeling (i.e., saying someone sounds gay and must be gay). They are still aware of the social consequences for sounding/being "too gay" (as put by Darren). In this sense, urban speakers appear to distance themselves from both rural and gay styles as a preemptive measure to avoid negative social-cultural reactions for being gay in Oklahoma, and for being Oklahoman elsewhere. Rural speakers appear to problematize the categories without necessarily rejecting them for themselves.

This more nuanced understanding — which came from a more sensitive approach to the discourse in the interviews — prompted me to take another look at some of the stories and experiences shared by the urban speakers. Ultimately, 3 of the 4 urban speakers (Levi, Patrick, Darren) mention conscious style shifting as a deterrent from being outed — being "too gay" in an unsafe space. That is, they each claim not to sound gay when asked directly, ayet they describe conscious practices to make them sound "less gay" (i.e., in front of heterosexual people they don't know well). In one anecdote, Levi says he might even get "a gay lisp" around one of his gay friends. Darren says he would lower his pitch and speak differently if he left a group of gay friends and went to a group of straight people. Patrick tries to speak "flat" (his own words). This brings about the third and final interpretation.

Urban and rural speakers might not be as different as they first appear. Perhaps in some of these elicitation conditions, urban speakers were thinking about the abstracted stereotypical ideas related to the styles, and perhaps repercussions for using those styles too openly led them to answer the way that they did. Yet, they seem to consciously employ styles which at least *vary* in their indexing of gay identity (categories). In this light, the situation is much more

complicated, but the biggest difference between the two groups appears to be in the (in)directness of the responses in relation to the problems, labelling, and consequences of being gay in Oklahoma.

After reviewing these complexly connected responses, I realized that it was only because I had spent a great deal of time transcribing, re-transcribing, and analyzing the discourse in interaction (i.e., the wording of questions posed to them, the tangential stories which might appear to be unrelated to the scope of the research, etc.), and the contexts in which the language occurred that I had gained these insights. More specifically, I was inadvertently drawing on a socio-cultural approach (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall 2005) to the data which I had collected through folk linguistic methodology.

I realized that sociocultural, queer linguistic frameworks were necessary for the kind of sensitivity and respect that ought to be given the discourse I was analyzing — particularly for a population which cannot be understood without an intersectional approach to identity in discourse. Once that is built into this analysis, it becomes clear that different questions, tasks, and contexts can motivate speakers to think or process information in particular ways. For example, the map-drawing task seems to encourage more detailed granularity of dialectal variation throughout Oklahoma, but the questions about typicality encourage abstraction and more wide-ranging stereotypical ideas of the state. This latter approach allows for the rural/urban divide to provides a clearer look at the most common patterns of distinctiveness. The stories told, the experiences shared, and at identity-in-interaction, show that most rural respondents have the *experiential factor(s)* of victimization by being made fun of for being gay in their hometowns and then again for being "country" when they left. This appears to have affected both their sociolinguistic awareness and their ability to push back against implicit

presumptions of distinctiveness in the interview questions (see Extract 2.2 in Appendix C). Moreover, like the urban respondents, there is a sense in which rural respondents also perceive gay and Oklahoman styles of speech to be in opposite socio-cultural positions, though not necessarily incompatible, and this also seems to be related to *experiential factors* (see Extract 2.1 above, Extract 2.3 in Appendix C).

The question of linguistic gaydar alsopatterned differently for the rural and urban respondents, but largely on ethical grounds. That is, the *perceived acceptability* of judging someone's sexuality/identity based on speech appears to be different for rural and urban speakers. All respondents believe this to be a practice that people engage in, and believe "gay speech" to have some sort of feminine quality, but rural speakers appear to perceive the act of overt category labeling to be unacceptable and therefore do not comply with the interview question/folk linguistic task the way the urban respondents do. In a sense, the details which complicate their (un)willingness to employ linguistic gaydar are erased when asked about what is equivalent to "typical gay speech." Thus, the cognitive move to abstract broad, stereotypical category labels seems to mirror the situation foud in the questions on Oklahoma.

Discourse analytic work gives a better look at the individualized, agentive analyses that tell us about how the folk feel about language, but it can also inform us about the places where ideology-eliciting yes/no questions are beneficial or not. That is, some questions about "typical" life or culture are necessarily generalizing; the responses we get from such questions are not necessarily reflective of how the respondents would represent themselves in all situations. But it does show us the role that wording, situation, and tone can play in the folk/sociolinguistic interview, which should further emphasize to us how we need to be sensitive to the ways we design our research. Finally, in addition to giving a bigger role to

stancetaking and social positioning of the speakers, discourse work with attention to metalanguage and implicature (see Preston 2012, 2019) can also tell us about the cognitive underpinnings behind language, thought, and information structure. This appears to warrant consulting more recent work in cognition and categorization.. Thus, I realized that at least a few main theory-methodology components are needed within a new, queer folk linguistics. I believe that there are probably more, and I welcome collaboration. For now, however, this is a starting point.

2.3 Some tenets of a queer folk linguistics

I want to point out that this framework ought to start with queer people (and non-cisgender and non-white people) in order to regain balance in the field of folk linguistic research. That said, I do not see this as a subfield of folk linguistics: I see it as a *queering* of folk linguistics which could ultimately be adjusted and applied to other populations. Additionally, I believe lots of research that already investigates queer and non-cisgender people often includes folk linguistic questions (e.g., asking about preferred pronouns, or being misgendered, or queer language experiences, etc.), and I see them as fitting under a QFL umbrella quite well. Lastly, I believe that there are a number of important components to the already-existing body of folk linguistic research that at least implicitly addresses important considerations in this type of research. This section will aim to make those points explicit, and to couple them with research outside of folk linguistics to highlight new priorities in the study of non-linguists regard for language and what that tells us about language (variation and change), our perception of the social world, and cognitive processes underlying those phenomena.

2.3.1 Intersectionality and warranting demographic information

The first pillar of QFL has to do with the information that we gather, record, and consider important in our research. Intersectionality (see Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson 2013) must be held as an integral part of understanding respondents. This borrows from updated feminist theory which includes the representation of marginalized women of color (e.g., hooks 2000). The influence this has on the way we think about the social world is paramount: nobody is ever just one thing. This fact has far-reaching consequences for the scientific study of language as is tied to social practice: nobody is ever explained by just one category. And nobody's categories should be something prescribed apriori by the researcher. The sociolinguistic research history is riddled with assumptions made about the speaker — their ethnic identity (see Charity Hudley 2017; Rosa & Flores 2017); their gender/sex identity (see Zimman 2014, 2017); and the assumptions we make about what types of sexual orientations necessitate overt performances (see Coates 2013). This may not always be avoidable, but QFL seeks at least to be methodologically transparent about it.

If a researcher wants to collect category distinctions among respondents, then it might be best to allow speakers to label themselves, either with open labels (i.e., not circles to fill in or boxes to check), or perhaps let it come out of the data. Superimposing social categories, boundaries, and strata reflect more of the patterns we *expect* to see within sociolinguistic research. A research agenda interested in the individual, social, performative, and cognitive organization of language goings-on of non-linguists (i.e., folk linguistics) should be striving to play as minimal a role as possible in dictating what perceived (and real) social worlds the respondents exist within. Otherwise, we run the risk of claiming a warrant for a label that we already suspect to necessitate a difference, which may in fact perpetuate the belief in

differences where there may in fact be very few at all — or where the similarities are hiding behind our own perceived differences.

I admit, however, that there are often cases where the respondents are not fully equipped with the experience, language, or will to adequately describe the nuanced details of the social world in which they live. In the same way we build cognitive realities around what we infer from what respondents know and perform, we must use, as much as possible, their own knowledge of social life and its tie to language in order to more accurately and more meaningfully build a representative model.

This is not something entirely new to sociolinguistics, or necessarily new to folk linguistics. For example, in their textbook on the study of language and gender, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) explain that there are far more differences *among* women, and *among* men, then there are between those two genders. Of course, this is limiting in terms of its essentializing binarity, but it is also a clear comment on the rather popular idea that women are at the same time linguistically more conservative and leaders of linguistic change (see Labov 2001; Trudgill 1972). This so-called "gender paradox" is responded to in a number of ways, most relevant here Eckert's (2008) description of the indexical field, and the role that linguistic variables can play in indexing membership to one-or-(many)-more groups. If instead of using gender/sex categories as pre-existing demographic labels and rather look at the *roles* people are performing/indexing, then we might have more clear understandings of the sociolinguistic realities underlying this "paradox." The expectation for women to fill more social roles, and perhaps expectations that they do this well, could potentially explain the different findings regarding what people of different genders have done in past sociolinguistic research. This

seems to be particularly true of laboratory or one-on-one interview conditions in which speakers are accommodating to what they think the linguist/researcher is looking for.

It is of course a foundational given in folk linguistics that respondents may not be equipped with the resources to provide accounts of and explanations for many sorts of linguistic facts (Silverstein 1981; Preston 1996). But it is nearly tautological to say that it is the folk linguist's duty to take folk accounts seriously and to provide from them a principled account of the attitudinal, ideological, and language regard matters that have long been widely held to be essential to sociolinguistic research (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968).

My own research experiences have proven that single identity labels (gender, race, class, etc.) can sometimes matter much less than the particular *roles* fulfilled by participants. For example, rural respondents in the above study weren't differentiated merely by being from small hometowns, but rather by having had experienced linguistic prejudice (in more than one sense) and thus found themselves to be experts within a folk linguistic interview. This parallels some of the findings of this dissertation. Namely, in my research in Oklahoma drag, performers who have been *drag mothers* (See Chapter 4) are allowed to break conventions without fear of consequence or reprimand than are drag children. Any demographic information attained ought to be warranted at the onset (especially any identity label that encourages static categories). Community roles, then, reveal themselves to be critical components of an intersectional approach to identity within this community of practice. In studying identity vis-à-vis expressed regard for language. Some identities constructed in interaction may seem conflicting, at times, or contradictory, and dynamic ways that queer drag performers engage with identity work has the potential to lend insight into broader studies of identity and into the role language can play in queer kinship systems (see Chapter 4).

2.3.2 Queer, sociocultural, and raciolinguistic discourse analysis

Queer, sociocultural discourse analysis is necessary for folk linguistic research focusing on queer people. That isn't to say that all research in queer folk linguistics *must* be discourse analytic, but in order to practice giving the time and attention needed to what the implicata (Preston 2019) and metalanguage (Preston 2012) tell us about the folk sociolinguistic organization, we have to look at what they say before we begin testing what they notice or perceive. This is an obviously self-benefitting claim, given that this dissertation is situated within an analysis of the discourse of drag performers, and I certainly think that perceptual studies would benefit the study of language in this community of practice. I just think you need the former before you can start designing experiments for the latter.

Discursive work on language, gender, and sexuality has a history of questioning the categories we make about the people we are researching. Early phonetics-perception based research related to sexuality/orientation focused on listeners' abilities to assign labels to pre-decided categories of "straight" or "gay" speakers and paid very little attention to how queer people actually spoke (e.g., Gaudio 1994; Smyth et al. 2003; Piccolo 2008). Work in discourse-based queer linguistics (see Livia & Hall 1997) focused on challenging such labels in these perceptual studies, and demonstrated that non-linguists performed in ways which challenge these categories quite often. Coates (2013) helped to demonstrate that, although there appeared to be an understanding that queer people must be performing queer identity all the time, heterosexual identity also takes social practice to form, establish, and maintain it, just like other identities. Hall (2013) reintroduces queer linguistics as moving away from queer theory in its firmly-held belief that identity and practice cannot be separated.

I would argue that the discursive research should come first (at least for now) in order to better inform how to design studies that will tell us more than what we already know. For example, the yes/no questions, ideological eliciting questions, rating tasks, Likert scales, even map-drawing and other tasks are beneficial, but my experience has shown that a *great deal* of the picture is left out without listening to respondents unpack those answers, and a discursive approach before these tasks were given might have given much essential information to the construction of the task themselves.

This is perhaps best explained — though maybe not so explicitly in the context of queer identities — in Bucholtz & Hall's (2004) description of a sociocultural linguistic framework which outlines the idea that identities (can) include broader ("macro") categories, but which are almost always situated within a local, temporary, and interactional setting that allows for them to emerge dynamically through various relationships between the individual and others, and which may be consciously or unconsciously constructed by the individual or by others. Bucholtz & Hall (2008) expand on this by highlighting the interdisciplinary traditions of socio(cultural) linguistics and argue for a grounding in ethnographic/anthropological work with "the ethnomethodological sensibility of conversation analysis" (424) in looking at structural and semantic content of the discourse in a way that pays attention to theoretical insights about the social world and which pays attention problems within it. This, they add, could be made stronger with the quantitative tools of sociolinguistics; I would add that, for sociolinguists who are most interested in the meaning behind language variation and change, then the coupling of these methodological and theoretical insights under a (queer) folk-linguistic research model could offer an even stronger collaborative framework.

To put it most simply, practicing sensitive, careful, ethnographic, and discourse-based research is the only way to attempt a description of the identities of the people we study, and — with queer people especially and marginalized groups in general— we have to establish ethically and soundly the identities of our speakers if we want to know who they are in the expressions of their language regard. In collecting this information and studying it, we not only have the opportunity to study the product of language, but also attitudes, beliefs, and ideas about language that could potentially tell us about the motivations behind language variation and change (i.e., Preston 2013).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly here, I would also add that Raciolinguistic frameworks (see Alim, Rickford, & Ball 2016) are equally important as a component of this approach. As a member of the broader LGBTQ community in Oklahoma City, I have some insider knowledge about the community. Having said that, I am not a person of color and therefore cannot expect to understand the experience of being one (in this community or elsewhere). As such, raciolinguistic insights can help insure research conduct that attempts to be fair and just in working with a group of respondents that includes queer performers of color. Both theoretically and methodologically, this is important in raising awareness of biases, and challenging them, and acknowledging my position as a white, cisgender, and subsequently privileged person doing the research.

This study recognizes the risk in the racializing and imposing upon bodies labeled as non-white the often stereotypical representation of cultural backgrounds. Just as queer linguistics has reminded us that gender-related identities are not static (see Levon 2016), and that identity labels are not a priori states which render all utterances representations of those labels (see Hall 2013), ethnic/racial identity is also tied to practice and emergent through the

discourse. Racial and cultural identities are dynamic and constructed discursively, despite the tendency for many to see people of color and to assign all of their language use racialized labels. This is explained best in Rosa's (2018) *Looking like a language, sounding like a race: Raciolinguistic ideologies and the learning of Latinidad,* in which he analyzes "the ongoing rearticulation of colonial distinctions between populations and modes of communication that come to be positioned as more or less normatively European" (5). Furthermore, Rosa & Flores (2017) address these systems of co-naturalization of race and language/linguistics through the study of category making (see Rosa 2018 for more) and enregisterment. I believe that this type of critical insight is required for a folk linguistic project which predominantly consults people of color; conversely, a queer folk linguistic perspective which incorporates these insights might be able to contribute to our understanding of category-making, enregisterment, and the socio-cultural and linguistic experiences of people of color in America.

Ultimately, the central notion of identity-tied-to practice leads to an important pillar of queer folk linguistics. With discourse analytic approaches in a new prioritized position, we must explicitly recognize that every instance of expressed language regard is an instance of stancetaking, of positioning with respect to the language/people/culture in discussion. Similarly, as every instance of stancetaking is related to the positionality of the speaker, all the discursive materials in a folk linguistic interview are thus instances of identity in construction, drawing from the aforementioned frameworks that discourse is an instance of practice. As researchers, we owe it to our participant-collaborators to be aware of our biases, to check them, and to consult experts elsewhere to assure that we are not misinterpreting the stancetaking occurring in folk linguistic discourse. I don't simply see these perspectives as being a way to make folk linguistics more equitable and just; rather, I see them as a way of making research

done with (queer) people (of color) more accurate, reliable, and meaningful in the pursuit of sociolinguistic documentation and understanding.

2.4 Conclusions and thinking ahead

A new, queer folk linguistics may contribute two important improvements overall: The first is a more reliable, more detailed analysis and report of the agentive approach to language and identity. In previous work, that kind of research wasn't really available to folk linguistics, although individuals' ideas about language and language-adjacent material can often shed insight into the kinds of experiences that might lead to group patterns of language regard. The second is the role of construal in language change Levon (2018). That is, though 3rd-wave sociolinguists are interested in the meaning behind language variation and change, even Levon mentioned that this was something Dennis Preston has been saying "for time immemorial". That is, understanding a person's *regard* (i.e., anything from attitudes, beliefs, opinions, implicatures, etc.) towards language (or varieties) tells us about what they are aware of in terms of language, and it tells us about what sorts of things they associate with what they are aware of. With enough people, we can begin to see the connection between the agentive and the group-pattern oriented linguistic approaches. But we can't do that if we are erasing parts of our respondents' stories, much less if we are erasing who they are altogether.

Queer Folk Linguistics, then, is a way to capture a picture of queer people, what they think of language, life, and culture; how they organize that information; how that information informs their expressions of language regard; how that regard manifests itself within a series of (conflicting) stances taken; how stancetaking contributes to the construction of identities (even according to different elicitation conditions); and how capturing this is worth the

endeavor on its own. It's an added benefit that all of that work has the potential to tell us about the meanings behind language variation and change.

Researchers working with non-cisgender speakers as the subjects of language-related research very often overlap with queer folk linguistics' goals. I see QFL, then, as a way of bringing together studies (and researchers) around a goal of accurately representing and learning from queer folk linguists. My ultimate goal is that some people will find it worthwhile enough to engage with it as a methodological and theoretical tool for a particular kind of language research. Naturally, we need more queer linguists to talk to more queer folk, and more importantly, we need more queer linguists of various ethnic, racial, cultural, and experiential backgrounds to help capture a fairer and more reliable picture of being queer in today's world, and of the ways language fits into that.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This project drew from several approaches to linguistic ethnographic work (Coupland & Creese; Kvam 2017; Pérez-Milans & Preece 2016; Stofleth, & Manusov 2019), and borrowed specifically the use of participants' descriptions of the community, and their role within it, to inform the types of questions asked in recorded interviews and the particular order in which they occurred (see Appendix B for interview template example). Furthermore, the conversations and notes taken in various unrecorded interviews demonstrated the community awareness of language as a tool of performance and expression of personality. Even in its design, this research depends on in-group insight and community engagement, and it attempts to maintain an awareness of community and regional histories. It complicates the discussions of privilege and power in the community today and is used to better understand the community, especially in the motivations for particular language-related phenomena.

3.1 The participants

Recruitment for recorded sessions was partially achieved through snowball sampling. In all the interviews, people were asked what three performers they thought I should talk to for this project—and in some cases, they were asked more explicitly "who are some people I *have* to talk to while I'm doing interviews?" There was a lot of overlap, especially for

performers who are familiar with the big pageant winners. Only few suggested I talk to newer performers on the scene. Some of the people I talked to responded to a Facebook ad, which was identical to the types I circulated around 39th St. and at the 2018 OKC Pride festival (see Appendix C for an example). Nobody emailed me or called me, but Facebook messenger turned out to be an important communicative tool. All but one or two people who allowed me to have an unrecorded interview were contacted through a friend or in person on 39th St. All conversations from which notes happened coincidentally and organically with people at the venues.

Table 3.1. Unrecorded interviewees, labeled by location of interview

INTERVIEWEES
Boom_1
Boom_2
FinishLine_1
Pheonix_1
Pheonix_2
Tramps_1
Tramps_2
Tramps_3
Tramps_4
WreckRoom_1
WreckRoom_2

All recorded and unrecorded respondents were read the recruitment script and all recorded participants signed the consent documentation (see Appendix B for both). Many more people than anticipated felt uncomfortable signing a document, with more than one person saying explicitly that they don't sign things that require their legal name. This reflects the tendency for many to feel uneasy about the formalities of paperwork, especially when it concerns providing signatures and being read potentially intimidating scripts.

Many people wanted to know about the project and immediately offered information, then asked that they not be referenced. In the situations in which people consented to my taking notes, I noted only what they had to say about the community and drag and made no mention of any identifying information. Thus, those unrecorded conversations are seldom referred to, except where they contribute to the discussion already presented by the recordings, and will simply referred to by the venue at which the conversation/interview happened (as in Table 3.1).

3.1.1 The recorded participants

10 people were recorded, 8 of whom are drag performers, and the other two were significant others of drag performers. They were all asked the same interview questions (Appendix C) and given the "My drag" task (explained below). Some had multiple sessions, some were asked to engage in additional tasks, and some were recorded during facilitated discussion. A conversation arose early in this project in which a particular drag queen told me that if they were going to be interviewed and talk about their experiences in the community, then they wanted to be referred to by their actual drag name. This confronted the expectation I had to go with the traditional methodological practice of choosing a pseudonym for the respondents, but I had no right to deny these respondents the acknowledgment of their contribution to this project. Consequently, I gave the option on all consent forms to choose how to be referred to, and explained (to my best ability) that this could be a name they made up, their real/drag name, or they could leave it blank, in which case I would come up with a pseudonym or generic label.

All respondents wanted to be referred to by their drag names; in some cases, however, there was confusion regarding the blank space, despite the attempted explanation. Since this line is below the signature, there were a couple of people who wrote their preferred" name in everyday life outside of drag. After checking with these people, I can confirm that they misunderstood this section of the consent form and agreed to go forth with their drag names. For ease of reference and transcription, each recorded person has a nickname or shortened form (given in Table 3.2; all performers are given 2 initials, while non-performers are given one). In some conversations in which there is sensitive material, or in which there are highly opinionated comments made about the community and other members, names of speakers are not always given.

Table 3.2. Recorded respondents with names, nicknames, and session information

Preferred Name	**Nickname**	**Major Tasks**	**Venue**
Zach	Z	interview, group discussion	residence
Guin	GH	interview, group discussion, EGG	residence
Foxxi	FX	interview, group discussion, EGG	multiple
Kayde	K	interview, group discussion	residence
Gizele	GM	interview, group discussion, EGG	residence
Kelly	KP	interview	Starbucks
Alexander	AJ	interview, group discussion	Tramps
Celeste	CJ	interview, group discussion	Tramps
Rae	RJ	interview, group discussion	Tramps
Shalula	SQ	interview	Phoenix Rising

All of the respondents were given an optional personal information sheet to fill out (Appendix B). They were told that there was not requirement for this paper, that they could

fill out as little or as much as they wanted, but that the purpose of it was for me to better understand who they are as artists and as the personas they play.

All but one filled out the form. Although there are sections which roughly correspond to demographic categories, this information is attained with blank spaces (i.e., not choosing options for them), and the results feel a little more personal than the static categories typically worked with. I should mention that the experience of working with people who want to be acknowledged for their role in the study, and their willingness to share personal information (on paper and in the interviews), was more a motivation than anything to make sure I was treating and representing them responsibly within this framework. That is, though I set out to employ a Queer Folk Linguistic framework with OKC drag, working with this community further motivated and educated my thinking about what Queer Folk Linguistics can/should be.

3.1.2 The recording conditions and tasks

All recordings were either made at a respondent's home, at one of the venues on 39th St., or in one case, at a Starbucks. No EGG work was done at public venues, and there were a couple of interview sessions in which the speech is competing against a backdrop of club music and conversation. Those recordings are still good enough to account for the discourse, however, and are thus still used. One performer's interview (Shalula) was almost totally lost due to technical errors (though some of it is in tact), but the notes from the conversation are still kept. That interview is not classified as an unrecorded interview, although we have since had a number of unrecorded clarification conversations. In all recordings, respondents were asked to wear a head-worn Audio-Technica PRO 8Hex

unidirectional microphone, linked to Morantz Professional PMD660 recorders. In some group discussions, the omnidirectional built-in mic of the Morantz recorders were used. In the analyses, these are only distinguished in the question of acoustic and/or phonetic analyses. Finally, EGG measurements for the lx wave in the investigation of voice quality will be discussed separately in Chapter 6.

All respondents completed the interview, or at least most parts of the interview. The Interview Template document in Appendix B shows the rough compartmentalization of the questions from the view of the researcher: (a) introducing themselves; (b) the purpose of drag; (c) drag in Oklahoma; (d) social variation and inequity in drag; (e) drag-related speech; and (f) general attitudinal questions. Most sections have multiple questions in them. All respondents answered at least one or more questions from each section. Group discussions were facilitated off of the same questions, though they were often steered by the specificities and community-oriented topics brought up by the respondents.

All respondents (who are performers) completed the "My drag" task as well, which was used as an ice breaker and as a final word. At the beginning of every recording, I asked participants to stay their name and summarize their drag in one sentence: e.g., "I am [name], and my drag is [explanation]". Because the recording conditions can sometimes be intimidating, especially at the beginning, respondents were asked to repeat this task at the end of the recording session. In one group setting, respondents were asked to describe their drag persona as a combination of two or three celebrities. And in several conversations, respondents were asked to provide examples of linguistic phenomena that they brought up in the discourse.

3.2 Methods of analysis and interpretation

Part of the goal of the previous chapter in outlining all of the important and influential research that have informed the practices of this project was to set a backdrop for the ways that the analysis interprets the goings-on of the non-linguists in this study (a folk linguistic approach) *in tandem* with the way it sees identity being constructed in these interactional settings (a queer sociocultural approach). Therefore, this section deals with the ways that I see those coming together in the discourse.

3.2.1 Discourse conventions

Respondent data was broadly transcribed initially before in-depth analyses took place. While I am a member of the LGBTQ community in OKC, familiar with many styles used in the community, and come from a multi-racial background, I had these transcripts checked with other native speakers of styles and varieties that appear in the data to double-check my accuracy and fair representation of the participants.

Traditionally, this type of work would have warranted a look at the initial or general responses to the interview questions, to look at the differences or similarities in responses, and then to build more complexity in the discourse. QFL, I believe, should start the other way around. So, this project first performed a case study on Foxxi, who has the most recordings, the most varied locations of recordings, and who has the most observed hours in the field. Her recordings' transcriptions were checked, broken into intonation unites (see Du Bois et al. 1993), and then analyzed for stancetaking (see Levon 2016; Jaffe 2009; Du Bois 2007), and including detailed notes on the contextualization of the conversation (including the role of the interviewer, the location, the presence of others, the previous

discussion, etc.). The results of this transcription and analysis were then used to build an understanding of the emergent, dynamic, and variable identities that are viewed as being tied to practice (see Hall 2013) and which may also be conflicting or otherwise contradictory (see Levon 2016). This led the way for identities and identity categories to play a key role in this project.

3.2.2 Queer Folk Linguistic analyses

The methodological-theoretical foundation for this project has three central interests in this community: (1) the community- or identity-specific language used in performance, (2) the role that identity place in expressions of language regard; and from that (3) the role that language plays in within this/these communities. It sets out to do this with an agentive, sociocultural model of identity (outlined above) and a model for the modes of language awareness (Preston 1996; Niedzielski & Preston 2003; Silverstein 1981), which I outlined in the previous chapter.

3.2.3 Language regard in QFL

Preston (2019b) recently updated the taxonomy of parent fields, fields, and subfields of the study of language regard (Figure 3.1). In it, the study of regard for language (entailing beliefs, ideas, attitudes, reactions, and ideologies, etc.) is mapped along its general methodological history, across sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and social psychology; it also displays different tendencies in methods and approaches to language (data) in each field and subfield.

While the words “folk linguistics” are in the title of the proposed theoretical and methodological considerations in this dissertation, the interests and methods of QFL are not necessarily of those traditionally in Folk Linguistics. That is, QFL is interested in a range of different methods, “cognitive styles” or approaches to data, and the analytic and interpretive frameworks used to handle that data.

QFL appears to be more in common with Language Regard than Folk Linguistics, but there are a few reasons for that. While I admit I like the sound of Queer Folk Linguistics better than Queer Language Regard, the latter wouldn’t make much sense. Language Regard, in my understanding of it, really describes the phenomena related to people’s thought and talk about language. Folk Linguistics (and other parent/fields that fall under Language Regard) are accompanied by sets of methodological and analytic norms and histories. So, it seems more appropriate to locate QFL among them. All of these (parent) fields have an interdisciplinary history, and QFL seeks to continue that by drawing from other areas of the study of language regard. What is most different from them, then, is the commitment to using discourse (in addition to other measures) to inform the construction of emergent identity, which is ultimately how we can inform our pictures of ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs about language—to get a glimpse at language’s role in the social lives of members of the communities we study, both in how they use it and how they regard it.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has worked towards a finer description of what Queer Folk Linguistics is and can do, as well as documenting the way I went about trying to employ it. The final words of this chapter should be, therefore, on the overall framework for speech production,

perception, and reaction. Building on three separate theoretical linguistic models, I want to briefly describe the system which is believed to be at work in the linguistic goings-on of people (and particularly the people in this study).

CHAPTER IV

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE "GAYBORHOOD"

This chapter attempts a presented study of place, community, and roles within the world of drag in Oklahoma City. It briefly reviews the history of an important area for the city's LGBTQ+ community, where almost all of this dissertation project's data were recorded, then turns to drag performers' discourse on the Oklahoma drag scene, the various venues in this area of the city that provide spaces for drag entertainment, and finally the importance that community roles and queer kinship play in this place. It is the goal of this chapter to set the groundwork for more careful and meaningful analysis of the language regard data reviewed in the following two chapters.

Research I conducted early in graduate school asked various gay-identifying Oklahomans about sounding gay, sounding Oklahoman, and if they talked in such ways. Oklahoma City's "gay district" emerged from the data as an important part of the queer Oklahoman experience. Most respondents were not from Oklahoma City (OKC), and many did not live there at the time of the study. However, all respondents frequently traveled to this area of OKC for nightlife and LGBTQ+-related goings-on, most notably Gay Pride summer events. The gay- and queer-owned businesses in this district do not constitute the only ones in OKC, but this area has a high profile because of its concentrated representation of queer Oklahomans in a single block of the city, and because of its more recent history being a safe haven for queer people in the state.

This area is often referred to as “the gayborhood” or “the strip” by people who frequent it. More recently, it has been officially referred to as the 39th St. Enclave, though I never heard any member of the OKC drag community call it that. This chapter explores how we might ground this project in a studied understanding of the Gayborhood. Using ethnographic, observational, and discursive data, below I outline what performers have to say about Oklahoma, about the venues in the Gayborhood, and about drag family and other community relationships relevant to understanding place as a complex and critical factor in the subsequent chapters’ interest in identity in interaction.

4.1 A short history of the area

As mentioned above, nearly all observations and recording sessions occurred on 39th St. This block is an area with a rich history and a meaningful presence as a protected space for queer people. Anecdotal evidence from several conversations I had in the field correspond with Bachhofer’s (2006) historical account of some of the experiences of gay and bisexual men in OKC, and which devotes a substantial portion of this history to the Gayborhood. This history traces back to at least 1889 and includes a relatively robust underground culture that thrived in the 1940s and 50s, to be followed in the 60s and 70s by increasingly severe policing of well-known spots where queer men congregated.

By the early 60s, the OKCPD had begun shifting their view of threats to the city, from alcohol-related issues to sex work and homosexuality (Bachhofer 2006, p. 195). The 60s and 70s saw a number of venues shut down, or otherwise continue to be the victims of unwarranted police raids and public attention, bars which “once [were] the only salvation for many, now were an ‘enter at your own risk’ proposition” (198). Heavy policing continued into the 80s, but

patrons in the local venues pushed back, both socially and with legal action, ensuring a growing level of awareness of the area as a hub for many gays and bisexual men:

> Here, Oklahoma City gay residents experienced their own Stonewall[1], when in response to police brutality and harassment a local disco fought back and helped make this area the permanent socialization center for the gay and lesbian community…By the mid-1980s, all but a handful of the gay bars in Oklahoma City were located on 39th Street. With the destruction of the downtown sexual and social landscape via urban renewal, the Strip, or Glitter Alley, [i.e., 39th St.] was now the anchor for Oklahoma City's gay and bisexual male subculture. (Bachhofer 2006, 288)

39th St., what so many performers call the Gayborhood, has remained a safe space for many queer Oklahomans, and many of the people who have spent their lives in OKC are well aware of the histories that permeate this area. This historical background is brought forward every summer at Pride events, and even for younger queer Oklahomans who are not aware of such histories, it serves as a protected place away from the rest of the city/state.

Most of the venues and stores in the area are still LGBTQ-owned—though various respondents commented on the fact that they are all owned by older, white (cisgender) men. While the Gayborhood has remained in place throughout the years, some things have indeed changed. In the time I spent in the area for this project, two formerly longstanding establishments on 39th St. closed, and thematic and business changes have occurred over the

[1] A reference to the 1969 Stonewall Riots, a series of protests, demonstrations, and resistance to police force and brutality against queer people in Manhattan, led predominantly by trans and queer people of color (notably Marsha P. Johnson) and which is set to have sparked the Gay Liberation and other Queer movements (see Stryker & Whittle 2006; Ramirez et al. 2017).

course of the years, too. Despite these changes, it remains a heavily trafficked area with nearly half a dozen venues for drag entertainment, an area with local norms that at times push back against broader regional ideologies and at other times embraces them. Before ending this section, I want to point out Bachhofer's (2006) is primarily interested in white gay and bisexual cisgender male subcultures, that is touches very little on the experiences of queer people of color[2] and virtually nothing at all on noncisgender Oklahomans. This is a shame because my time in this area has demonstrated to me how evident the role that queer and trans people of color have played in the shaping of this community. While race and ethnicity play a critical role in the linguistic analyses of this project (Chapters 5, 6, and 7), they will be addressed here, though slightly less formally, in order to expand the insightful yet limited history on this area.

4.2 Oklahoma drag: *Old school* and *cut-throat*

The increasing global popularization of drag performance today cannot be understated, especially given its potential to affect local drag scenes in places like Oklahoma. Every participant in this study, recorded or unrecorded, remarked on the widespread fandom of shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race, Dragula,* and social media-based entertainment offered by famous drag performers. In many ways, older generations of performers in this area have likely always felt as though the next generation changes everything, and although this study finds elements of that, some important similarities span across age and experience. Still, local performers exhibit a complicated relationship with the spread of drag culture.

Wider exposure to drag adds to the pop-cultural relevance and, perhaps as a result, the value of drag artistic endeavors. In other ways, it pits them against big-budgets, Hollywood,

[2] "Some information regarding African-American LGBT Oklahoma City residents is included in this study, but admittedly it is slight" (Bachhofer 2006, p. 23).

and digital venues that can take away from the regionality of drag entertainment. Performers in Oklahoma, perhaps to no surprise, very frequently express a willingness to discuss the spread of drag culture, and they are all willing to express their characterization of Oklahoma drag specifically as it is differentiated from an otherwise "mainstream" drag scene. In the excerpt below, Foxxi, a performer with over a decade of experience in the OKC drag circuit, references some of the defining characteristics of this scene.

Excerpt 4.1. Foxxi describing drag in Oklahoma

1	Interviewer:	so, how would you describe drag, in Oklahoma
2	Foxxi:	ooh [u:w], honey that's a long conversation too[3], I mean Oklahoma drag has
3		changed, ever since, like I first saw drag, I felt like it was more, of the upscale
4		which is you know you wanna be pretty, and polished, which you should always
5		wanna be, but it was more, it was like, old school drag, you know

Foxxi's very first response ("a long conversation", line 2) alludes to the complex place Oklahoma drag finds itself today[4]. She recalls the OKC drag scene back then as "upscale" (line 3) and "pretty and polished" (line 4). These two concepts, i.e., class and beauty, both concern appearance and performance, but they are not the primary concerns of all performers in today's drag scene, something Foxxi only implies here with her label "old school drag" (line 5) but on which she elaborates in Excerpt 4.2 below. She characterizes Oklahoma drag today as still having some "old school" aesthetics, calling attention to "costumes", "big hair", and "stone", which correspond to tailored outfits, higher-quality wigs, and lots of jewels, respectively.

[3] Foxxi's use of the additive particle *too* here refers to another "long story" of a memory she had just shared on her first experience with drag, one in which she recounts having to learn a lot of the craft on her own and having to face the venues' sometimes rigid expectations for what drag could or should be. More on this below.
[4] A simpler situation would presumably not require a long story.

Excerpt 4.2. Foxxi unpacking old school drag

1	Foxxi:	Oklahoma is very old school, they want jewels, they want costumes, they want big
2		hair, they want stone, and that's fine, but every person don't wanna do that, some
3		people wanna come out, in a, trash bag or, or something different that's not glam,
4		and that's fine, cause I don't do that all the time bitch I do ratchet hood, sultry sexy
5		or, my creativity is, either doin some Nicki Minaj or some Cardi B, you know with
6		some colored hair, colored outfit, you know something crazy

Foxxi distinguishes "old school" Oklahoma drag from her own approach by using terms like "ratchet" and "hood" (Excerpt 4.2; line 4), descriptors which index associations with African American culture and identity but which also have class-based associations. *Ratchet* has been described as a word which indicates behavior deemed inappropriate in public, perhaps *déclassé* (Weinraub 2015). Both *ratchet* and *hood*[5] are associated with the language of hip-hop[6] music and culture (Jones 2015; Pichler & Williams 2016), though Jones (2015) adds that these items have been "noticed" and then borrowed by the "white mainstream" (p. 411) and is therefore not necessarily reliable as an indicator of speaker status regarding AAVE varieties. Pichler & Williams (2016) further define and describe *ratchet* in its sexual nuances:

> *Ratchet* is a term with clear indexical links to hip hop, and, especially in relation to gangsta rap, it indexes ghettoness[7] [sic]. When used to refer to women, *ratchet* tends to be derogatory, connoting trashiness and sexual promiscuity. (p. 568)

[5] I'm treating these here as separate descriptors, despite their occurring in the same intonation unit. It is possible that *ratchet* is modifying *hood*. Given that *sultry* and *sexy* appear together as a pair of words which, if only uttered side-by-side, we can glean a more nuanced understanding from the semantic overlap, *ratch* and *hood* may be functioning similarly and are treated as such here for simplicity.
[6] Please also see Alim's (2004, 2009) work on Hip Hop Nation Language.
[7] I find this term problematic, even when referencing how it is used in speech. I do not find it to be a helpful descriptor of *ratchet* nor perhaps much else but include it here for the sake of making such a comment, and because I believe to elide it from this quote and not commenting on it could be even more problematic.

Foxxi also uses "sexy" and "sultry" (line 5) as descriptors of her drag, terms which carry with them the sexual connotations without the (perhaps) sexually derogatory associations of *ratchet*. Since *ratchet* occurs with *hood*, directly after "glam[8]", however, it is hard to say whether Foxxi is using it to imply sexuality or if she is using it to describe a visual aesthetic that differs from the "old school" look (both of which are interpretations that employ culturally nuanced understandings of the apparent difference she is referencing). Either way, these terms serve as reminders of the long history of sexually charged performance and humor within the drag scene (see Newton 1979), of the toying with being taken seriously while taking nothing seriously, and the long history of the influence of African American Language and culture in queer communities. Foxxi's comparisons of "old school" aesthetics and the styles she additionally enjoys performing lend some insight into the privilege granted to the styles of white drag performers (i.e., traditionally, country and Broadway/showgirl numbers) over music and performances that are indexical or celebratory of non-white music and culture.

Foxxi, an African American[9] performer who identifies openly as a woman—she talks in interviews about how drag led her to her coming out as trans—and who performs female-presenting drag, also mentions "doin some Nicki Minaj or some Cardi B.", referencing that she lip-syncs to the music of two well-known female rappers of color. As the comparisons of "old school drag" and newer drag rely on more personal experience and explanation from Foxxi, she demonstrates how intricately woven are her ideas about class, identity, race, and

[8] A shortened version of glamorous, meaning roughly the same thing in this context.
[9] Labels for ethnicity, gender, and other identity categories are taken from the demographic information sheet filled out by respondents in their own words (see Appendix B, "Personal Information") and are here used as a best attempt to represent their original words, including capitalization and spelling. While I acknowledge that it is not always necessary to include demographic labels for race and gender, I include them here because of their relevance to the type of community and the sociocultural complexities within it.

artistic ambition. These ideas integral to understanding the cultures and ways of speaking in the Gayborhood, both for Foxxi individually and for the community.

Foxxi's unpacking of the "old school" label is informative and complex—she is hardly the only performer to use these words to characterize the scene—but one subtlety in her initial response in Excerpt 4.1 cannot be overlooked: she remarks that Oklahoma drag *has changed*. Her authority on this subject from her long-held position in the community and her storied rise to popularity within the scene. "Old school" describes a drag performance aesthetic that was pervasive in much of the history of drag in the Gayborhood, and which can still be seen in some parts of the community today. The change, then, stems from younger performers who in the last decade or two have begun to break away from the more traditional styles of performance, partially a result of pop culture's influence.

Kelly, a Caucasian, cisgender Male[10] performer of female-impersonation with nearly two decades of experience, also characterizes parts of the scene as old school. She[11] remarks that the 39th St. Enclave and the venues there have become somewhat predictable (see Excerpt 4.3 below), at least in terms of the performers who are regularly booked at such venues. She alludes to the fact that drag shows in OKC were scarcer in the past and that, because of their more infrequent occurrences that they felt more special ("kind of an amazing thing", line 1). On the one hand, you would expect the rising frequency of drag shows to be something to be celebrated for a performer—or even for an advocate of queer representation and culture. On the other hand, the latter half of Kelly's statement seems to assume a relationship ("just because", line 3) between the regularity of the casts at different shows and why she works less

[10] See note 9

[11] The tradition of referencing performers pronominally defaults to the gender they present in drag, despite gender identity outside of drag performance; most performers still use these pronouns outside of drag as well.

in Oklahoma City (lines 3-5). That is, while the number of shows has grown in the scene, Kelly suggests that this does not necessarily mean that the number of entertainers performing is so much greater.

Excerpt 4.3. Kelly on some changes in the gayborhood

1	Kelly:	used to, if you got to see a drag show it was, uh, kind of an amazing thing, it was
2		cool, you know there were just a few a week, now there's a show at every bar
3		every night, um, I don't work a whole lot of Oklahoma City anymore, just because
4		of that fact, I know if I want to see a certain drag queen I can go to a certain bar
5		every night, it's always the same queens

Her thoughts here appear, at first, to relate only to the audience's experience (e.g., "if I want to see a certain drag queen I can go to a certain bar every night"); there is less variety in types of entertainment, at least as far as what is regularly offered at a given venue.

Considering Kelly's position as another performer, however, highlights another important component of this scene. Her attention to the increase of popularity, frequency, and regularity of drag shows remind us that to be a headliner[12], and particularly one who is employed[13], is to have one of the most prestigious positions within this community. And to be employed at such a venue is to perform there regularly. Not everyone in these positions is equally praised or admired by the rest of the community, but these regularly employed performers often carry some clout in the decisions made about who gets booked at various gigs and shows in their employer's venue. It's probably not too difficult to imagine how this system

[12] i.e., a host or someone who's name is published in large text on a show's advertisement.
[13] i.e., not contracted on an event-to-evet basis.

can lead to problems in diversification of performances, particularly when you consider drag family relationships (discussed further in Section 4.4); Foxxi mentioned in one conversation that "every club has their token black girl", a rather disappointing if not unsurprising reality for such a community. While we cannot say definitively that Kelly alludes to this in her response, we can assume her knowledge of this as she critiques the regularity of the shows.

More experienced performers have more personal history to draw upon when characterizing the drag scene in the gayborhood, but a difference in years of experience does not stop newer performers from weighing in on the discussion, particularly as it pertains to the availability of decently paying gigs in the scene. Gui[14]n, a performer with less than a year of experience performing in the scene at the time of this interview, offers her opinion of these regular shows, their lack of diversity, and how that relates to audience-focused entertainment.

Excerpt 4.4. Guin on the quality of regular shows

1	Guin:	who in their right mind wouldn't want to book someone who doesn't bring people
2		in or don't like—or like, likes her stuff, but, it still happens, but it still happens,
3		because you're not what they, they wanna hold up this image, but my thing is like,
4		okay it's 2019 in Oklahoma, your bar hasn't changed in years, your image is
5		fading girl, and it's not- your girls may be polished[15], but your show's not polished,
6		it's boring as fuck

It's worth noting that Guin cleverly alludes to three factors in the problem of diversifying regular bookings: 1) the audience and their preferences; 2) the managers/owners/senior

[14] Guin openly identifies as a Caucasian Transgender Woman; see note 9.
[15] A frequent term used to describe a professional and impressive ability to present oneself, primarily regarding makeup and tailored outfits.

performers who make the decisions on bookings; and by implication, 3) the newer performers. Guin is not unaware of the importance of providing entertainment to the audience and its symbiotic relationship to the bar/drag shows, and she implies (lines 1-2) that the older, long-held positions in the regular shows are not necessarily bringing in crowds.

Guin gives credit to the individual performers and their talents and presentation, and in a way that appears to be addressing the managers of the shows ("your[16] girls may be polished", line 5). This conditional mood is juxtaposed quite interestingly with the negated indicative ("your show's not polished", line 5), in ways that are structurally[17] and phonetically[18] parallel, so that we are extra clear that the compliment of the individuals is not to be extended to the show and the system of bookings behind it. She punctuates this, in a way, by labelling this unnamed show "boring as fuck", echoing very much the sentiment offered by Kelly above.

Alexander, a drag king[19] who also had less than a year of experience performing in the Gayborhood at the time of this interview, noted the problem of diversification as well.

Excerpt 4.5. Alexander on lack of diversity in OKC drag

1	Alexander:	oh god yeah, here lately, some clubs have been called out for some stuff, now
2		I'm not, gonna get too deep into that because, I'm not about, the drama or
3		anything but…I'm constantly scrolling through Facebook looking you know,
4		<Q who's getting booked, who do I wanna go see tonight, oh it's the same
5		people, every night Q>

[16] This does not appear to be a universal *you*, and it almost certainly is not addressed to the interviewer.
[17] e.g., subject compliment "polished"; NP = "your N"
[18] e.g., "girls" having plural a voiced plural morpheme [-z]; "show's" having a contracted copula [-z]
[19] i.e., male-presentation of drag; Alexander openly identifies as a While Male and also talks of his being assigned female at birth and how drag led to his realization that he is a trans man; see note 9.

He and his drag peers primarily performed at the Wreck Room—a popular spot for the LGBTQ+ youth of the area, being the only 18-and-up venue for drag on "the strip" (more on venues discussed in Section 4.3)—before it closed in January 2019. At the time of Alexander's recording session, just after the Wreck Room's closing, many younger performers and queer people were open about the problem of diversity in performers and performance styles within the scene, and in ways that caused tensions within the drag community

Alexander's sensitivity to the rising tension on the issue of diversification is revealed in his otherwise ambiguous reference to "some stuff" for which "some clubs" have been "called out" (line 1). His decision not to offer more details or opinions on the matter speak to the gravity of community-straining tensions within this little queer bubble of OKC; his explanation (e.g., "I'm not about the drama") seems to suggest an additional desire to avoid stirring up any more tensions among "some clubs" for their lack of diversity. It just so happens that there has been an ongoing conversation, largely on social media outlets, confronting this problem in the last few years. They are still continuing at the time of the writing of this dissertation and still cause rifts among the various cliques and families of drag performers (more in Section 4.4).

In the latter part of Alexander's excerpt, he echoes much of the criticisms of other performers offered here. He performs a hypothetical inner dialogue, gesturing with his smartphone in his hand as if he were navigating social media while asking himself "who's getting booked…oh it's the same people, every night" (lines 3-5). Recall that Kelly and Guin offer the same critique of the scene, tethering the static casts to a lack of excitement in shows and hinting at the added difficulty for new performers to get their start in the scene.

Gizele [20], a performer who has nearly a decade of experience doing female impersonation in the scene, hints at this, too, citing that OKC drag used to be even less diverse than it is today, characterizing it as "very cookie cutter" drag.

Excerpt 4.6. Alexander, Rae, and Celeste on the "cut throat" OKC drag scene

1	Interviewer:	how would you describe drag in Oklahoma
2	Alexander:	cut throat
3	Rae:	yeah, cut throat, but, not as cut throat as, Las Vegas, Texas
4	Alexander:	New York, California, it's cut throat, yeah, but it's cut throat for a reason, there's
5		so few of us here that, the ones that do get booked, are the ones that are like, top
6		dog, as a lot of people would say
7	Rae:	m-hm
8	Alexander:	uh, but, the ones that, don't get booked we're trying to get that booking we're
9		trying to, make a name for ourselves
10	Rae:	it is ha:rd
11	Alexander:	so we've got to battle those ones that are always booked so
12	Celeste:	and then you just have people like me who just, wanna do it for fun

She does acknowledge that the few changes in casts have been good, and Foxxi claims that "if you do your research" you might see some diversity in terms of race and background compared to previous eras of the OKC drag scene. However, their positions as experienced performers in the scene might render them more nuanced, if not more careful, in their characterization of the scene. While everyone acknowledges the hardships faced by aspiring entertainers, the less experienced performers seem to more directly acknowledge this. Below, Alexander, who we

[20] Gizele identifies as a Black Cis-Male entertainer who does female impersonation; see note 9.

heard from in Excerpt 4.5, discusses his take on the scene with his drag peers Rae[21] and Celeste[22], who each have less than a year of experience performing as well.

One important reminder in reading this excerpt is that this discussion of a "cut throat" scene occurs in direct response to a question about the community's overall characterization (e.g., line 1 "how would you describe drag in OK"). That is, these new performers have had such an experience that their initial response (at least in this interview setting at this stage of the discussion) addresses the already implied tough situation would-be performers have in front of them. It is also important to call attention to Rae's distinguishing of bigger cities with well-known drag scenes from the OKC scene (e.g., line 3), which is followed up by Alexander's drafting of the situation for these performers. Namely, he acknowledges "a reason" (line 4) for this characterization of being "cut throat", tying it to the small numbers in OKC[23] and the relative amplification of celebrity status in the community[24]. Thus, for the newer performers who are, in Alexander's own words, "trying to get that booking, trying to make a name for ourselves", they must "battle" the established performers for stage time, a war metaphor whose nuance can be found in the other discussions and descriptions of the power dynamics within this community.

I should acknowledge that Celeste, who is a few years older than Alexander and Rae, despite her little experience in the drag scene, is both more reserved with her speech and with her engagement with the discussion. Her approach to drag centers on self-expression and toying with gender, rather than with entertainment and celebrity. Given the struggle that her

[21] Rae uses the label "Black/AA" to express her ethnic/racial identity; she also uses the label Transgender to describe herself and presents in self-described "feminine" and "female" presentation. See note 9.
[22] Celeste is a (cisgender) white Male who, at 49, is more than two decades older than Rae and Alexander and thus has a bit of a different experience in entering the scene than they do. See note 9.
[23] e.g., "there's so few of us here" (lines 4-5).
[24] e.g., "the ones that do get booked are the ones that are like top dog" (lines 5-6).

peers have endured in their attempts to make a name for themselves, it would be no wonder why Celeste would choose not to "battle" as directly as her brother and sister have.

While the newer performers appear to demonstrate a more direct characterization of Oklahoma City's drag community as cut-throat, they are not alone in pointing out this tendency of the scene, nor even to use that exact descriptor. Below in Excerpt 4.7, Kelly describes some of the experience she has had as a long-time performer in the scene; that same excerpt offers (below Kelly; separate interviews) Foxxi's comments on competition in the scene. In both cases, the term "cut-throat" is employed in talk about the OKC drag scene.

Excerpt 4.7. Kelly on her experience; Foxxi on competition; "cut-throat"

1	Kelly:	you have to have thick skin, cause it is cut-throat…competition with, more
2		established queens, they can be really cut-throat…it's really hard to get into the
3		shows…my first, 13 years of drag, I was in any show that I wanted to be in
4		Oklahoma City, then I quit drag for two years…when I came back, the entire scene
5		had changed, and people who were my friends, that I worked with all the time, had
6		moved on to other bars or had finally gotten their own shows, and would not book me
7	Foxxi:	it's so cut throat cause it like either they feel competition, so they wanna like
8		either try to bring you down, break you down to make you feel inferior or,
9		unconfident but that, they doin that because they know that you're competition

Kelly's use of the term "cut-throat" is first used as a reason for needing "thick skin" in this community, something she mentions elsewhere as it relates to *throwing shade*—ritual insults that tend to focus on drag appearance and performance. *Throwing shade* appears to have its roots in African American Language and culture as well, looking much like *the dozens,*

which Smitherman (1994) characterizes as being used "to test not only [players'] verbal skills but also their capacity to maintain their *cool* (p. 100; emphasis hers). In Excerpt 4.7, Kelly references competition with other queens, offering personal experience of her own that, presumably, demonstrates the types of cut-throat or competitive behaviors in the community. Kelly importantly mentions her absence[25] from the scene, a small two years compared to her then 13-year record in the community, but two years is a great deal of time in terms of the opportunities for change in this community. This absence appears to have cost her the freedom of performing "in any show that I wanted", now positioning herself as competition with performers who "were" (and presumably are no longer; see lines 5-6) her friends. This competitive coloring of the community is consistent across every participant in this study, though they do not all talk about it the same way or in the same contexts.

Foxxi, for example, uses the term "cut-throat" to refer to the competitive nature of critique, shade, and the arguments various performers get into (online and in person) in the above excerpt. She describes the surface motivation for such criticisms as seeking to make someone feel "unconfident" or to "break [them] down", but offers a nuanced understanding of them as well: "they doin that because they know you competition" (lines 8-9). For both Kelly and Foxxi, the cut-throat nature of the scene is tied to the competitive situation that almost all performers find themselves in. It is at least implied that Kelly lost friends over this sort of phenomenon, while Foxxi explains, perhaps normalizes, and certainly contextualizes the types of language-related "cut-throat" behavior that occurs in the scene.

These insights have led to a better understanding of the overall characterization of Oklahoma City drag, particularly as it pertains to the work it takes to be successful (or to get

[25] Kelly discloses in the interview that, following a bad car accident, she had to take time to physically recover from her injuries, more still before she was strong enough to be performing on stage (in heels) again.

noticed and hopefully be able to make money) in the scene. Still, these insights in the "old school" and "cut-throat" tendencies of the scene do not capture all of the diversity in its audiences, in its new, up-and-coming talent, or in the community's relative seclusion from the rest of OKC in relation to how that seclusion bolsters the community roles in complicated and important ways. Below, the various venues are briefly discussed, followed by a return to performers' thoughts on community and drag family, specifically focusing on how that is an amplified factor in this community specifically.

4.3 Drag venues in the OKC Gayborhood

Of the many venues which typically host drag performances or weekly shows, I visited, observed, and informally talked with patrons at every single one of them. I only recorded in three of them. All other recordings were at private homes nearby. Figure 4.1 maps the area.

Figure 4.1. Map of OKC "Gayborhood"; pins for venues discussed (red) and others (purple)

The six places which were major sites for this investigation were: The Boom, Tramps, Pheonix Rising, The Copa Cabana, The Finishline, and the Wreck Room. The last of these, The Wreck Room, was a club which also had a long reputation, most recently as a safe space for 18-older crowds to enjoy and attempt drag performances. Naturally, this drew a younger crowd, especially since they did not serve alcohol. In 2018, however, The Wreck Room closed. I observed several competitions and performances here before they did. Soon after, the hotel which housed the Copa and the Finishline was sold to a new owner, and those venues are also no longer functioning as they used to.

Because of their role in this study, and in the community prior to closing, the venues which are no longer functioning as they were are still depicted in Figure 4.1. All venues which housed interviews and discussions (recorded or unrecorded) are marked with red geo-pins in the figure while other venues which were mentioned or otherwise play a role in the community (even if unstudied here) are labeled with purple geo-pins

4.3.1 Venues and nightlife

There are two things to know regarding how a typical night of observation went: (1) the common patterns for regular, younger patrons, and (2) the more stationary crowds that did not bar-hop as much. In the case of the latter, Rising Phoenix, Tramps, and Apothecary [26]were often the most common bars with static crowds. This area of OKC is just down the street from Oklahoma City University, and there is almost always a notable presence of college-aged LGBTQ+[27] people who frequent the area. For these young people, a night out almost always entails migration from one place to another, to another, and often ending at one of the clubs

[26] Formerly The Park
[27] I use this to includes allies as well in this particular instance.

housed in the Hotel Habana. Apothecary offers a billiards table, the occasional go-go dancer, an outside patio, and a list of cocktails. Rising Phoenix is a regularly hosting drag venue with fewer boutique-ish cocktails offered, but with a garden patio and outside bar. Tramps is notorious for the strength of their mixed drinks, which must be purchased with cash (the only venue not to take cards as a form of payment). These venues tend to place earlier on the queer pilgrimage, usually leading young people to The Boom for the drag shows, then to Copa or Finishline for dancing and traditional club-like atmosphere.

Asking respondents and conversation partners about their understanding of the social makeup of the area, vis-à-vis the different venues and their respective typical audiences, was a part of the investigative protocol. The Boom is one of the biggest venues on in the area. Although Angles competes with its size, The Boom boasts a smoking bar, a smoke-free bar with a stage, booths, tables, and bar seating, and an outside patio that has even more recently been renovated. It hosts drag shows and events on 5-7 nights a week.

The Finishline and The Copa Cabana are themed by country ("cowboy") bar and dance club, respectively, and both are housed with the Hotel Habana[28]. Copa did host drag shows on some weekdays, and often has competitions (e.g., underwear/dancing, amateur drag, etc.) that draws weeknight crowds. Finishline did not typically host drag shows other than special events.

Phoenix Rising is another popular and active site for drag. It hosts 5-7 shows a week, with many performers who are seasoned and well known. Lastly, Tramps is a venue which also hosts drag shows, typically with the same (or nearly the same) cast week-to-week. This is a very popular bar with a widespread reputation for strong pours, right in the middle of "the Strip", the parking lot of which must be crossed to get from the Habana bars to anywhere else,

[28] Formerly Habana Inn

and vice-versa. Almost all the performers I met eventually talked to me at this bar, however briefly, and one group interview was recorded here. It is a heavily trafficked place often made a pit-stop if the destination is another venue. Most patrons and performers move around a little bit, at least on different nights, and many bar-hop every weekend. Ultimately, there is no picture of the community without accounting for all of these different sites.

The above does not describe everyone's experience or characterization of the venues, but it helps capture a broad view of the scene. The performers' characterizations of the venues, discussed below, more directly ties together drag performance, experience, and opportunity.

4.3.2 Audiences and experiences

Participants of this project were all asked about whether there were different audiences at different venues, and almost everyone had something different to say. Their discussion of venues about their own drag experience, however, is both ubiquitous and telling. While it seems likely that a performer's early experience in their drag career might associate places of early performances with stages of their journey in entertainment, it is also true that almost all participants associate certain venues with certain milestones of such a journey. That is, venues are referenced in this data according to the type of drag found in them, but also according to the status afforded by performing at certain venues.

Rae and Alexander are two performers who are relatively new to the scene. They have less than a year of experience performing in the community, a little more in experimenting with drag. Their lack of experience, however, does not keep them from making clear claims about the venues and the people who frequent them.

Excerpt 4.8. Alexander and Rae on some of the different venues

1	Rae:	yes, Sunday nights here, at Tramps, place is packed, barely for a place to sit, and
2		that's--
3	Alexander:	you've got, the people here for the classic drag, here, at Tramps
4	Rae:	yeah
5	Alexander:	The Boom you go there and it's the younger community
6	Rae:	uh-huh
7	Alexander:	they wanna see the ratchet, they wanna see the upbeat
8	Rae:	<SINGING that ass, that ass, that ass SINGING>, yeah I'm [you know]
9	Alexander:	[but that was at] The Boom too,
10		Boom is, the younger generation of, I'm just gonna say it, it's the younger gays, the
11		Phoenix, it's the old rich gays, like this is how, we decide whether or not we're
12		going to a show <Q do you wanna join me tonight Q>, <Q where's it at Q>, (.)
13		<Q Phoenix Q>, <Q old rich gays I'm going Q>
14	Rae:	yeah
15	Alexander:	<Q do you wanna join me tonight Q>, <Q where's it at Q>, <Q Wreck Room Q>,
17		<Q kids, (.) nah I'm good Q>…but, just the different, people at the bars, like, I can
18		tell you straight up, Pheonix, old rich gays, The Boom, the younger kids, Wreck
19		Room used to be the kid kids, Tramps, classic, you go down to Copa, the weird

Rae and Alexander immediately discuss Tramps—the venue where this particular segment of the recording took place—by mentioning popularity[29] and the aesthetic[30], the latter

[29] e.g., "place is packed", line 1; it should be noted that this popularity or big crowd is constrained by the particular day. Not many would have shown up to Copa on a Sunday, but Tramps could still be packed. However, if it were a Thursday and The Boom were packed, you would probably get spill-over into Tramps.
[30] e.g., "classic drag", line 3.

of which is probably tied to the oft-termed "old school drag" that describes much of the scene in Oklahoma.

Alexander and Rae immediately move to The Boom, where we are told about the typical audience [31] and the aesthetic[32] ("the ratchet…upbeat", line 7; "that ass, that ass", line 8). This conversation then seems to pick up in the comparative work by Alexander, who then juxtaposes The Boom ("younger gays") with the Rising Phoenix, at which are the "old rich gays" (line 11). He then offers a performative hypothetical conversation which we are told is an example of how one comes to deciding which venue to attend.

The interesting follow-up to this includes another performative exchange in which, unlike the offer to attend Phoenix with the "old rich gays", the offer is refused because the Wreck Room is where the "kids"[33] are at. As the Wreck Room is a venue that allows patrons of 18-years-old and up to enter, we see an important distinction between the "young community" which is comprised of adult, of-age-to-purchase-liquor patrons of clubs and bars, and the "kid kids" who are not of age[34]. This characterization of the Wreck Room is constant throughout every interview and group discussion: it is an old venue associated with underage audiences and aspiring young performers.

Briefly, it should also be mentioned that Copa gets labeled "the weird" [35], which Alexander associates with some of the other, less-popularized subcultures of queer communities (e.g., *leather*, *kink*, *role-playing*, etc.; see Barrett 2017)—in this instance, this "weird" does not necessarily carry with it overtly negative or evaluative connotations.

[31] The "younger community" here should be disambiguated from the underage crowd at Wreck Room; rather, they are college-aged.
[32] Here, where Foxxi performs, Alexander uses the term *ratchet* to describe the aesthetic.
[33] Notice also the use of duplicative "kid kids" to designate younger-than the "younger community".
[34] It is a sort of unsaid truth that some of these youth who find a way in, in fact, are not even 18.
[35] A nominal adjective that occurs frequently in this dataset.

Unlike other venues, the Wreck Room is unique in that it's a club for people under the age of 21, but it is special because of its role in providing early experiences for drag on part of both the audience and newer aspiring performers. Many young LGBTQ+ Oklahomans throughout the years have made their way to the Wreck Room at some point. It was a safe space for young queer and trans youth, and it was, for many, the first step in making a name for oneself on the drag scene. In one group discussion, Foxxi, who has had considerable success[36], shared the following story of the first drag show she ever went to[37].

Excerpt 4.9. Foxxi on the first drag show she ever saw

Foxxi: when I went to my first drag show, and, and you know what I'm saying just being a gay boy, you feel liberated you feel like, you feel accepted, you like <Q oh my god I love what they're doing, it's a good time Q> um, like my first drag show I like, on the sideline I was dancing my ass off cause I loved the music they were doing you know, I wasn't trying to showboat I just was myself, you know just dancing bitch getting my life, I wasn't like necessarily trying to steal the show, but, it was a Wreck Room show, and I was just having fun… this my first time, I've never been to a gay club, I'm living my life and you know me, I love to dance, so bitch they were playing all the good music, well attention got kinda like thrown to me at the very end of the show, the club was over and then, one of the queens like literally came outside as we was leaving and ran up and was like, <Q I love, what you were doing, but you know, it's not about you, so don't try to take over Q>, I was like ((SHOCKED FACE)), and my best friend was like <Q well he wants to be a drag queen Q>, and she was like, <Q everybody wants to be a drag queen Q> and walked off

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[36] i.e., she has been a regularly booked performer, one of the only African American performers to be so consistently booked; and she has won a number of local and regional drag pageants.

[37] At the point at which Foxxi offered this reflection, she had already shared that her experience with drag led to her coming out as trans; since the experience (i.e., the one retold in Excerpt 4.9) occurred before that realization, Foxxi's use of pronouns reflects how she was referenced before coming out. These pronouns are, for the purposes of honoring the data and the perspective offered by Foxxi, written *sic erat dictum*.

Foxxi's story offers numerous insights, almost all of which say something about the experiences had of many queer people and queer people of color in Oklahoma. Something which stands out most notably here, though, are that her first experience appears to be marked both by the freedom found in a safe space to be queer ("you feel liberated, you feel accepted", line 2) and by the competitive tension created in such safe spaces among the various entertainers of the crowds.

More specifically, this unnamed drag queen[38] referenced in lines 9-13 appears to be potentially threatened by the attention Foxxi got just by her dancing, and she does not seem to think much of young Foxxi-to-be's desire to partake in drag culture and entertainment. This has proven to be a commonality across this study: established performers (regardless of levels of experience) acknowledge the ever-growing popularity of drag and the oversimplified perception of what it takes to do drag. Some of this is alluded to in the language regard data (see Chapters 5 and 6), and some of it is directly discussed in conversations about *RuPaul's Drag Race* and drag on social media (see Chapter 7). In any case, the work it takes to make a name in this community makes sense out of the protective position many performers take when hearing of a new person who wants to pick up drag as though it were a weekend hobby.

In addition to Foxxi's insights considered above, a final more important point emerges from this data: that such competitive spirits roam even here in the Wreck Room, where so many young queer people see their first drag show, and where so many young aspiring performers get their first gig. Foxxi's account of this story was introduced as the first time she ever saw a drag show (line 1); as an established performer herself, it is no wonder she sees this as a part of her journey to becoming who she is and emphasizes the role of the confrontation

[38] Foxxi kept the anonymity of this particular drag queen but did say that they are good friends today.

in the story[39]. Presumably, we take away that Foxxi did not listen to the less-than-encouraging words and that she made a name for herself over the coming years, but this is how it started.

The Wreck Room's unique position among the other venues has other affects as well. While most of the other venues have more regular shows with more regular casts, the young and revolving cast at the Wreck Room (and the young but relatively loyal audience they had) demanded new, innovated, boundary-pushing performances that challenged the norms of the community[40]. For this reason, Kelly, who has more years in experience than any other performer in this study, claimed "I have to prove myself more in Wreck Room than I have to at any other place". Yet Kelly hosted shows there until they closed. Alexander, Rae, and Celeste all say that, despite the differences in crowds and venues, the Wreck Room was their favorite because of the openness of what counted as drag, what got booked, and how the crowd reacted to it (see Extract AD.2 in Appendix D for an example). It is an interesting and complicated venue that a great many people were sad to see its doors close.

Some other distinctions among types of drag should be made here, but the discussion of "pageant drag" as it differs from club-based shows deserves more time and attention than I can give here. I will say, however, that the pageant-style of drag used to permeate shows across OKC venues in the past, that they are very different from the headliners of today, specifically at The Boom, in at least the following components: music, appearance, and performance style. To put it succinctly, the "old school", "classic" style of drag draws from pageantry (recall Foxxi's notes on big hair, big jewels, and big gowns; Excerpt 4.2), while newer and updated styles of drag performance draw from today's popular culture, drawing heavily from African

[39] It is, in fact, where she ends the story.
[40] You would be unlikely to find anything that could appropriately be called "old school drag" in this venue, perhaps with the exception of the host, who is usually a more well-known performer.

American Language, life, and culture. The employment of new and modern pop/hip-hop music contributes to these differences. The presentation and appearances of performers has diversified from glamorous and elegant female impersonation to sexual, comedic, class-/ethnicity-indexing costumes corresponding to various character motivations of each performer participating in these clubs. The venues that regularly support these innovations in their shows are likely the loci for the change more seasoned performers allude to. We saw above that the Wreck Room offered a potential epicenter for change, fostering a community of very young queer people with new ideas about drag, self-expression, and artistry. One other venue has played a role in the changing tides of OKC drag: The Boom.

The Boom is deserving of some specific attention because of the "younger crowd" that Alexander alludes to, because of the status offered by performing at this venue, and because the occasional diversity of its cast. Still, there are some aspects to The Boom that rely on more traditional, if not conservative, approaches to drag. Gizele, for example, comments that it is still influenced by a classic sort of Vegas-style of show.

Excerpt 4.10. Gizele on drag at The Boom

1	Interviewer:	are there differences in audiences or venues
2	Gizele:	most definitely, like The Boom is very much a show bar, and it's very kinda Vegas
3		style, so you're not just gonna get a drag show, you're also gonna get kind of that
4		experience…you wouldn't see Foxxi at The Boom back in the day
5	Foxxi:	hell naw bitch

Vegas showgirls are said to be one of the proposed early influences on drag culture (see Newton 1979), while more recently Harlem ball culture has been identified as a more direct

influence on the drag culture of today (see Livingston 1991). These are important historical points to keep in mind for their different potential inspirations in today's drag scene, and they are worth extra critical attention given that the former was an entertainment industry dominated by cisgender white female performers and the latter a collective and expressive cultural celebration practiced by predominantly working-class Black and Latinx people of color in New York City. In Excerpt 4.10, Gizele makes a further point by saying that Foxxi would not have been seen working there (like she is today), presumably a comment on both the requirements to work at The Boom and the credentials a younger Foxxi might not have had. Foxxi, who was present in the group discussion where this occurred, immediately agrees (line 5), and elsewhere, she elaborates that has grown as a performer and that she has learned to appreciate some of the pageantry (see Appendix D, Excerpt AD.2 for an example).

In many ways, because Foxxi is a regular at The Boom, she offers a perspective not available to many of the other performers in this study. Recalling that the crowd is predominantly younger, college-aged people who are (to put it frankly) more interested in today's popular music than they are classic, Broadway, or showgirl musicals, it is no wonder that Foxxi explicitly states "I have to put the crowd out before I do anything, I know what they wanna hear" (see Appendix D, Excerpt AD.3). That is, Foxxi's discussion of The Boom centers around her role there at the time of the interview, as an employed, regularly-performing entertainer for large audiences, a substantial portion of which are serious fans of hers. On the nights that I spent observing and talking with Foxxi while she was performing or hosting a show at The Boom, every small conversation between sets was interrupted by new and old fans expressing their adoration of her. As she walks through a crowd to get a drink before her next number, she is constantly hugged, kissed, touched, hollered at, and offered drinks. And when

she does get on stage for her number, the room almost always explodes with cheers and applause. It's no wonder that here at The Boom, the location of our first recorded interview and a place that helped her grow her celebrity, she thinks of the crowd.

Excerpt 4.11. Foxxi on Rising Phoenix and her first performance there

1	Foxxi:	and you know why I say that cause when I first started talking to [owners/managers],
2		they- when I first started, when I first won Newcomer [pageant], that was in 2012, they
3		literally just started, doing drag in their bars, like literally just started, so they wasn't very
4		like, equipped, of you know of what they wanted in drag, they knew what made the bars
5		in Oklahoma and at the time the money, so of course you gonna appeal to what you think's
6		makin you money…I got booked there, and, I was raunchy bitch, if you knew me when I
7		first started I was very, you know raunchy very ratchet very just you now gutta [i.e., *gutter*],
8		not so much gutta cause I was very just, in your face Foxxi, my cliché was a thong and a
9		jacket bitch you know that's what you got, so, I can't, be mad at them because, that's not
10		what they were feeling that cause that's what I was giving

Foxxi also mentions the other venues, like the Rising Phoenix, which she describes as "more burlesque" in its shows, citing that there was a little deviation from the Vegas-type classic drag, but she holds there is more *variety* in the regular performances at The Boom. This description is accompanied by Foxxi's story of her earlier career in drag and the Phoenix's first trial at hosting drag performances. She notes that the managers of the venue were very particular about the type of drag they wanted in their shows. She has since performed many times at the Pheonix, and her memories of these early days appear to encourage her ability to be uniquely herself while accepting some of the norms of the community.

Foxxi's talk about the early days at the Phoenix (lines 3-6) centers around the managers' prioritization of making money. The view of drag as a money-making enterprise is certainly not new; Esther Newton's *Mother Camp* (1979) references the early drag industry in Vegas, the economic role it played there, and the work ethic it took for early performers "on the job". Today, however, the commodification of drag via popular media and shows appears to make the economics and capitalist understandings of drag as prevalent as the creative and expressive components to the performance. Foxxi lends some understanding towards the managers (lines 9-10) in that they wanted popular, proven-to-make-money shows that were already on stage at the Boom, and she admits that this is not the type of performance she was offering. At least part of her understanding and patience with this seemingly narrow view of drag entertainment stems from her growth, involvement with pageantry, and the diversification of her types of performances.

Foxxi's experience has included a serious consideration of herself, of her unique approach to drag and the character(s) she portrays, and more recently, the value of what her drag mother and mentors have imparted on her regarding how to be successful in this community. She has indeed achieved a level of notoriety and success not afforded to all new performers in this community, and it's not hard to see why she would be appreciative and thoughtful on her adapting to change, growth, and the economics of the 39th St. Enclave.

As a brief additional note, the Copa is an important venue in this community for a few reasons. It hosts the biggest dance floor and consistently draws the biggest crowds on weekend nights. It typically hosts several special or recurring thematic events throughout the week. It is inside the Habana Inn (now Hotel Habana), a long-standing LGBTQ+ institution that houses another bar (the Finishline, or the "country" bar), a gift shop with many adult items, and a

pool/patio area were many various LGBTQ+ groups hold summer events. And, most importantly, it is one of the venues that hosts open talent nights for aspiring new performers.

Newer queens have an easier shot getting in a Wreck Room show than they do at the Boom or Phoenix, but open talent nights are almost always where performers get their start. These require performers to be approved in advance of the event, which means they must make some sort of impression or request to the manager/host. A spot at the Wreck Room required a reputation, experience, or close connection with somebody, even if minimally, but open talent nights are fair game for anyone who could convince the host that they deserved a shot.

Foxxi, now a big name in OKC drag and a regular performer at the biggest venues, reminds the others in a group discussion "people forget like I've been-- I've fought myself way to the top bitch I did every open talent night you can think of back then…it's how you got noticed" (Appendix D, Excerpt AD.4, lines 8-10). It's worth noting that Foxxi mentions her first booking was also at the Copa at an open talent night, now having worked her way up to being a regularly booked performer and often host of shows. It's through open talent nights and smaller gigs that aspiring performers can start to gain attention and get noticed for bigger venues and more populated events[41].

One similarity across respondents is the tendency to describe venues as they correspond to their own experiences or memories at certain shows of these venues. Of course these different experiences correspond with different characterizations in many cases, but the similar methods of reflection appear to be worth noting. Kelly, for example, mentions that she doesn't work in OKC much anymore (see Excerpt 4.3), and she cites the changed scene and "cut-throat" nature of some seasoned queens as the reasoning for that decision. She says that she

[41] There might be 30 people or less at a given smaller open talent night at the Copa, compared to the so-called "Amateur night" at The Boom (see below) which could have closer to two hundred.

doesn't mind going to The Boom, of all places, to work "for free"[42] on Thursday nights. These nights are typically for newer and less-popular talent who don't have regular bookings other popular nights of the week, and so, the performers are paid less. Performers who are accustomed to a fairer compensation for their work are not too enthusiastic about such pay.

Excerpt 4.12. Kelly on The Boom, working for free, and having a mentor

1	Kelly:	I don't mind going to The Boom and doin, you know what we call the cat-a-call night,
2		where you go in to work for free on a Thursday, um I use those opportunities for me to
3		learn from people, and for people to learn from me, where a lot of the more established
4		drag queens are like, <Q oh I would never go in there and work for—you know ten
5		dollars or free or whatever Q>, and, I don't have a problem doing that…you have to
6		have thick skin, um, and I think you really need someone to be able to guide you, the
7		last thing that you wanna do is, jump up on a Thursday night at The Boom, and, not
8		know how to do makeup or hair, or what kinda body to put on because you'd be,
9		completely laughed off the stage and, tore apart on social media, and so um, I think you
10		need to have thick skin and you have to have a good mentor, and uh, you need to learn
11		to walk in heels, that- that would be important ((laughs))

Kelly's painting of this picture also reflects some of her own characterization of herself as a drag performer (see Chapter 6 for more). Briefly, she claims that she is seen as "old school" to the younger performers she works with at the Wreck Room (presumably the reason she has to work harder to impress them), while she is seen as "new school" to the older and long-established performers of this scene. Kelly has a career outside of drag—not altogether uncommon, but most other jobs are in the service industry while Kelly's is in the medical field.

[42] For a seasoned performer, getting paid $10-$15 for a gig is practically doing it for free.

Her financial stability means that she can go to such events as described in Excerpt 4.12 without worry that she will be wasting her time (i.e., working without earning) and can therefore focus on the more social and personal aspects of performance.

Thursdays are often the nights for amateur drag shows at The Boom, and these look rather different at than other shows The Boom puts on. For one, they are not available to just anybody who shows up and wants to enter, and as Kelly mentions above, they are in front of a potentially critical audience. If The Boom carries a reputation for entertaining and putting on shows (à la Vegas), then people are likely to grow to have an expectation of what they see. Still, given that this is all queer entertainment and expression, and in a place like Oklahoma, you might think that the audience might have learned from the rough social terrain outside the 39th St. Enclave. It appears, though, that this is not always the case. In fact, almost every performer mentions needing to have thick skin or learning to take and *throw shade* as a necessary part of being in this community; this is the first time we are seeing some explicit indication that the audience is another reason to develop thick skin (i.e., not just to protect from other shade-throwing performers).

In fact, it's precisely this tendency of The Boom to be so exacting of its performers that separates it from the other youth-associated venue. It is also certainly the case the Thursday nights have tended to draw in the students from nearby Oklahoma City University, creating an audience entirely different from those of other venues in town. Both Gizele and Foxxi tell stories of their first shows at the Wreck Room, referring to it as an extreme opposite (likely reference to professional performance/reception), both having had some of their earliest

experiences with drag at the Wreck Room and experience as seasoned performers at The Boom[43].

Even in a brief focus on the two venues give the most attention here (Wreck Room and The Boom), we find both overlap and distinction among the responses to the community's shifting, to the influence of age and popular culture. In many ways, The Boom is always the most popularly mentioned venue, and certainly more prestigious than the Wreck Room. On the other hand, the audience at The Boom is far more critical of the performers than the Wreck Room, which is largely populated by queer youth and friends and family of the drag performers in the shows. Much in the way that the characterization of the scene overall is influenced by experience and perspective, the general conversations about these venues revolve around the way that speakers see it: Wreck Room is the (kid) kids place and/or the safe space; The Boom is the hippest and/or the toughest place. This experience appears to intersect with role in the community, where we see shifts between *aspiring performer* and *knowledgeable (young) insider* affecting the ways certain venues are described. This is also affected by identity work in distinguishing between *seasoned queen* and/or *newcomer* or perhaps *hustler* (i.e., someone who is working nonstop to be successful in their drag endeavors).

The added pressure of entertainment is something threaded through the discussions—we have seen The Boom's audience mentioned by both Foxxi and Kelly—something that fuels the competition and tension among performers, but which also fosters a need for community and family, especially for so many young queer Oklahomans who have been estranged or are otherwise never accepted by their families for who they are. For this reason, it is the final goal

[43] Kelly actually pits Wreck Room against Tramps in her thoughts on the two most different venues on the strip, citing that the former has younger kids who are personalizing and changing the way drag is done, while the latter has been using "the same queens for ever" and has thus not done much to change or update the show at all.

of this chapter to discuss briefly the importance of queer and drag kinship in this community, and the roles that are played in the relationships that performers have with one another.

4.4 Drag family and roles

No study on drag performance, whether language specific or otherwise, could be conducted without consideration to drag culture, and drag family is one of the most important and pervasive components of drag culture. Put most directly, drag family encompasses a complex queer kinship system that spans across various types of relationships, almost all of which have corresponding familial labels (e.g., *mother, daughter, father, son, cousin, aunt, etc.*). This particular web of social connections within drag-performing communities has been documented (e.g., *Paris Is Burning*, Livingston 1991) and commented on:

> [T]he balls provide three things—a safe space for gay community, a space around which to construct versions of the traditional notion of kinship systems, and a site where self-identity creations can be claimed, identified, produced, and respected in terms of value in a socially meaningful way. (Caldwell 2009, p. 77)

The world which working-class Black and Latinx people of color in 1980s Harlem drag culture were constructing and in which they were performing—the drag balls or drag/ball circuit—was built around performance and kinship. Competition was around in these early days, too, but kinship has been an integral part of surviving in drag communities and LGBTQ+/Queer communities as well. Cragin (2010) describes "queerness" as it relates to kinship, or perhaps of a different sort of kinship relationship with one's community after coming out.

The establishing of an identity and community[44] in many ways resembles the practice and culture of kinship (Lemaster 2015). This, of course, is a situational reality that many queer people find themselves in, particularly the many in places like Oklahoma, who find themselves suddenly without family or support for expressing their noncisgender identities and/or non-heterosexual identities or orientations. The kinship of such communities, the Otherness reflective of sociocultural phenomena rendering it necessary for survival, is inherently political (see Eng 2010); such queer relational systems encourage the review and reconsideration of traditional kinship systems and the cultural force behind rejection of queer participants in them.

Drag family, then, is much more important than simple familial labels. In most cases, the labels indicate a relational role between one person and another of their family unit.

Excerpt 4.13. Foxxi on meeting her drag mother

1	Foxxi:	my very time doin drag, I walked, in the dressing room…and so like, I see [Drag Mother]
2		and [Drag Aunt], cause they were sittin at the, very top of the, um, dressing room
3		getting painted, and I'm just like, <Q they are so pretty Q>, you know <Q they are,
4		African American drag queens, that I haven't ever seen on the sce:ne, and, they're really
5		poli:shed, but I fell in love with [Drag Mother] cause I was like, <Q oh my gosh, you know
6		she's thick like me: Q>, like, <Q oh my god, I feel like we have so much in common Q>
7		…I didn't become her child until after I won Miss Gay Oklahoma Newcomer, like I felt like
8		I needed to earn that, just as an entertainer…so I asked her I was like, <Q oh my gosh, I
10		would love to you know you Q>, she was like, <Q I've been waiting Q> I was like
11		<Q well girl Q>, I just said to her like I had the, the stature right now like, and, now she's
12		like one of my good friends and, my drag mother

[44] I would claim this to be done dynamically and non-statically regardless of developmental stage of identity and community.

For example, Foxxi is both a *drag mother* and a *drag daughter* [45]. She recalls in an interview the very first time that she did a drag show, the very first time she met her *drag mother*-to-be (see Excerpt 4.13 above).

Foxxi's recount of her meeting and subsequent kinship with her drag mother provides insight on Foxxi's journey in the OKC drag scene, but so much of the culture is embedded in the language here, too. The first two lines of Excerpt 4.13 describes Foxxi's drag mother and aunt in the dressing room, seated a few steps above on a platform above other areas to get ready. Foxxi remarks that they were doing their makeup [46] and that they looked like professional performers, with impressive appearances[47]. Foxxi notes that she fell in love with her drag mother because she, like Foxxi, has a bigger frame and is not a petite performer ("she's thick like me", line 6). She offers some of her internal thought process by performing quotative material—an interpretation encouraged by the frequent employment of quotative *like*[48].

Another performer interrupted this particular segment, but on returning (the elided material in line 8), Foxxi tells that, despite her admiration for her drag mother, she felt she had to win a pageant title before official asking to be her daughter. Foxxi's drag mother, in fact, was already a successful, well-known, club-performing, and pageant-winning drag queen by the time she met her. As an African American performer who looked, at least in size, like Foxxi, her drag mother was no doubt inspirational and intimidating. Foxxi's desire to establish herself (e.g., to gain "stature", line 11) is indicative of the awareness of respect for those who

[45] In most cases of spoken speech, I have found that most kinship terms do not need modifying with "drag" among community members, though "drag mother" occurs more frequently than any of the others; for the sake of consistency, "drag" will be used to modify all subsequent instances of community kinship relationships and roles.
[46] i.e., *getting painted*, line 3
[47] Again, we see the in-group word "polished" to reference this.
[48] i.e., *to be like* introducing quotative (performative) material. For more, see Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004; Davydova 2019.

work at drag performance. Her telling of another performer remarking "everybody wants to be a drag queen", (Excerpt 4.9, line 13) helps us understand that there is some uphill work to be done to earn the respect, or at least professional acknowledgment, of other performers. Still, Foxxi gives herself a little credit by noting that her drag mother, upon finally being asked to mentor Foxxi, said that she had been waiting to be asked (line 10), presumably because Foxxi had already proven herself to be worthy of mentorship.

This sheds light on some of the complexity of drag kinship relationships. That is, drag mothers may very well nurture and care for their drag children[49], but they also function professionally as a mentor beyond appearances and dress, helping newer performers get bookings, meet other well-known performers, spend time with inner circles of the scene. This is not to downplay the importance of a drag mother's role in helping craft a particular style or aesthetic with artistic development of a drag persona or appearance. These are crucial parts of drag culture. Kelly hints at this in Excerpt 4.12 in which she claims that, if you are performing at The Boom, "you really need someone to be able to guide you" (line 6) or otherwise run the risk of being "torn apart" by the audience/other performers. This is perhaps especially the case for Foxxi, Kelly, and other seasoned performers who joined the scene before the drastic increase of social media influence in the community.

It just happens that Foxxi's drag daughter, Guin, is a part of this study and also offered insights on the importance of drag mentorship. She notes below that Oklahoma is small, and the drag scene (in terms of sheer numbers) is perhaps small, but given its location in this part of the US has managed to gain considerable attraction from nearby states (e.g., "we're so

[49] Aspects of *motherhood* I presume to be prototypical.

known", line 1). At first she alludes to the competitive aspects of the community mentioned elsewhere (line 2), then cautiously says that it is easy to find a drag mother but with a caveat[50].

Excerpt 4.14. Guin on drag mothers in Oklahoma

1	Guin:	I feel like cause Oklahoma is small, like it is a small place, but we're so known, like
2		everyone wants to hold that title, and they're afraid of anybody taking it, so because of that,
3		they, are very, it's easy to find a drag, mother here, yes, and find someone to help you if you
4		want that help, but you better make sure you get a damn good drag mom and drag family,
5		cause if not, you are gonna be torn to shreds… drag queens are very open and accepting and
6		diverse, but we also, do not welcome that very much

Guin's warning that one should "make sure you get a damn good drag mom and drag family" (line 4) has at least two important points to it. The first has already been stated: Drag family can help learn the tricks of the trade, help with appearance and performance, and hopefully help anticipate the types of acts to be performed at certain events. The second was only hinted at: Networking. It is crucial for drag performers to build a network as best they can with other performers, inside and outside of their families, in order to be considered for various non-recurring events[51]. Again, we are told that without such mentorship, or perhaps even protection, one might be "torn to shreds" (line 5).

It is of no surprise that Guin mentions this thought, being the drag daughter of a well-known performer who is the drag daughter of another well-known performer. In many ways, Guin must carry both the burden of being her drag mother's daughter (and thus expected to be

[50] I offer the clarification that Guin probably means it's easy to find *any ol'* drag mother.
[51] These are probably the most common precursor to getting regularly booked at venues during the week/end.

good enough to warrant the relationship without appearing to copy her drag mother too much) as well as the privilege of being better known than many other performers with her level of experience who do not have drag family with such status.

Guin offers an additionally insightful idea here in her initial thoughts in Excerpt 4.14. She notes that, because Oklahoma is so small but so successful in its thriving drag culture, it can cause difficulties for some of the goings-on of community-internal relationships and events. This sheds light on the fact that Oklahoma City, admittedly one of the most progressive places in Oklahoma[52], has a history of conservative political and sociocultural thought and behavior. As mentioned in Section 4.1 of this chapter, the "gayborhood" had a history of its own in fighting off police brutality and discrimination. Because of that fight, much of this area has grown as a separate part of the city. In many ways, because of the tenuous situation so many young LGBTQ+ people face, this safe zone provides a place to build queer kinship when they are denied access to traditional kinship outside of this community. In many ways, then, these relationships among drag community members is bolstered by the strength and separation of the queer community in OKC. As drag performers are local celebrities, especially successful and regularly performing ones, they are given a lot of attention and admiration among the broader community. These kinship relationships, then, are at least potentially magnified in their importance because of the role the performers play in the community.

The complexities that exist between the "outside" world beyond the "gayborhood" and the community-internal relationships manifest in some of the discourse on drag family in more direct ways than Foxxi or Guin have exampled. Alexander and Rae, two performers we have already heard from in this chapter, are drag siblings (along with Celeste) who share a drag

[52] I encourage the reading of this sentence with a grain of salt as OKC is still not a leader in progressive and inclusive politics, perhaps especially when it comes to LGBTQ+ populations and people of color.

father. When asked about the cost of drag, Alexander and Rae discussed the importance of asking for help when you need it, something they learned from their drag father. When asked if asking for help and borrowing clothes/makeup were commonplace across the whole community, they immediately say "no". It is interesting that the exceptions to this generalization, the positive examples that follow, are all related to drag kinship.

Alexander mentions their drag father has recently borrowed some of his new drag outfits and took them to an event in Norman to debut them in his[53] own show. Alex's comment on line 8 ("but it's fine cause they got to be seen in Norman") is introduced with a contrastive conjunction *but*, implying that there is at least a possibility that Alex could be jealous or bothered by his father's debuting of Alexander's own new outfits before he himself is able to. Alex notes that the outfits will still get to be seen, a silver lining worth holding onto.

The most crucial part of this excerpt and discussion follows the interviewer's second question. Having responded that asking for help isn't something the community widely takes part in[54], they were asked if their approach to asking for help was influenced solely because of their drag father's teachings or because of the situations they found themselves in. While the question was intentioned to discuss drag performance, appearance, and sartorial help, Alexander quickly recognizes a different sort of situation for himself. Earlier in this discussion, Alexander had descriebd the way drag—specifically drag at the Wreck Room—helped him discover his trans identity, helped him find the community who would support him in his transitioning, and helped him find the courage to bravely untake the journey of becoming more of himself. This was a source of conflict with his biological mother, and the ultimate cause of his losing familial support.

[53] i.e., drag father's.
[54]Or at least not widely outside of their own family units.

Excerpt 4.15. Alexander and Rae on drag family and helping out

1	Interviewer:	is this something you think the whole community takes part in, borrowing and asking for help
2	All:	no
3	Rae:	people, most performers let their pride and the ego, get in the way of asking for help, or
4		asking for anything in general but, like dad said, <Q ask ask ask ask Q>
5	Alexander:	if you don't ask, you'll never know, um
6	Rae:	yeah
7	Alexander:	for instance, [drag dad] borrowed, couple of my costumes last night and he went up to
8		Norman, but, that's fine, cause they got to be seen, in Norman…but if you don't
9		ask, how to make something, or to borrow something, or how to do something, you're never
10		gonna know
11	Rae:	m-hm
12	Interviewer:	do you think that's because, you've been in a position where you've had to ask for help
13	Alexander:	probably, um, I know myself, I have been in positions where, like right now, me and my wife
14		we're technically homeless, cause we got kicked out of my [biological] mom's, thank god for
15		my [drag] sisters, they let us move in, um, I feel like I owe, a lot of people a great debt for
16		helping me get to where I am today, I really do, and, I tell them this every <CV time CV>[55]…
17		((INHALES)), and I do thank you Celeste and Rae, for helping us out and <CV doing all this
18		for me CV>
19	Rae:	uh-uh, don't you [start doin that]
20	Alexander:	[I'm trying not] to cry
21	Rae:	do not start cryin, I will backhand you back to Bangkok, don't you do it
22	Alexander:	((LAUGHS)) bitch I didn't come from Bangkok

[55] This annotation is typically used (by me) to indicate creaky voice or creaky phonation; because of the acoustic similarity it has with voice breaking or cracking from holding back crying, it is used here for such purposes. I would not repeat it (or recommend it) in any analysis which investigated or analyzed voice quality.

Alexander's drag sisters, Celeste and Rae, had opened up their place for him and his wife to stay in the meantime. Alexander's voice breaks in expressing his gratitude, happy that he has a place to live, a place to be safely with his partner, happy to find kinship in the same city where his family has rejected him.

Rae, in response to Alexander's emotional statement of gratitude, tells him that he better not cry, which brings laughter around the whole group, a reminder that excessive sentimentalities are not appreciated within drag circles, apart form occasional and exceptional circumstances. Rae's diversion from the thanks offered towards her and Celeste, however, also alludes to the complexity of the drag kinship system in its relationship to the world "outside". That is, this type of togetherness, of loyalty and dependability for family who need help, is reflective of the ideal traditional kinship outside the community as well as of that systems tendency to deny access to it. More aptly, Rae is aware that this is just what you are supposed to do for your family. It's especially necessary among queer relationships because of their necessity in finding shelter, safety, and confirmation of being true to oneself.

The drag kinship system is crucial to the study of this community in two important ways: 1) the role the systems play in maintaining community, including the role that celebrity and relationships among well-known community members affects the local culture; and 2) the role the systems play in providing safe spaces and room for identity experimentation a part from a potentially harsh and dangerous world beyond the community. Every single participant in this studied referenced, either directly or indirectly, the role of drag family and their own experience with it. It seems critical for this study, then, to include the community or familial *role* as an important and meaningful component to an intersectional identity. More than that,

it seems critical in understanding the variable ways that language is employed, perceived, and talked about within this community.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to use the observational, discursive, and sociocultural data to describe parts of the OKC "Gayborhood" and the thriving drag performance community within it. It has done so by addressing the "old school" type of drag which is said to characterize most of the traditional venues of performance, which also contributes to the competitive, "cut-throat" nature of getting recognized, booked, and aided in finding success in the scene. While these thematic foci were critical to the groundwork of ethnography and community complexity, it should also be noted that the language component of this chapter is equally as influential. Performers employ drag-related language, stylistics, and reference local phenomena in ways that hint at the regularity with which they are referenced.

The discourse produced by newer performers complicated the characterization of the Gayborhood, offering perspectives that are necessarily different from established and employed performers. This difference is somehow magnified with the discussions of the Wreck Room, knowing that it is now closed, and this difference reveals that the role of drag kinship systems is ever-more necessary in the successful development and maintenance of a presence in the drag scene here in Oklahoma City. Drag family, then, is revealed to be a critical part of this study's investigation into drag culture in OKC, a critical part believed to be bolstered in importance by the role drag place in the wider LGBTQ+ community here and in the role kinship plays in providing shelter and family to queer youth who are otherwise without such support. Finally, this necessitates a consideration for community, place, and *role* as factors

which must be included in the analysis of discursive identity construction, of their regard for language, and of their participation in language variation and change.

CHAPTER V

FOXXI, A WHOLE LOTTA WOMAN

This chapter presents a case study of one drag performer with over a decade of experience, who has been a host at multiple recurring shows, who appears in shows throughout OKC each week, who has won at least two important local drag pageants, and who has traveled to perform all over the southwest region of the US. This performer, Foxxi, contributed the most time (recorded and otherwise) to this project and has played an important role in its development. The chapter begins by looking at her responses to language regard-eliciting quesitons, then turns to see how Foxxi characterizes her drag and her drag persona(e), then discusses the importance of intersectionality in the interpretation of identity-related discourse, which this project holds is always the case for expressions of language regard. Finally, it concludes with some important points to remember before moving on to the following chapter, which takes a similar approach to discussing the data from the other performers who are included in this study.

Before moving on, I want to elaborate on some of the motivations for this case study. Not only did Foxxi offer the most of her personal and professional time for observation and investigation, but she introduced me to other performers, invited me

to shows (twice into dressing rooms to meet performers as they *got painted*[1]), and offered her own apartment as a site for one interview and one group discussion. Her generosity is something to be appreciative of, but it was the success of her input and help that render the case study worth doing. Rather, Foxxi's role in this community, the cache that her name carries, contributes to the success of her help in this project. Because of this, and her substantial contribution of speech data, her regard for language functions as a starting point for how we might begin to understand the role that language plays in this community.

Table 5.1. Interview information for sessions with Foxxi

	Interview A	**Interview B**	**Group Discussion**
Interview Date	10/13/18	12/28/18	02/26/19
Length	00:47:49	00:40:39	02:26:40
Location	Boom (drag venue)	Foxxi's home	Foxxi's home
Others Present	+1 ; *in public*	+1	+5
Recording device	Morantz (built-in mic)	Morantz (head-worn mic)	Morantz (head-worn mic)

Below I will briefly describe the recording settings, the data, some demographic information relevant to Foxxi's contribution to this study, and finally the analytic procedures for interpreting the data. Overall, Foxxi's recorded sessions total at just under four hours of speech data, sessions at which there was always at least one other community member or performer (see Table 5.1 above). All recordings were reviewed and broadly[2] transcribed in Praat speech analysis software (Boersma & Weenink 2020). Some sections of the recordings were transcribed more carefully for discourse analysis, also in Praat, then converted to plain

[1] i.e., getting into drag, specifically in terms of makeup; see Chapter 4, Excerpt 4.13.
[2] In terms of sections of the interview, responses to specific questions, impromptu discussions, etc.

text files (.txt), reviewed and analyzed. Those transcriptions of Foxxi's amounted to nearly 500 words of transcribed speech (more of her interactional speech data is included in the following chapter, but not here). Finally, the data were reviewed considering several theoretical insights in socio(cultural) linguistics, which I will briefly address below.

First, Raciolinguistics (e.g., Alim, Rickford, & Ball 2016; Rosa 2018) played a crucial role in the analysis of this data. Because many recorded and unrecorded participants of this study are people of color, and because racially and/or ethnically indexing discourse is employed in the performance of drag personae, this project seeks to hold the commitment to, in Alim's (2016) terms, "analyzing language and race together rather than as discrete and unconnected social processes" (9). Furthermore, because this project is also centered around the construction of identity, both in terms of the artist who performs drag as well as the personae who constitute the performance, this project also seeks to study "how ethnoracial identities are styled, performed and constructed through minute features of language" (Alim 2016, p. 9). Foxxi, a self-described "chocolate girl" (see Excerpt 5.7), not only uses "styled, performed and constructed" speech to build her drag character in ways that index and perform African American identity, but her experience as a trans woman of color in Oklahoma has been one of trial and struggle, including within the 39th St. Enclave[3]. Foxxi employs features of African American Language varieties in conjunction with other varieties in her linguistic performance *and* offers examples of identity construction reflective of the different experiences that people of color have in this community, city, state, and perhaps more broadly.

Lastly, Queer Linguistic (e.g., Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013) and Sociocultural Linguistic (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 2008) perspectives are consulted and employed in the

[3] See Chapter 4.

analysis of production, construction, and performance of identity in interaction. These are required particularly as they pertain to the sensitivity and complexity required in studying queer identities, perhaps especially here vis-à-vis artistic media (i.e., drag performances) that result in personae both similar and dissimilar to the performers who act them out. The responses to the regard-eliciting questions, then, are considered from a folk linguistic standpoint, then consult identity-related discourse, then return to expression of regard for language as instances of identity construction, a theoretical and methodological undertaking that distinguishing Queer Folk Linguistics as it is carried out in this project.

Table 5.2. Demographic and personal information offered by Foxxi

Performer	Experience (years)	Age (years)	Ethnic Identity (performer)	Gender Identity (performer)	Drag in a few words
Foxxi	10	31	African American	female	"Booty"; "drag is my outlet"

Chapters 3 and 4 mention participants were asked to consider voluntarily filling out the "Personal Information" sheet (Appendix B). As a reminder, this sheet had various demographic information sections in which respondents had the option to describe *in their own words* the various information. I have attempted to capture their own wordings, in spelling as well as capitalization (see Table 5.2). I should also mention that, unlike other noncisgender performers in this study, Foxxi prefers the gender identity label "female" (i.e., without a transgender-signifying component) but that she, throughout the interviews, talks openly about the way drag helped her to realize her trans identity and how proud of it she is. While I do not believe demographic aspects like race/ethnicity and sex/gender to be necessary factors in every

analysis of data[4], given the particular roles that gender plays in drag performance and the influence of African American Language and culture has had on drag culture, these aspects are warranted and deserving of attention.

Finally, there are two main questions from the interviews which are given the most attention in the analysis of language regard data for this chapter: 1) "Is there such a thing as a drag style of speech?" and 2) "What does it mean to talk like a drag queen?". These questions were asked in that order, though respondents were asked to elaborate and explain in between. This was done to elicit regard related to the community (of practice) and their relative conventions or patterns (e.g., "drag style of speech") before asking about archetypal, proto/stereotypical ideologies in the community about what drag queens talk like (e.g., "talk like a drag queen"). Each recording session throughout this project differed to some degree[5], but the above questions were always asked in the same order.

5.1 A drag style of speech

In previous research on gay Oklahomans[6], some of the complicated and important considerations were on implications and presuppositions within interview questions. These can impact the scope and focus of the responses in ways that might limit or otherwise make problematic a generalizable conclusion. This interest is maintained in this project (and addressed in Table 5.3), in addition to the interest in explicit, implicit, and presupposed language regard data in the responses to such questions.

[4] I have found these factors (race and gender identity) to be factors in analyses that do not offer a warranting of their consideration prior to collecting or analyzing the data, revealing at least potential problems in *looking* for differences in places that ideological forces encourage us to expect them (see Chapter 2).
[5] The ordering of the questions was somewhat regular but attempted to adjust to the organic flow of respondents' discourse, bringing up subjects and questions of interest to the study even if it came up before the interview outline would have planned them.
[6] See Chapter 2.

Table 5.3. Question 1 (Q1) with example of implicata/presupposition in the question

. Order	Question	Implicational/Presuppositional Detail
1	Is there such a thing as a drag style of speech?	*Drag-style of speech; drag-language connection*

There is a tendency to associate folk linguistic interests with metalanguage. It is true that instances of metalanguage are almost always instances of regard for language, and that a considerable amount of work withing Folk Linguistics is concerned with metalanguage (see Preston 2012). However, Preston (2019) has more recently addressed the need to rely on implicational, presuppositional material within expressions of language regard in order to better grasp at what people think, believe, and feel about language. This is of particular importance here, for this project requires investigation of both explicit and implicit regard in order to make sense of the data. The sociocultural perspectives offered here (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall 2008) encourage an understanding that such expressions (explicit or implicit) of regard are expressions of identity via stancetaking and positioning, and that in such instances, we are seeing highly contextualized instances of what people "really think" right now, in this situation, according to this particular task. I should note, however, that this was addressed early on in Preston's (1996; Niedzielski, & Preston 2003) comment that there is no such thing as "the attitude", rather "an attitude" with a relationship to the elicitation conditions.

Given that the first question (Q1) asks about the existence of a drag-style of speech, that this dissertation project is about language in the drag community, and that the participants knew at least that much, it's fair to say Q1 might presuppose the existence of such a style of speech. Q1 potentially indexes or perhaps makes available (i.e., Chafe 1994; Ariel 1988) the

beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about the drag-language connection. With that in mind, it's perhaps no surprise that Foxxi's response to Q1 focuses primarily on what she refers to as "drag slang"

Excerpt 5.16. Foxxi describing a drag-style-of-speech (Interview B)

1	Foxxi:	I mean there's so many terminologies-- yes, there's drag slang of course, I'm sure you know
2		a lot of words like *jush*[7], ((LAUGHS)), I mean, like there's so many words that can,
3		mean the exact same thing, I mean, so many different terms can mean one thing, and then
4		the way you say it could mean, yeah something else or a derogatory comment or, rude
5		statement so I mean it's the way you say it, who you say it to, which words you, done said
6		but yes there's (SIGH), *jush* is your, like your *flavor* your *sauce*, you know the way
7		you feelin um, you know that's you that's two different things right there, like you know
8		<Q that's not my *jush*, that's not my *tea* Q> you know, that's just two 'nother things

The response evidenced in Excerpt 5.1 displays Foxxi's careful and demonstrated understanding of language—more specifically "drag slang" and how you use it—in this community. Most of this is explicit regard, including metalanguage on words[8], but which she complexifies in her discussion of how these words can be used, and used variably. Foxxi here is using a non-linguists' vocabulary[9] to describe the variable meaning of "drag slang", or *polysemy*, where a lexical item (in this particular case) can have multiple meanings or senses depending on how its used. This is already a rather nuanced understanding of language use in the community, but she further explains that it depends on "the way you say it" (intonation or

[7] [ʒʌʃ]; a word which at least appears to be potentially related the word zhoozh, which some credit to the gay British dialect Polari (see Baker 2002; Lucas 1997), suspected to be borrowed from Romani.
[8] e.g., "terminologies", "drag slang", "a lot of words", etc.
[9] i.e., as opposed to a technical one; see Chapter 2; Preston 1994.

prosody), "who you say it to" (audience or pragmatic effects), and "which words you done[10] said" (lexical choice and context). Foxxi, in many ways, is a sociolinguist. She may not have the formal training, but that only results in a different vocabulary to address these rather complex linguistic phenomena she's able to describe (and describe well).

"Drag slang", including the examples she offers at the end of the excerpt, is something that all respondents touch on, but Foxxi's awareness of polysemy speaks both of her time in the community and in communicating with many other members, as well as her command of language individually. Polysemy factors into jokes, *reading* or *throwing shade*[11] , and is an important part of fitting into this community via engagement with their discourse practices. It should be mentioned that, like many other aspects of drag culture here in OKC, this could be another influence of African American Language and culture. That is, polysemy has been described in its relationship to African American Language and culture, as in Jackson, Johnson, Hecht, & Ribeau's (2019) work, explaining that "strategic alternation of meaning or development of new lexical devices" is an important part of "African American rhetorical tropes", along with signifying and indirection.

Foxxi's example of this begins with the word *jush*, a term with various beliefs concerning its origin[12], but at least within drag circles is widely credited to drag celebrity of *RuPaul's Drag Race* fame, Jasmine Masters. This particular spelling and crediting has made its way into popular culture—including the LGBTQ+ magazine *Out* (Dommu 2018) and the US entertainment magazine *Billboard* (Schiller 2018). *Jush* has appeared throughout this project, in usage and as an example of "drag slang."

[10] Notice the example of completive/perfective *done* here; for more see Green 2002; Alim 2002
[11] Ritual insult; see Chapter 4.
[12] See note 7.

Foxxi's initial explanation of the polysemy of *jush* is a little tricky, being somewhat veiled by even more slang. Your "flavor" or "sauce" (line 6) could, in some special circumstances, actually be related to food—something you really enjoyed, or were really craving, or that you needed because you were so hungry. However, Foxxi more likely meant it in a broader metaphorical context in which "sauce" or "flavor" could be anything you enjoy (e.g., a particular fashion trend), something that artistically resonates with you (e.g., a new song from your favorite artist), or even something that references your style or character.

Foxxi's second interpretation of *jush* relates to how one is feeling[13], and she immediately notices how this differs from the other meaning of the word[14]. The way this difference is achieved appears to be via pragmatics. In line 8 of Excerpt 5.11, "that's not my *jush*, that's not my *tea*" is offered as an example of how to use the word. This example demonstrates the way *tea* and *jush* can semantically overlap, presuming that the examples in line 8 represent near-identical statements, but more importantly for Foxxi's point, it demonstrates the way that *jush* can be related to feelings.

The negative particle does a lot of the work here in conveying such feelings. If someone says "that's my *jush*", a phrase given by more than one participant, it appears more likely to be of the broader "flavor" and "sauce" types of meanings. To say "that's *not* my *jush*", on the other hand, is essentially to say "I don't like that" or perhaps "I don't agree with that" or even "I don't feel like doing that". In the case of the negative expression, it's possibly easier to impart feelings onto the use because of the situations in which someone would say that something *isn't* their jush. Still, the fact that Foxxi recognizes variable meaning, and

[13] e.g., "the way you feelin", lines 6-7.
[14] e.g., "that's two different things right there", line 7.

overlapping semantics[15], hints at the important role language plays in the world of drag performance, and it foreshadows Foxxi's nuanced insight into this community in ways that differ from her younger counterparts.

Foxxi's thoughts on a "drag-style" of speech are different in the group discussion than in the interview. Part of this is inevitably a result of others present who are equipped with microphones and are encouraged to participate in answering questions and conversing. More aptly, it's likely to do with the authoritative role she holds in the community and therefore must perform in the presence of other community members who are being observed (more on this in Section 5.3). Below in Excerpt 5.2, Foxxi response to the same question, again referring to lexical items (less directly addressed as "slang" here), but now more focused on exposure to them and learning these words outside of the drag scene.

Excerpt 5.17. Foxxi describing a drag-style-of-speech (Group Discussion)

1	Foxxi:	I mean if you wasn't like--, grew up around gay culture or had a gay uncle or gay friend
2		or somethin you never heard words like that, and growing up I heard, things like that,
3		but it never gained mainstream until it was like publicly, known like *RuPaul's Drag Race*
4		like, I heard that shit all the time either growing up like, *sickening* or, *fierce* or, you know
5		*boots*, you know certain things they said but it wasn't, either heard about unless you was,
6		grew up around that, but you didn't-, known about till it got on TV

While Foxxi maintains the explicit focus on lexical items in this response, she does not refer to "slang" here, seemingly broadening her view of this vocabulary in her description. That is, we still get reference to "words like that" (line 2) and examples of slang such as

[15] i.e., *jush* and *tea*.

sickening[16], *fierce*[17], and *boots*[18]. In addition to the explicit regard offered here, Foxxi's initial input in this discussion, at least regarding Excerpt 5.2, includes presuppositional material. Paltridge (2012) describes *presupposition* from a discourse analytic perspective, drawing from Speech Act Theory (specifically Searle 1979), as "common ground that is assumed to exist between language users such as assumed knowledge of a situation and/or of the world" (p. 43). This is relevant here because, as briefly mentioned above, Preston (2019) has encouraged the inspection of presupposition in the study of language regard, stating that within them "are surely candidates for what is implicitly expressed by a language user" (p. 5). In this case, Foxxi presents the argument surrounding in-group language that: if you had no experience growing up with gay family or gay friends, then you likely have not had exposure to this language. Of course, what is implied here is that these examples of language, at least at the lexical level, are shared by a wider group of LGBTQ+ people.

I do want to briefly point out, however, that because Foxxi is from an African American family in Oklahoma, because she has critically acknowledged in these interviews the tendency for white cisgender gay men to claim to be similar to African American women "on the inside", then it might be the case that Foxxi is implying having LGBTQ+ *people of color* in family and friends might offer exposure to this language. That is, these terms have undoubtedly spread throughout the community, but they have been around for a while in some circles, perhaps even Black feminine or female circles outside of OKC's Gayborhood. There is not enough

[16] i.e., "incredible", what Calder (2017) calls "a positive evaluation of drag".
[17] See note 16.
[18] A modifier or intensifier that can mean "to an excessive degree" or "to an impressive degree"; common collocations occur in phrases like "*read* you *boots*", meaning someone *read* or critiqued you harshly or possibly intimately.

evidence to claim this, but Foxxi is not the only performer of color to allude to cultural experiences rendering different perspectives on these issues[19].

Whether Foxxi does mean a broader LGBTQ+ group or a more specific cultural group within OKC's queer communities, the first and last lines of Excerpt 5.2 entail presuppositional material such as: 1). *at least some* queer people already talked like this; 2) if you were around it, it wouldn't appear to be unique to OKC's drag community of practice; and 3) people who do think that this "slang" is new and unique to a modern drag phenomenon are likely gathering that impression from what they have seen on TV. This complicated and nuanced description of language parallels the complexity of her awareness of polysemy, but it differs regarding the latter's attention to language use and the former's focus on language origin. She also cites *RuPaul's Drag Race* as a source for the spread of popularized drag expressions (line 4), a notion that appears throughout this project and from multiple speakers. This critical attention to language awareness, origin, (correct) acknowledgment, and spread is conveyed primarily through implicata, rather than explicit regard and metalanguage. Unlike the responses to questions about "drag-styles of speech", the other regard-eliciting questions tend to elicit exactly such presuppositional material, which will be focused on more in the next section.

5.2 Talking like a drag queen

The second question (Q2) reviewed in this chapter[20] elicited discourse which primarily relied on presupposition and implicature. While the previous section reviewed the question of a "drag style" of speech, and thus tended to elicit explicit regard—at least in tandem with implicata—this question encourages thought and reflection on more archetypal, or perhaps stereotypical,

[19] See Gizele in Chapter 6.
[20] i.e., "What does it mean to talk like a drag queen?"

if not ideological levels (see Table 5.4). Part of this is intentional, knowing that the wording and the premise of Q2 implies or presupposes a way of talking associated with drag queens[21], a phenomenon of association that I believe to be already well in place, at least I this community[22]. Still, Q2 also encourages generalization in presuming that one is able to "talk like" any category. The results from this responses, across all speakers, are therefore not considered to be the most detailed and accurate depictions of the scene. Rather, they are seen as revealing well-established ideologies and beliefs about being queer and the relationship that has to language. This ultimately does help shape our understanding of the scene, but admittedly with a cautious eye towards the regard discourse referencing hegemonic ideologies encouraged by the presuppositions within the question itself.

Table 5.4. Questions 1 and 2 with examples of implicata/presupposition in the question

Order	Question	Implicational/Presuppositional Detail
1	Is there such a thing as a drag style of speech?	*Drag-style of speech; drag-language connection*
2	What does it mean to talk like a drag queen?	*Drag queen language; you can "talk like" a category*

Foxxi's response to Q2 is equally as complex and nuanced as the responses covered in the previous section, but here, she offers popular characterizations of the ways drag performers perform, entertain, and behave. She delivers a quotative-performative example here with a

[21] Because of the attention given to female-presenting drag artists, this question intended to rely on the heavy exposure to such drag and on the already existing ideas about drag queens and language.
[22] In my work with gay rural Oklahomans (McCleary 2016, 2019b), one respondent (Pepper) reported that they were so against assuming someone's sexual preference or identity based on speech that he wouldn't care if he were talking to a drag queen, that he would need to hear it from the drag queen's mouth before assuming; this is an example of common and pervasive myth that drag queens are somehow the *most gay* or who speak the *most gay* speech. This is of course related to hegemonic ideas about masculinity and femininity, something else which is strongly pervasive throughout Oklahoma (see Appendix C, Extract AC.1).

tongue pop[23], a very marked and well-known feature of queer speech styles associated with drag speech (Extract 5.3). While this has also made its way into popular culture (all one needs to do to test this is punch in a web search of "tongue pop" and "drag" or "gay"), though I suspect it has its true origins in queer and femme African American culture as well[24]. Foxxi continues this performance with a phrase "okay how you durn", a pronunciation of "doing" which I believe to be associated with rural African American Language varieties. It's worth noting that, because of the popularization of African American Language and culture within this community, this example that Foxxi is offering is interesting in that white queens very often employ highly caricatured versions of AAL varieties. In a sense it's stereotypical in potentially two different directions.

Excerpt 5.18. Foxxi on talking like a drag queen (Interview B)

1	Foxxi:	talking like a drag queen is all that you know, <Q ((TONGUE POP[25])), okay how you durn Q>
2		you know like just *extra*… everybody have they own *flavor* you know they own , their own
3		interpretation of drag, so you have that, for instance *pageant queen*, don't really say too
4		much but gives little snick comments or little side eyes or little glances, and then you have
5		that one queen that's loud and speaks her mind and, says everything in the *gay dictionary* in
6		about five seconds…I wouldn't say you're required to be funny, but you have to have a sense
7		of humor…if you, never hung out with a gay person or hung out with a drag queen you gone
8		take it, predominantly half the time offensive cause you don't know what the hell she sayin,
9		so, if you don't know the scene and you step out there you gone be culture-shocked as hell

[23] This is the community term for this sound. It is a lingual ingressive, typically a palatal click [ǂ], but unlike languages which employ this, in this community (and in other queer/drag communities), it does not co-occur with the pulmonic eggressive airstream.
[24] I only say this because, as an adolescent I heard this from people of color who were not in the OKC LGBTQ+ community. I will leave it for another day, or another scholar, to follow up on this.
[25] See note 23.

The opening (line 1) of this response is the closest we get to explicit regard in this particular response; the rest of the discourse addresses more directly the *ideas* behind language use and communication. For example, she goes on to say that this speech (or perhaps the speakers) are *extra*[26], a notion that fits with the idea that drag queens are somehow *more* queer[27] than their non-entertainer community peers. Despite the encouragement to generalize, though, Foxxi does note that everyone has their own *flavor*[28], their own "interpretation of drag", an interesting note to add to this discussion. In a way, it takes back some of the generalizable discourse she initially offers in her response, another potential indication of her nuanced understanding of this community and its patterns of language use.

That is, even with the aforementioned presupposition and encouragement for generalization in this question, Foxxi still delineates between at least the two biggest styles of drag: pageants and club queens[29]. Interestingly, she notes that pageant queens communicate less verbally, yet still indicating their opinions or (un)approval of a communicative interaction, which she juxtaposes with "that one queen" (line 5) who speaks her mind. This alone is a meaningful comparison in that it likely alludes to the different kinds of cultures among pageants and clubs. In the former, there is one winner, and they are judged in performance and demeanor. In the latter, there is entertainment, career, and money to be made. Money is certainly made in pageants (there is almost always a cash prize for winners and runners-up), but they also cost a great deal more to compete in[30]. Simply put, pageant queens have much

[26] i.e., "dramatic", "excessive", or even "inappropriately expressive".
[27] See note 22.
[28] See *jush*, note 7.
[29] See Chapter 4, section 4.3.2.
[30] Pageants often require expensive gowns that often cost thousands of dollars, entry fees, the materials for talents that are performed as a component to the pageant, etc.

more motivation to be subtle with their opinions, while club queens have to fight for their spot in the limelight.

Foxxi's further characterization of the "club queen" includes an even more interesting characterization: someone who "says everything in the *gay dictionary* in about five seconds" (lines 5-6). There are indeed dictionaries and collections of words and phrases used in queer communities[31]; I am fairly confident in saying, however, that no OKC drag performers are actively reading though. That is to say, Foxxi's alluding to the *gay dictionary* is of course a reference to the lexical items and phrases that this community (and the broader LGBTQ+ community) employs frequently. This "club queen" is someone who is embracing queer culture and performing it *in excess* (or perhaps in a way that is *extra*), and in ways that parallel the seemingly ubiquitous perception of drag performers (of this type) as excessively queer[32].

In the course of this response, Foxxi mentioned that some specific performers do this (i.e., talk like "that one queen") in order to be funny, at which point she was asked if one has to be funny in order to be a drag queen, or to talk like one. I still find her response pensive and intriguing: "I wouldn't say you're *required* to be funny, but you have to have a *sense of humor*" (lines 6-7). This line is poignant for two reasons: it alludes to something Kelly mentions[33] about needing to have "thick skin" because of the ritualistic *shade* throwing and *reading* practices. More specifically, Foxxi explains that a drag queen doesn't have to be a comedian to be successful—though it no doubt helps—and in fact emphasizes this by her usage and intonational emphasis of the word *required*. One can get along without telling jokes. The

[31] Leap (1996) comes to mind.
[32] It's also worth noting that Foxxi's prepositional modifier "in about five seconds" seems to be commenting on rate of speech, and talking fast specifically. This is an interesting comment in a place like Oklahoma where, like many areas of the US South, speakers are told they speak slow.
[33] See Chapter 4, Excerpt 4.7.

implication here is that one can not be successful, or survive as an artist, in this community without a *sense of humor*. Performers need to be able to take a joke, perhaps especially about themselves, in order to make it in this community. The second takeaway from Foxxi's thoughts here is that irreverence is valued in the drag community. In other words, not much is off the table in terms of discussion, jokes, and confrontation. In a sense, performers have to be able to take some things less seriously, to consider the discussion of them jovially or, to say it with more nuance, with a sense of humor.

She gets interrupted by another person at the table where we were recording[34] then further emphasizes the language practices in the community as being both foreign and, at first, appearing to be offensive. Foxxi appears to portray the foreign speech patterns (and words) as the cause of the potential offense taken; she reinforces this by reiterating a message we saw in Excerpt 5.1. That is, Foxxi reminds us that if you have not been around queer people before, and then you are suddenly among a community of queer people, you might find yourself "culture-shocked as hell." No doubt some of this relates to the regularity with which performers and community members *throw shade*, which some outsiders might find insulting or distasteful. Furthermore, this echoes of a type of insider-outsider perception that many queer people in Oklahoma exhibit, acknowledging that the 39th St. community feels like a very different world from the city outside of it. This perception is itself reflective of the awareness many LGBTQ+ people (in Oklahoma and elsewhere) express in their coping with hegemonic ideologies about what it means to be a healthy and happy person in the US and what it means to build community and kinship among other LGBTQ+ people.

[34] Hence, the elided material in line 7.

This last point takes a little more consideration for the individual and their interaction with local and broader ideologies that inevitably interplay with artforms like drag performance. This is layered with community roles, the economies wrapped up in entertainment in this community, and the specific experiences Foxxi has had as a trans woman of color in Oklahoma City. While the above certainly offers insight into Foxxi's regard for language in the drag community of practice, the broader a perspective we take on the interpretation of this regard, the more necessary it is to shape our understanding of language regard in its relationship to identity construction. The next section briefly covers some of the discourse Foxxi offers on herself, her drag persona(e), and the way she sees herself in this community. In reviewing this discourse, I will review more regard data in light of how it contributes to her construction of identity in persistently complicated and nuanced ways.

5.3 Language and identity contruction

This section briefly breaks away from the regard-eliciting questions previously focused on, primarily in order to pay closer attention to the ways that Foxxi explicitly and implicitly constructs identity in interaction, specifically in these interview and discussion group settings. I doing so, I turn to focus on two short segments of these recordings: 1) question(s) I associate with what I label the "My drag task", in which performers are asked to describe their drag in a few words[35]; and 2) a "Last words" task which essentially asked every recorded participant if they had any final words they would like to say before the recording was over[36]. I turn now to

[35] In some cases, particularly group discussions, there was further elaboration in this task. On one occasion, performers in a group setting were asked to name two or more celebrities/artists who they thought captured their artistic aesthetic best.

[36] Most performers generally have keen ideas about what their drag persona looks like, and after having interviewed for the better part of an hour, dealing with some subjects a bit more serious than drag jokes, most performers were eager to leave the recording with a humorous or otherwise entertaining final farewell related to their character(s)/persona(e).

some of those responses as an attempt to see the ways that Foxxi describes her drag persona and the ways that she performs that persona.

All performers were encouraged to introduce themselves at the beginning of the recording since the first part of every interview and group discussion centered around their establishing who they are, how they describe their drag. Foxxi does this by offering her whole drag name, that is, with both drag family names that indicate which drag family houses she is associated with[37] (see Excerpt 5.4). She employs the *tongue pop*, described above, as a sort of discourse marker that both holds the floor and demands attention. Despite being asked to describe her drag in one sentence, she offers a series of descriptors and concepts, demonstrating how silly a one-sentence limitation really was after all.

Excerpt 5.19. Foxxi's "My Drag" and "Last Words" (Interview A)

1	Interviewer:	can you describe your drag in one sentence?
2	Foxxi:	one sentences with my drag well I'm Foxxi [*Drag Family Name*] [*Drag Family*
3		*Name*][38], ((TONGUE POP))[39], and my drag in one sentence is, en(t)ergetic[40],
4		vibrant, sassy I mean, my name is Foxxi that just kinda says it all, she gives you
5		everything I mean that's, the stage is where I let loose, so you gone get a whole lotta,
6		cakes, shakes, twerks, and the works, m-hm if you ever been to like Red Dog,
7		Night Trips or something like that that's basically what you, gone see, but the titties be
8		covered okay honey I'm a lady

[37] Drag entertainers in OKC very often belong to various cliques or groups that foster queer kinship systems, usually revolving around a parental figure. In Foxxi's case, her "middle" drag name is representative of the house she and one of her sisters started; it is now a name adopted by some of her children. The "last" name is the name of a prestigious house that Foxxi's mother brought her into. For more on drag family and the kinship system see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.

[38] See note 37.

[39] See note 23.

[40] Foxxi's production of "energetic" here includes consonant epenthesis, an aspirated [tʰ], in the onset of the second syllable, just after the nasal coda: [ɪn.tʰɹ.d͡ʒɛ.ɾɨk]. This feeds into the discussion of the role released /t/ can play in identity performance and in interaction (See Chapter 7 for more).

Before she elaborates on the "My drag" task, Foxxi offers a few adjectives to characterize her drag, the first of which includes and epenthisized released (i.e., *aspirated*) /t/. There is some reason to believe that /t/ release can do indexical and interactional work in this community, which is disussed more in Chapter 7. For now, it's enough to say that Foxxi's choice of energetic is, on the one hand, descriptive of her performance style, which includes dancing and upbeat music and facial expressions as she interacts with the crowd. One the other hand, her choice of producing it with the /t/ epenthesis at least points towards a performative aspect of her description: that is, she is entertaining even as she describes what her entertainment is like. For many performers, this is commonplace[41], and is somewhat to be expected since these respondents are all entertainers who know that they have been asked to participate because of their roles as such.

Foxxi employs fun and lively language to describe herself, using "vibrant" and "sassy" as descriptors after [ɪn.tʰɪ.d͡ʒɛ.ɾɨk]. These adjectives fit somewhat the persona we got a glimpse of in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2), in which Foxxi describes the "old school" tendencies of the scene and the ways that she breaks away from it. Being "vibrant" may have something to do with her standing out from the crowd of performers who are at her level of renown and success, and "sassy" overlaps with her complicated attitudes towards the traditional drag in OKC[42]. Foxxi continues her description of her drag by reintroducing herself—"my name is Foxxi that just kinda says it all"—presumably relying on the semantic accessibility of the adjective "foxy", which tends to relate to sexual attractiveness when describing female-presenting people and

[41] See excerpts from Rae and Alexander in Chapter 4 and 6 for some explicit examples of performance amidst the interview/group discussion.
[42] See Chapter 4, Excerpt 4.2. Foxxi: "Oklahoma drag is very old school…I don't do that all the time".

otherwise carries meanings of wit and slyness. Her name holds another key to the complexities of her drag persona and the construction of its identity, too, as will be discussed more below.

Foxxi's description of herself includes some direct insight into her view of her craft and what it means to her as an artist: "the stage is where I let loose" (line 4). And this insight is offered in between the aspects of her character that correspond with entertainment and sexuality or desirability. When she says "cakes", "shakes", "twerks", and "the works", she primarily refers to her dancing, the showing of her natural (i.e., not wearing padding), and the presentation of a sexually desirable character on stage. "Cakes", for example, is a euphemism for one's *derrière*, the plural suggesting reference to the two main parts which make it up. "Shakes" corresponds to what Foxxi can and does do with her "cakes", dance styles popularized in Hip-hop music and culture and now spread throughout the cultural conscious under the more popular name "twerking", which Foxxi also references. The addition of "the works" here is a little more ambiguous, but given that "cakes" and "shakes" rhymes, it could be employed partially just to continue the scheme, a continuation of the role that entertainment and perhaps joviality plays in the linguistic performance of drag entertainers like Foxxi.

Sex appeal is an important part of Foxxi's character, as it is with many performers. If this was hinted at in the first part of her "my drag" response, it's confirmed in her aligning herself with "Red Dog" and "Night Trips" performances, both of which are the names of prominent strip clubs[43]. She follows this by offering a qualification of her alignment with dancers at these clubs, almost as if she were concerned with coming across as excessively *risqué*, and in a way that maintains the humor which she employs readily and persistently: "the titties be covered okay honey I'm a lady". This line interestingly employs both habitual-aspect

[43] Both of these clubs house entertainment performed only by cisgender female dancers and primarily to a heterosexual cisgender male audience.

be[44], suggesting that Foxxi *never* uncovers her chest in performances, and she also asserts the gendered implication that "a lady" wouldn't expose her chest, part of the humor stemming from the fact that Foxxi elsewhere brags about showing off her "cakes" without much covering. That is, much in line with this community's tendency towards the irreverent (see Chapter 4), Foxxi, in a sense, makes fun of the construct of "a lady" by claiming to refrain from what would be, by extension, "unladylike", while leaving unacknowledged the relative "ladylike" status of showing "cakes". This first encounter with Foxxi's description of her drag contributes to an elaborate, dynamic, at times conflicting, complex, and entertaining character, even within the small confines of the "my drag" task—though certainly expanded upon with some of the other excerpts of hers in this project. Race, gender, and role contribute parts to that complex identity, parts which are emphasized varyingly across the other responses.

The contribution that race or ethnicity and culture play in her establishment of identity have so far in this section been underplayed, but this becomes more important and more central to the discourse here once we turn to Foxxi's first "last words" task. When asked if she had any closing words, Foxxi response was short and precise: "I'm Foxxi [*Drag Family Name*] and I'm a whole lotta woman". The brevity of these words does not parallel a simplicity with how they factor into her character. In another part of the interview, before the ending of this recording session, Foxxi shares how she and a friend started drag together, started a drag family together, and even go far back enough that she recalled coming up with their drag names together. Drag names have a reputation for being either wordily comic, provocative, or on

[44] Arguably one of the most recognizable aspects of grammar in African American Language varieties. Part of this spread is most likely from the popularizartion of Hip Hop Nation Language (Alim 2002; Smitherman 1997) and has been documented in the speech of other communities. Cutler (2008, 2010), for example, documents habitual *be* and other grammatical features of AAL in the speech of some European immigrant communities in New York City.

occasion, personally meaningful to the performer. Foxxi remembers a moment when she was struck by a character in the film *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (2002): Foxxy Cleopatra[45], who is influenced by Pam Grier's titular character in the blaxploitation film *Foxy Brown* (1974). Foxy Brown is described as "a whole lotta woman", and Foxxy Cleopatra recites in the Austin Powers film, "I'm Foxxy Cleopatra, and I'm a whole lotta woman!". Given that OKC's Foxxi chose a name that continues the line of fierce, talented, and comedic performers of color, it seems fitting that Foxxi latches onto this phrase[46]. That is, the choice of "Foxxi" as a name, and the tie it has to the character that inspired her, is imbued with African American identity (and pop-cultural awareness) in a way that another drag name only meant to be clever or funny just wouldn't likely be able to replicate.

There is another meaningful component to this related phrase, one which links the pride of Foxxi's trans and female identity outside of drag with the exclamation of being a "whole lotta woman". This connection between the character and the performer, and the particular journey they took together in self-discovery, is something that reemerges across her interviews and which requires acknowledgement. Below I will briefly touch on some of the aspects of dynamic, shifting, intersectional identity as it emerges from this data, before returning to look at one more example of language regard, analyzing regard data as it relates to identity work.

5.3.1 Intersectional identity: Place, race, gender, and community roles

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

[45] Portrayed by the famous pop artist Beyoncé Knowles, who has spoken out in favor of feminism and the Black Lives Matter movement, being one of the most well-known musicians of color in the entertainment industry.
[46] i.e., "whole lotta woman"; She mentions the Foxxy Cleopatra/Foxy Brown connection in passing during this portion of the conversation, but she recalls this phrasing readily in the "last words" section.

must be included in the analysis of identity in this data. Crenshaw's (1989, 1994, 2016) work in developing *intersectionality* theory came from her analysis of the treatment of African American women, particularly how the fights civil rights for African Americans and for women tended to leave women of color out of the conversation and out of visibility. In a way, *intersectionality* has some gestalt principles in that, in addition to doing away with oversimplified ideas about how single category labels can describe people or the data they provide, people exists in intersections of their identity that is more than the sum of their identity influences. This is the case for the respondents in this study, the case for Foxxi.

The previous section touched on the ways the Foxxi's drag celebrates African American Language culture, and so far this chapter has hopefully demonstrated the various ways that Foxxi employs language to position herself in relationship to certain phenomena in this community. In doing this, she employs styles, stancetaking, and "minute features of language" (Alim 2016) that, at times, contribute to a dynamic ethnoracial identity. This is necessary to build on an investigation of intersectional identity, but ethnoracial identities do not exist outside of place—whether that be local or macro.

In a discussion about venues and the racial make-up of drag lineups, for example, Foxxi describes Tramps, Phoenix and The Boom[47] as having "set casts" and acknowledges the following: "it sounds so typical to say but yes every club has their token black girl…yes, [they're] totally treated differently". She further discloses that every venue in the Gayborhood is managed and/or owned by white cisgender gay men[48], and that many of them prefer showgirl numbers, country songs, and the occasional pop ballad. Foxxi's ability to adapt to and navigate

[47] See Chapter 4 for more on the venues.
[48] At the time of this interview.

around the skewed preferences of the managers and show directors[49], despite the stigma and prejudicial treatment of African American performers, is testament to her work ethic and uniqueness within this problematic system. It is also an example of how people of color must often perform at a higher level in order to be given the same respect and treatment of their peers. Foxxi's rise to success in this community and the persona she has created includes ethnoracial components that are important and are relevant in specific ways, some of which relates to the OKC drag scene.

Excerpt 5.20. Foxxi's final "My Drag" section (Group Discussion)

1	Interviewer:	who are you in drag? what is she like?
2	Foxxi:	((TONGUE POP)), I'm Foxxi Chanelle Paige, um, I mean that's a good topic when
3		I first started I was, of course very--, not so much immature but just very premature,
4		I mean, I wanted to dance, you know, I had seen my first drag show, I said <Q bitch
5		that's easy Q>, <Q you know the songs bitch I could do that Q>, you know, and so
6		when I got up there to do it, you know lip sync wasn't my forte, I could dance but
7		bitch, lip sync the words, hm-mm, but, ((TONGUE POP)), I'm a entertainer, I love
8		to perform, if anything is going on I can get on the stage bitch and, Foxxi is the star,
9		do I live through her, a little bit, but, Foxxi's just a entertainer, I love her sass, she
10		is classy now, and a whole lotta ass, I cover my ass sometimes, outside the show

Still, a truly intersectional account of identity in interaction must include other aspects of Foxxi's persona. She openly talks about how drag led to her self-discovery in a couple of ways, both in terms of letting go of stresses in life and in the realization of her female identity.

[49] Foxxi expresses frequently and fervently that the music she loves to perform drag art to is rap, hip-hop, pop, and R & B. See Chapter 4 for more on the "old school" drag that Foxxi has broken away from.

She addresses this in the last "My Drag" task she participates in (see Excerpt 5.6), describing her early days in drag as "premature" (line 3) and having trouble with the expectations for lip syncing (lines 5-7). This touches on a common theme in the discourse on drag in this community, namely that it's not as easy as it may look.

The rest of this response is interesting in that it addresses some of the other themes brought up in Foxxi's other responses[50], but the situational context of this response adds another layer of complexity to it. More aptly, this recording took place in a group discussion with Foxxi, her drag daughter, her drag sister, and their respective significant others. Although there were always others present in the prior recordings/tasks, this entire group participated in some interview and discussion questions and were recorded. So, it's a little easier to see how these responses are both examples or lessons for her drag family and how they also address them directly.

Interestingly, the second half of her response contains most of this language and is begun with the *tongue pop*. What follows is interesting for two reasons. Lines 7 and 9 contain sentences that are very similar. In the former, "I'm a[51] entertainer", in which the predicate nominative is uttered with two released /t/s [ɪntʰɹtʰeɪnəɹ]. In line 9, she utters "Foxxi's just a entertainer", in which a diminutive-like *just* appears next to an alternative pronunciation of the same predicate noun, one with only one released /t/ [ɪnɹtʰeɪnəɹ]. Interestingly, the version in line 9 is a sentence about drag character and is in grammatical third-person[52], while the first instance is uttered in first person (i.e., *as* Foxxi).

[50] e.g., the difficulty of drag, the confidence in doing drag, the love of entertainment, sexual desirability, etc.
[51] The non-nasal determiner *a* before an open onset, which occurs in both utterances, is not uncommon in other Oklahoma dialect data (McCleary 2016).
[52] There isn't enough data here to make any claims about tendencies for /t/ release and grammatical person; moreover, such an analysis would be complicated, if not obfuscated, but the community use of grammatical third-person to refer to oneself (e.g., Foxxi in reference to herself: "*a bitch* don't know no country by heart", Excerpt AD.3).

The language which uses grammatical first-person also has similarly complicated interpretations in that, Foxxi the drag persona, Foxxi the artist, and Foxxi the (codename for the real) person outside of drag all employ it. We see some of this complexity exampled in lines 7-10, in which Foxxi describes herself in a series of statements along a cline of viewpoint:

I'm a entertainer ; I can get on the stage

↓

Foxxi is the star ; do I live through her, a little bit

↓

Foxxi's just a entertainer

The first and last of these examples suggest that we are hearing from the Foxxi persona first, then perhaps as the artist/performer who has to get on stage, then as the artist whose drag expression is self-benefitting, then as the observer almost humbly describing Foxxi as *just* a entertainer. The grammatical and structural variation in these examples, even with sole focus on pro/nominal variation and grammatical person, demonstrate again that there is a polyphonous quality to the speech of drag performers (Barrett 2017)—indeed, maybe to everyone. For Foxxi, though, we have seen the employment of speech styles associated with gendered language, ethnically or racially-associated grammatical features, in-group community language, class-based language, and utterances used to achieve shock, humor, and desirability. Brevity aside, this little example is a reminder that variation, polyphony, and stylistics can prove relevant and insightful at many levels of linguistic analysis.

Considering this is in a situation in which Foxxi is surrounded by members of her kinship system, and in a place of authority for at least some of them, this utterance now allows for a demonstrative interpretation. She is able to seamlessly move in and out of the speech *of*

the character and *about* the character, a reminder that the language which focuses on the drag character can correspond with the external, or perhaps empirical, perspective of the artist (e.g., "she gives you everything"; "I love her sass, she is classy now"). There is likely some identifiable overlap between the two personae[53], but the professional ability to address and perform succinctly is not likely lost on her drag family present. Barrett (2017) remarks that, although there is no such thing as a monolithic gay speech, one characterization that might be shared across many queer speech communities is the combination (and I might add intentional juxtaposition) of stylistics. This is demonstrated here in Foxxi's discourse, offering yet another potential interpretation of this careful and nuanced language use as a demonstration of her command and authority of community (language) norms whilst among her drag family.

Even more indicative of the influence of the presence of her drag family, Foxxi's last recorded words in this session begin with a note of appreciation[54] that all the people involved made it, signed consent forms, and agreed to be recorded in a discussion (see Excerpt 5.6).

Excerpt 5.21. Foxxi's final "last words" section (Group Discussion)

1	Interviewer:	do you have any closing words?
2	Foxxi:	uh I was just glad to see, you know, hear all five of us X you know that's why I picked
3		y'all, um, because I know you can give a you know new, perspective of your side of
4		being new [TO DAUGHTER], and then, you you know being on the same side of
5		being seasoned [TO SISTER] but also you know you have your own opinion cause we
6		both, have a lot of same opinions but also different ways of looking at things so yeah,
7		let's let's spread the word yass, I didn't think they was gone bring them two though

[53] i.e., *artist* and *drag character*
[54] "I'm just glad to…hear all five of us" (line 1).

Immediately after this expression of appreciation, she credits the other performers in the group discussion by acknowledging that she wanted them specifically to participate; she does this, however, I a way that also marks her role in choosing them to be a part of this discussion: "you know that's why I picked y'all" (lines 2-3). It's very true that, after talking with and observing Foxxi for years, I frequently relied on her kind willingness to use her cache to help introduce me to potential respondents[55], but Foxxi is also in a particular community role that renders her able to acknowledge her weight in the matter, though in a way that still credits her beneficiaries.

Foxxi tells her daughter she was chosen to offer her perspective on being new to the scene (lines 3-4), and she tells her sister that she was chosen to represent another "seasoned" perspective and because she and Foxxi have very different approaches to drag[56] (line 6). She celebrates them in saying "let's spread the word" and then acknowledges that she didn't know that the significant others would be joining. The entirety of her "last words" here are tied to her role as a facilitator, mentor, and long-time peer.

Foxxi employs language styles and engages with performance *and* performativity that at times index identity category associations like *African American, working class, country,* and/or *queer*. Her discursive engagement with the questions and prompts—and by extension the ideas and ideologies about language and culture here—also potentially index role- and relationship-based categories like *mother*/*mentor, sister/peer, artist/entertainer,* etc., and with characteristics that are valued in this community, such as *femininity, hard-working, humorous,* and *sexually desirable*. These are categories and associations that span from the global and macro levels of ideology to the regional, local, and community-based sociocultural ideologies. These are often present within a single response of hers, within a single performance of hers,

[55] This is not how most respondents were recruited, but it happens to be the case for this discussion group.
[56] e.g., "we have a lot of same opinions but also different ways of looking at things" (line 6).

and are likely consulted in her processing of the regard(s) she holds for language. They are, therefore, important parts of identity that are not only necessary and worthwhile in the study of sociocultural linguistics, but they are potentially meaningful, perhaps necessary, in the analysis of language regard as it relates to identity in interaction

5.4 Language popularization, spread, and regard

The final analysis section of this chapter includes some of the discourse from Foxxi's responses to questions about *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the rise in popularity of drag, and the changes she has noticed, particularly in a few passages which demonstrate that language regard data can be analyzed as it pertains to the construction/performance of identity in interaction.

These excerpts contain more direct commentary on the issues, including more identifiably attitudinal responses. In the first interview with Foxxi, for example, she claims *Drag Race* "fucked it up" by introducing more abstract interpretations of drag and by leading the general reality TV consumer to think that local drag is in any way like Hollywood or TV drag[57]. She aligns this with female impersonation, the most popular form of drag in OKC, and with the need to appropriately add to the presentation: hips, breasts, and hair. This is somewhat of a conservative opinion, considering where Foxxi is more progressive in other areas[58]. This event, however, is made more understandable and complex with the consideration of her role in the community as a mentor. She has found a way to made it to the coveted spot of being a regularly booked and respected performer; ergo she must know something about how this

[57] She also mentions in this interview the problematic comments RuPaul Charles, a cisgender gay man, has made about allowing trans women on the show. RuPaul made a statement that trans women who had begun transitioning (RuPaul: "changing their bodies") would not be invited to participate in the drag competition reality show. See more on this and the queer and trans communities' reaction to it in Framke's (2018) *Vox* article

[58] e.g., persistently developing an artistic style that is quite different from traditional drag in OKC; explicitly calling attention to this and critiquing it, etc.

economy works. In that light, her conservative ideas about female impersonation are less about how things *ought to* be and more about what it takes to make it. This an interpretation not readily available without the consideration of her experience and her intersectional patterns of self-presentation. She also acknowledges the benefits of *Drag Race* and the spread of culture, stating she is "happy" and "proud" that so many young people have more opportunity to come out of the closet and to look for a safe space (if their family doesn't offer it) in order to survive. This differs, however, from her language-focused thoughts about *Drag Race* and the spread of drag language and culture.

Excerpt 5.22. Foxxi on *Drag Race* and the spread of drag language/culture (Group Discussion)

Participant: I don't watch it [*Drag Race*] anymore

Foxxi: I feel like it [*Drag Race*] fell off like it went from like being drag, to being like, what's gone get you to watch the show…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 when I was drunk ((CLAPS)) you know, I said that last night at the bar with my homegirl Q> you know, like *bitch*

To summarize Foxxi's opinion simply, *Drag Race* has become more about reality TV than about the celebration and exploration of drag. Her specific attention to language matters here is related to that, if only in that the popularity of drag (and *Drag Race* specifically) has allowed access to language and culture for people who otherwise would never be participating in this community. This is probably somewhat a result of the commodification and capitalization of drag by RuPaul and others in popular media, which has inevitably would

spread items or components of local culture around the world so quickly and in such small bytes that loss of context and origin appear unavoidable.

Foxxi's attention to language here echoes of her comments in Excerpt 5.2—that people who have never exposed LGBTQ+ language and culture wouldn't recognize or know what to make of it. In a sense, she's noting that, if you're a person who has not been exposed to this language and then hear it on TV, you are likely to assume that the people who are using said language are the originators of it, or of that particular style. The performative examples of a hypothetical interaction with Foxxi and one of these non-community-member viewers occurs in lines 4-7, in which she performs a potential mistake in the origin of a phrase or language style: "girl have you heard what what's-her-name said on the gay show?". It's interesting that this performance alludes to "the gay show" when the subject of *Drag Race* has been central to the conversation. This phrasing (i.e., *the gay show*) appears to be a sort of hyperbolic example of what a non-community member, or someone not exposed to or educated in queer culture, might call this show. Her highlighting of the non-membership status of this speaker indicates her awareness of just who is most often getting their sociolinguistic histories wrong.

Furthermore, Foxxi's retort to that in this hypothetical example is that she and her friends have been using this sort of language (presumably drag-related speech): "I said that last night when I was drunk….I said that last night at the bar with my homegirl". This line both works to reclaim the language erroneous credited to TV celebrity drag performers, and it additionally comments on the local, regional, and cultural ties to such language use. She is not the only performer to be protective and instructive on knowing the history of language use, where this language comes from, and who gets credit for it. This is likely a result of her status in the community, her experience being a minority in the community (and particularly being a

queer African American woman who likely experiences the (re)appropriation of African American Language varieties and culture regularly. This adds another layer to this interpretation in that, Foxxi does not seem to be concerned with correcting or monitoring the usage of drag slang as much as she is interested in acknowledging who uses it and who gets credit for it. If the sociocultural factors are indeed at work here, then Foxxi would likely already have experience in community members (and white adolescents at large) using parts of African American Language features and associated language incorrectly, oddly, or perhaps in ways that are not in a sense "original" or "authentic". Her concern, then, is related to the acknowledgment of the origin of such language, which is in turn related to her role in the community which consistently employs such language styles and features.

Foxxi's is protective of the local trends and cultures—defending traditional approaches to drag prominently featured in OKC—and she is aware of both the nuance in language variation (particularly with slang) and the popular discourse on the origins and celebration of drag slang. She acknowledges the good that drag race and popularization have done, even going as far as to be proud of young experimenters, but she (and many others) prefers the qualities and histories of the local drag scene more than the popularization of it via TV and social media. This attitudinal response relates to ideologies about language origins and authenticity, the latter of which is a critical part of this community's ideas about language and in-group status. However, teasing apart the sociocultural forces Foxxi is commenting on in her discussion of the spread of drag slang requires the consideration of her status in the community, of the role she performs as a mentor, of her status as a queer woman of color, and of her desire to be acknowledged, appreciated, and perhaps celebrated for her talented entertainment. All this is to say, without the careful work of grounding in the community, attention to the identity

work Foxxi performers in discourse, and the variable factors that dynamically engage with her identity construction, there is no hope of reaching a reliable and informed approach to interpretation and understanding of the data.

5.5 Conclusions: Identity and Language (Regard)

This chapter has set out to begin the necessary work of sociocultural grounding in the study of language regard. In doing so, it outlined the language-focused regard data offered by Foxxi, a prominent figure in the OKC drag scene. It attempted to demonstrate that, the more steps a researcher takes towards broad, ideologically-linked interpretations of data, the more a careful and intersectional approach is necessitated. While the insights gleaned from Foxxi's discourse on the community, the venues, her drag, and drag language have all contributed to an informed perspective on the OKC drag community, they also offer us glimpses in the stylistic and sociolinguistic polyphony employed by Foxxi. This, in turn, informs our understanding of some of the stylistics and language specific phenomena in the community; moreover, the identity work studied allow us to see stancetaking and positioning in that sociolinguistic polyphany[59] In many ways, a study of the language in responses to questions is interesting in itself, but even a purely descriptive study such as that would warrant sociocultural grounding in order to contextualize the ways these styles index various meanings when juxtaposed with each other, or the ways they achieve certain ends by accessing cultural associations that align or distance the speaker from the subject matter.

This chapter, however, was ultimately interested in the language regard data that came out of these interviews and, in tandem with years of observation, used discourse on the

[59] e.g., Foxxi's discussion of drag *as* a drag persona and the transition into speaking as the artist, particularly in front of her daughter and sister.

community and on identity to help arrive at an informed place of interpretation. On the one hand, the differences in the responses to Q1 (drag language) and Q2 (talk like a drag queen) appear to align with the findings in the Oklahoma RODEO project (McCleary 2019a; Chapter 2). That is, using a generalizing phrase like "talk like a drag queen" likely motivates abstraction to a level of categories, rather than asking about "a drag-style of speech", which produced rather nuanced and intricate descriptions of both slang and the variable meaning assigned to them given the contextual situation. On the other hand, the responses which addressed sociocultural phenomena (e.g., race in the OKC drag community) required more identity- and experience-related research of which to make sophisticated sense.

The roles Foxxi has performed in her time as an OKC drag queen emerge as critical in understanding the language regard discourse here, particularly as it pertains to the critique of the spread of drag culture and language. Foxxi's role as a successful drag queen in OKC is tied to her hard-earned respect and fandom, and though it comes with authority and cache, it still encompasses her attention to the audience and to the changing trends in drag—not all of which she agrees with. Her complaints that popular queens on TV are being credited with language that she has been using for years likely relates to this, and it is indicative of potential (re)appropriation of African American Language by LGBTQ+ populations.

Perhaps it's unnecessary to say this, but these roles don't exist independent of each other. They overlap, are tied in some places, and share a common historical experience in Foxxi's rise to success in this community. We see this intersectional take on the roles she inhabits most clearly in her discussion of the changing world of drag and popular media. She is glad and happy for the good its done, primarily as young queer and trans people are having an easier time coming out and experimenting with gender, and she is glad to see drag move

beyond the “old school” styles so common in Oklahoma’s past. And finally, while she is aware of the incorrect usage of newer members, and is aware that it’s not their fault if they have no exposure to it, she does have critical insights about the origins of such language. More specifically, she is critical of the claims that *Drag Race* and the celebrity queens in pop culture are the originators of drag-related language and customs. These are meaningful and informative language regard insights she offers, ones which lend us a starting point for an understanding of the changing linguistic terrain for queer and trans peoples in Oklahoma, and which would not be as readily available in interpretation without the ethnographic grounding provided in this chapter. Finally, Foxxi’s insights, and the Queer Folk Linguistic approach to them, help to begin painting a picture of the sociocultural and sociolinguistic landscape of the OKC drag community.

CHAPTER VI

SPILLING ALL THE TEA: PERSPECTIVES AS BRICOLAGE

This chapter revisits some of the same regard-eliciting questions of the preceding chapter—ideas about a "drag style" of speech, of the ideologies and archetypes associated with "talking like a drag queen"—now reviewing the responses of a group of six drag performers (in addition to Foxxi) with varying backgrounds, experiences, and positions in the community. This chapter also includes a brief look at the "my drag" and "last words" tasks to glean insight on performer's identity construction in interaction, pertaining to both the drag personae and the artists behind the characters. Finally, it revisits the attitudinal data surrounding the spread of drag language and culture, observing some emerging patterns in this dataset.

The wide range of experience in such a small number of performers requires that this chapter not attempt any generalizations or attempts at widespread description across the community. It is interested in each respondent's series of responses, their shared experiences, how that relates to their language regard, and where we see similarities and differences across the dataset. The result, like the previous chapter, helps to begin painting a picture of the OKC drag scene. Additionally, it aids the argument for a Queer Folk Linguistic approach to the language-focused studies of underrepresented communities, and for the coupling of (sociocultural) language regard research with sociolinguistic research.

This chapter's data comes primarily from seven performers in the OKC drag scene, three who are seasoned queens, and four who have two years or less of experience in the scene (see Table 6.1[115]). All the newer performers are drag children of someone in the scene. Not all the seasoned performers are actively involved with drag family. Their individual experiences with drag kinship, the community, and their levels of experience will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.3. The responses analyzed in this chapter come from eight different recordings adding up to a total time of 6:21:09 hours of recorded speech data. The sections of the recordings that correspond to the questions of interest, and some related discussions, were all transcribed in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2020), exported to rich text documents, and analyzed. Ultimately, the combined transcripts added up to 25, 339 words of speech data used for the analysis in this chapter.

Table 6.1. Breakdown and relevant information of all performers discussed in this chapter, including performers' names, years of experience in drag, age, ethic identity (of the performer), gender identity (of the performer), and a few words on their drag.

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

[115] All this information was taken from the "Personal Information" sheet; see Appendix B.

6.1 Drag style of speech and talking like a drag queen

Like the discourse displayed in the previous chapter, the responses covered in this chapter over the existence of a "drag style" of speech tend to focus on "slang", in-group language use, and more explicit instances of expressions of regard for language. When asked if there is such a thing as a "drag style" of speech, for example, Gizele responds that there "definitely" is (see Excerpt 6.1). Gizele further comments on the in-group status of a "drag style" of speech, that there is a "code" and that many (presumably non-group members) would have a hard time understanding it.

Excerpt 6.1. Gizele on a "drag style" of speech

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

Gizele's take on "drag style" of speech captures what seems to be the general consensus for this group. Most respondents think of individual lexical items, or perhaps specific uses of lexical items, in response to this question; most of them imply the in-group usage of such items and the potential confusion or offense they could cause non-group members. Foxxi's initial response[116] was that "there's so many terminologies", that there were different words that could "mean the exact same thing", and that some words can mean something in one context but change in others. She specifically explains that "the way you say it could mean…something else or a derogatory comment or rude statement" (see Excerpt 5.16 of the previous chapter). That is, for at least two of these seasoned performers and long-time community members, the

[116] Reviewed more in Chapter 5; see Excerpt 5.16.

idea of a "drag style" of speech evokes ideas of slang and lexical items which have potential to be misinterpreted, perhaps even to be found insulting, especially by non-community members. This attention to slang is equally demonstrated by the less experienced performers.

Rae, a drag queen who has 2 years of experience[117], immediately gave examples of the in-group usage of *live/life*, which occurs in phrases like "getting/giving (me) *life*"[118] and "I *live* (for NP)"[119]. These are words/phrases that are used quite frequently in this dataset. In fact, the words "life" and "live"[120] both occur 34 times each in the transcripts. "Life" occurs in this drag-related usage 5 times, but the in-group usage of *live/living* occurs 10 times, suggesting the verb is more popular across this group[121].

Rae's drag brother, Alexander, also took part in the naming of drag-related items, drawing parallels between "drag style" of speech and "our own little slang" (See Excerpt 6.2). Among the items referenced were *werk*[122], *yas/yaass*[123], *read*[124], and *shade*[125].

Excerpt 6.2. Alexander on a "drag style" of speech.

1	Alex:	drag style of speech, we have like our own little slang, like we have *werk*, *ya:s*, *read*,
2		we've been saying read all night, um *shade*, so like there is kinda that, style, there is
3		kind of that slang, um, when we're back stage and somebody says we're just gonna *run*
4		*it*, like this took me forever to understand…that means, we're not talking in between,
5		once I call your name you go, if it's a person ahead of you, you get up there get ready to go

[117] See Chapter 4, Section 4.2 for more.
[118] i.e., to be entertained or excited by something, typically of performance or appearance.
[119] See note 118. Rae's example was "I live for your dress" and demonstrates that this works in the present progressive as well: "I'm living for your dress".
[120] This includes first-person *live*, third-person singular *lives*, and progressive *living*.
[121] More on drag slang and popular words in this dataset in Chapter 7.
[122] A celebratory exclamation, typically used as a cheer or message of encouragement. It's popularity is often attributed to RuPaul's 1993 song "Supermodel (You Better Work)".
[123] Similar to *werk*; a variation on the word "yes".
[124] Ritual insult and/or critique. See more in Chapters 4 and 7.
[125] Used similar to *read/ing*.

Aside from the items that Alexander offers, he further characterizes the slang as "a style" of slang, highlighting *run it* as an example and pointing out its relevance to the culture of entertainment. That is, in lines 4 and 5, Alexander explains that to *run it* is to move from one act/performance to another without the hosts intermediary dialogue and engagement with the audience. Alexander mentions that it "took forever" for him to learn this and that he missed his cue a number of times.

There is no doubt that the explicit regard in these responses are interesting and informative in terms of the phrases and lexical items, as well as the respondent's ideas about their usage. Some more nuanced insights from this community come from the more implicit and presuppositional information offered in their responses. Gizele's initial response to the question about a "drag style" of speech addresses slang and the "code" that the community often uses, but she moves into a discussion of the origin of this code, a discussion important for the study of drag language, for this particular project, and this particular group of speakers.

Excerpt 6.3. Gizele on the origins of drag slang

1	Gizele:	a lot of- I think a lot of it, actually comes, more from Paris Is burning, and, then it's
2		spreading out into mainstream, and RuPaul's Drag Race when you see it, now that it's on,
3		in on the screens people are, seeing those words, and now they're rolling out into other,
4		communities now, and a lot of, our slang and stuff, I think a lot of it comes form the
5		South, cause I was watchin, when I was watchin the Housewives of Atlanta, they say a
6		lot of stuff and I'm thinkin like, they got this from the gay community, I was like you
7		know what's funny, I think the gay community got this from the South I think, like "what's
8		the tea" and all that stuff, that's these, Georgia Peaches used to sit down and drink tea, so
9		I think we get that a lot from, Black women

Her attention to the origin of this language, specifically mentioning the African American sociocultural and linguistic roots of this "code", is indicative of a different way of thinking about drag-related language for some of these performers. Kelly Powers, for example, mentions that the particular things she says in drag would be inappropriate out of drag, or otherwise that she wouldn't feel comfortable with that way of speaking outside of the context of a drag event. After that, however, she claims drag slang is just the same as what the broader "gay community" uses, just more intensified. Kelly is alluding to the fact that many drag performers' usage of in-group language is both appeasing their audiences and establishing community language norms.

These differences in the few excerpts examined above are indicative of experiential and identity-based differences, some of which are further reflected in the responses to the questions, "What does it mean to talk like a drag queen?". By and large, these responses deal with levels of detail (both in regard for language and in sociocultural knowledge/opinion) on a more abstract or generalized level than the responses to the preceding question, which produced a number of responses with specific examples of slang and usages (i.e., *granularity*).

Excerpt 6.4. Alexander on the usage of drag slang

which a lot of these are coming out into, normal speech, for, most everyone,
because of RuPaul's, 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>

Alexander gives more examples than most other participants in this study, and he does a nice job of exemplifying them in use, as well. However, what's even more of interest here is Alex's final thoughts on this matter, that he is frustrated by the spread and of language into "normal speech" and by the comparison of TV drag to local drag—a very common sentiment across every performer I talked to in OKC. Even more interesting, his final line is a performative conversation with someone who apparently gets the usage of *werk* wrong (perhaps an analogy for them many in-group items that visitors and new members could misuse), and his response is a correction and policing of sorts. This might seem harsh, but for new performer, with every step they take towards their goals, they have more motivation to establish themselves as an authority within the community, even if only over brand new performers.

Rae's response, albeit terse, gives another set of examples of slang before saying that speakers who don't know how to use in-group slang ought not to use it all. This type of policing, it occurs to me, might be related to the identity established within the community as members, aspiring performers, and respectably up-and-comers. For new and visiting people, the language matters might seem trivial or jovial, even, but for these newer performers, it's a system of code and of belonging-indexing communication. In that light, it's no wonder they care so much.

Excerpt 6.5. Guin on the usage of drag slang

1	Guin:	do you mean slang, it came from the ballrooms…like Paris Is Burning like it's very like,
2		ballroom kinda scene, and that's where a lot of that came from like the *sickening, fierce*

Guin's response is somewhat different; she refers to some in-group language but first responds with a description of the origin of much of this slang, something that separates her from the others in these responses but which also align with the attention her mother, Foxxi, gives to the proper origins of in-group languag. I will note that Guin specifically mentions *sickening*, which is mentioned by Foxxi, Alex, and Guin, as well as *fierce*, which is only mentioned once by her and her drag mother each. These two commonalities allude to the influence Guin has had from her drag family (see more below).

Guin, for example, begins her response to the "talk like a drag queen" question by thinking about the art of drag and what it can do with/for gender, before turning to a personal take on the usage of in-group language.

Excerpt 6.6. Guin on talking like a drag

1	Guin:	what does it mean to talk like a drag queen, I don't know I think it's, you know, doing
2		drag is, poking fun at, at gender and that, the norm, in life and like these-, these
3		expectations that society has, for how people should be living their lives, talk like a drag
4		queen , I mean I don't know I've always been gay as hell, so, I've always, I guess kinda
5		talked like that, but I guess just like use terminology and know what it means where it
6		comes from…like whether it's a straight friend who has never been out before or like,
7		someone who's like new to coming out, or anything like that like to hear them say stuff,
8		you're just kinda like <Q ope Q>, @@@, <Q no that's like that, that's not how you use
9		that girl like that's not right like hang on just second Q>, but, so to like know and have
10		that meaning and like…it's like you have, cracked the code on just like …to talk like a
11		drag queen is just, it's in any kind of gay way like that, <Q huh?, did what?, hello? Q>,
12		and it is, but it's just like I, it's to talk and, to use it like appropriately I guess

Her response (Excerpt 6.6) addresses "poking fun at gender" and societal expectations for the ways people ought to live—two relatively abstract ideological concepts—almost whimsically because of their, perhaps obvious, role in drag performance. This is an instance that reminds me of the Labovian-Prestonian dialogue on non-linguists' vocabulary for nasality, disambiguated by Preston (1996) as simply a distinction between sets of vocabularies with varying levels of attention to general/granular detail (i.e., "nasal' for *nasalized* or *denasalized* speech). In Guin's case, on the other hand, the analogy extends beyond linguistics. Her knowledge of gender norms and other societal expectations are both personal and real. The vocabulary she employs in this interview may not look like the language often used to describe these ideological powers in places like Oklahoma, especially in academic texts, but she is able to do it nonetheless.

Guin reflects on her long-held queer identity and links talking-like-a-drag-queen to "always" having been "gay", then uses the conjunction *so* (in its own intonation unit). This *so* looks like the conjunction that implies consequence, in which case we might see Guin's statement starting to look a bit more like Kelly's interpretation of drag queens' sounding like the "normal" gay population. She emphasizes this with the additional requirement that you have to know the meaning of your slang (a statement all but one of the newer performers reported) and the additional stipulation that you should know where it comes from. This latter consideration is, I believe, probably due to her drag mother's influence on her, but some of Guin's discourse here resembles Alexander and Rae's ideas about drag-related slang. She gives a quotative performance of someone getting in-group language wrong, and then comments that talking like a drag queen is talking any kind of "gay way", an understanding that more aptly aligns with Kelly's depiction.

With this, we now see most of the newer performers express interest in correcting and policing language far more than the seasoned queens. In fact, this sort of attention to language use is not given much attention at all by Kelly and Gizele. Gizele's description of talking-like-a-drag queen revolves around "tone", a folk linguistic term that appears to correspond with pitch (contours), amplitude, and/or voice quality (again echoing of the folk vocabulary), and she uses it as an exclamation in her hypothetical story. She notes that anyone in the dressing room might hear this particular production of *bitch* and know that something happened—presumably something bad. This dressing room lesson is an interesting way of talking about drag-queen-related speech, one that is about language use but in a more abstract way than the discussions of slang.

Excerpt 6.7. Kelly on talking like a drag queen

Kelly: lie a lot, @@, yeah, you have to lie a lot, how wonderful everything is how comfortable you are, how, you know, <Q this old thing Q>, 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, so a lot of lying, you know everything is positive and its lime light from the, moment you step out of the dressing room until you go back… oh gosh, we throw a lot of shade at each other, in the dressing room, like, <Q oh girl so glad you're wearing that wig, (.) again Q>, or, you know someone's, tips on their heels will be worn off, and I'll be like <Q well if you were standing on me that long I'd be wore off too Q>, you know cause we throw a lot of, joking shade at each other, in the dressing room

Kelly's response to this question is that one must "lie", and her description draws on the acting required of a drag performer who is playing a character at an event. While these initial insights are interesting and amusing, Kelly's own dressing room lesson is just as

important as the last. Kelly warns that tough skin is needed in the OKC drag scene because throwing shade is just a part of being in this community. I can attest to this. At one group discussion session, in fact, upon arriving at the subject of *shade*, one performer grabbed my hand and told me my nails (which had polish on them) were "cute" but in need of "professional help", the semantic overlap of which I appreciate. Kelly's warning of shade-throwing is another example of abstracting away from word-level language regard. Here, she describes one of the community's ritual linguistic act, and one that probably also has its roots in African American Language and culture.

I want to repeat that, though these responses look quite different when we look closely at what they are saying, they both address language in a way that is at least a little more abstract than the word-level focus of slang that the "drag-style of speech" question elicited. In that regard, many of the performers have something in common. The nuance and the details of their discussion, however, reveal some of the key differences across this group. Newer performers have more at stake in establishing belonging in the community, and that seems to show up in their policing of the usage of slang. For those performers who had to learn and practice the "code", as many must, it might feel like something they have to protect (i.e., make sure new community members aren't misusing anything), or perhaps something they need to demonstrate their mastery of (i.e., knowing the nuances of when you can/not use certain items. In many ways, the language (or "code" or slang) in this community is an important part of new performers' confirming their in-group status, which helps to explain Alexander, Rae, and Celeste's reply to the second language-based question in this study. They all seemed to have slightly misinterpreted the question; when asked "what does it mean to talk like a drag queen?", they all respond with what this way of talking *means to them*, on a personal level.

For these younger performers, what it means to talk like a drag queen is addressed quite differently. On the one hand, they are all thinking personally, a kind of reflection not unlike other areas of these interviews; however, they all conflate (with the help of the question) talking like a drag queen with the standards of community-marking speech. In Alexander's case, he explains that hearing this language makes him feel at home, like he's around other members of his community, even if he had to learn what all this lingo means being a young white performer on the scene. Rae adds that it makes her feel more comfortable and is perhaps hinting that being able to exist in a small pocket of a queer community in OKC can make queer people feel, for once in their lives, like they're not so different from everyone else. Of course, she adds that the definition of "normal" and "weird" are all relative. Celeste's take on this question is perhaps the most personal. She describes this way of speaking as a medium through which she can become her drag character ("it puts me in that different persona"), though she also does not give any examples or further commentary on this.

These last three responses fit the patters that have emerged from the data investigated in this section—namely, that the questioning of the existence of drag-style of speech motivates a different way of thinking about community language than the archetype-based question on talking like a drag queen. All the respondents participated in some level of abstract—or at the very least, some sort of "zooming out" from word-level descriptions—when transitioning from one question to the other, but in both sets of responses, newer performers here have tended to approach language issues differently. More specifically, newer performers more readily name slang items and appear more concerned with monitoring and critiquing their misuse. Seasoned performers, on the other hand, have more experience to draw upon, more ways of thinking about this style of speech. It's interesting that the idea that drag-style of speech and talking-

like-a-drag queen is, for many, synonymous with gay-related speech styles more broadly. This differs from Gizele's, Foxxi's, and to some extent Guin's additional commentary on the origin of these ways of talking, another hint that lived experience and role within the community are likely key factors in the variation in language regard.

6.2 The "My Drag" task

This section is aided greatly by those that came earlier in this chapter. Having done a little work in the geographical grounding of this research to the 39th St. Enclave, the way that these performers (variably) describe this area, and demonstrating some of the similarities in perspectives on OKC drag, this section investigates some of the responses to the "My Drag" and "Last Words" tasks to build a better understanding of how these performers see *themselves* specifically in this community. Ultimately, the goal of this section, in conjunction with the previous section, is to provide enough information to provide an interpretation and analysis of these performers' regard for language that is as accurate and reliable as possible.

Below in Excerpt 5.8, Kelly's initial description of her drag ("glamour for the masses") appears at first similar to the "old school" drag mentioned before. Personal experience can attest that the shade-throwing humor she alludes to is also typical of this type of drag, which makes it all the more interesting that she claims to exist between the "old school" and the "new drag". Part of this undoubtedly stems from her involvement with Wreck Room, her hosting shows with young performers, who don't make it easy for her either ("I have to prove myself more [in the] Wreck Room than I have to at any other place" Excerpt 5.7). There, being a performer with 19 years of experience in this community, she is likely perceived as an "old school" queen, despite Kelly's own differentiation between herself and the "older queens".

Some of these roles Kelly performs—i.e., facilitator at the Wreck Room, experienced OKC queen, mentor to young queens—probably aid her interpretation of herself as in-between eras of drag as much as they are products of her being in-between critical points in the history of OKC drag culture.

Excerpt 6.8. Seasoned queens' "my drag" (Gizele; Kelly)

Kelly: the drag name is Kelley Powers, and for me, drag is, glamour for the masses, yeah, so Kelley Powers is, the very outgoing side of me, um, no stops, um, says whatever comes to her mind, but, does it with, ease and grace, and, never to hurt someone's feelings, Kelly's the person who can get on the stage and call the grandmother at the back of the Fat Mary's Bar a cunt and, she loves it and laughs at it…for the newer, queens I would say it's old school drag, for the old queens I would say it's new drag, I'm more, late nineties, early two-thousands era, drag

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Gizele: I'm Gizelle Monae I've been doing drag for a little over nine years, in a nutshell, you can consider me, half, eclectic live singer, half comedy queen… I wanted to be fish, I wanted to be no-pads, I wanted to just, I thought I was a skinny bitch I was like oh I'm just gonna be this skinny girl…it took a long time to find, Gizelle Monae, and, she ends up, being somebody who just doesn't give a fuck about anything, so I'm very that bitch… she gives zero fucks, and she doesn't look at the technicalities of things, and I just like to go out and there and have fun

Gizele, on the other hand, addresses less the community and her place among its other performers, and instead she describes her personal journey with her drag character (a complicated and intimate journey reflected in the switching back and forth of grammatical person throughout this response, i.e., between performer and drag character, and perhaps a

combination of both at times). Two important takeaways from this are: 1) Gizele's early idea of her drag persona relied on *passability* ("fish"; or, being able to pass as a person assigned female at birth on the street) and on her association of body size and beauty with passing; and 2) her evolved attitude of someone unimpeded by the thoughts of how she is perceived. This is a slight overstatement, but elsewhere Gizele does elaborate that she's equally unbothered by criticism of her drag or of her drag style; she's out there to express herself, have fun, and help others have fun. In that light, Gizele is at least indirectly referencing the community and their at times exacting standards. Her experience of never having been invited back to Pheonix, for example, was something she might have been bothered by in the past. And while she is still curious as to why this happened, when asked how she felt about it now, she said she didn't give a fuck. That is, Gizele's "My Drag" response is personal and introspective, but her "zero fucks" attitude appears to be, at least in part, a reaction to the sociocultural habits of the gayborhood.

Some of the younger and newer performers are obviously less experienced in the scene and have less to draw upon in terms of how they distinguish themselves from other performers, but that does not stop them from being enthusiastically straightforward with who their drag personae are. Below in Excerpt 5.9 are the responses uttered by Rae, Alexander, and Celeste (siblings), all of which are notably shorter than any of the seasoned performers' answers to this question.

Excerpt 6.9. Alexander, Rae, and Celeste response to "My Drag" task

Alexander: Alexander Jackson, I am the pretty boy emo king, um, well for me, my drag is ever evolving, so, you could catch me one night probably doing an emo song, like Fall Out Boy Panic At The Disco, My Chemical Romance which, actually

	perfectly describes my drag, or you can catch me doing something upbeat like, tonight I'm fucking you, oh, can I say that
Rae:	Ravishing Rae, Jackson, bad and boujee, eeoow, whoo, whoo lord child, oh man I'm, diverse caring, loving, but I'll cut you in the throat, don't fuck with me, don't fuck with it
Celeste:	uh just basic rock out, from the classics to, pretty much the modern, it's straight forward

It is fair to say that these three siblings are rather different from Foxxi, Kelly, and Gizele regarding their depictions of their drag, and while I mentioned that they are all much briefer in their responses, Alexander and Rae are rather consistent in speaking from the point of view of the character they perform on stage. Foxxi, Kelly, Gizele, and Guin (below) all switch perspective (grammatical person) in their descriptions of their drag, possibly indicative of the time they have spent developing their persona. Alexander and Rae (and to some extent Celeste, who was rather timid at recording sessions) both do a good job of capturing their drag in a few words, also indicative of the work they put into their personae, but in ways that feel like performance of those personae. Alexander describes himself and uses music to help index the persona he has crafted, one I might add is quite different from others (and not solely because he is the only drag king in this study).

Rae has similarly crafted a character with a personality and performance style ("Bad and Boujee" being the title of a popular song by the hip-hop group Migos and artist Lil Uzi Vert in 2016 which later became *Billboard Hot 100*'s number one song in early 2017). Like Foxxi, Rae uses pop culture to index parts of her persona, some of which is inevitably associated with her African American/Black identity. That component of her persona,

however, is still just one facet of Rae, albeit an important one, which we are reminded of in her comedically juxtaposed phrasing that she is "caring" but will "cut your throat".

Finally, Celeste, who started drag much later in life than her siblings, has a more reserved approach to drag and in fact talks the least out of anybody in this dataset. All of these performers differ in their aesthetics from Guin and the more seasoned queens, but Celeste is the only performer who primarily uses rock music to establish her character. Like the others, she uses music to index a persona or an aesthetic, but her description is admittedly less enthusiastic than the young performers, who more readily admit to wanting to be getting more spotlight. Despite their differences, however, all of these performers are consistent in speaking as their drag personae, potentially influenced by the constant performing and auditioning they must be doing in order to get noticed by event managers and organizers in the community. If this is case, then so far, all performers are in some way thinking or affected by the community standards and procedures for making it in drag, something that only seems believable once we've reviewed the tough terrain of the 39th St. Enclave.

The last performer to address here is Guin, who responded to this task in a group discussion with Gizele and her drag mother, Foxxi, who mentioned several times that she had specific ideas about how drag queens ought to present themselves. Her number one critique was suggesting that girls pad (i.e., add padding underneath their costumes to create a more curvy figure underneath their outfits), second only to the request that drag queens where some sort of breast augment. So, when Guin explains who she is and elaborates on being told how to do drag, one can't help but wonder if she is responding, in a very indirect way, to her mother's advice and no doubt the advice of others—Gizele, in this same conversation, added that "you have to make a figure if you're doing female impersonation" regarding padding and

drag. Though these segments did not occur simultaneously with Guin's "My Drag" task, the frequent similar marks Foxxi makes in her interviews even in 2018 suggest that Guin has already been reminded of her Foxxi's opinions.

Excerpt 6.10. Guin's "My Drag" response

Guin: I'm Guin Holland, she's very, to describe her drag persona…you get like the classy trashy like, alternative… I mean I'm still very new to drag, there are a lot of things I, um, there are a lot of things I don't do, that I, am told I should be doing, but again like I said, we all, as drag queens, preach diversity, when it comes to like wanting different types of entertainment, but when we actually get them in our face, we're like <Q mm no, but that's not right, cause it's not what I do, and it's not what I've been raised to do Q>

Guin's self-characterization is interesting in that is uses "classy", a word frequently describing the "old school" drag style that younger performers typically don't adopt, but she combines this with "trashy". Given that they occur together, that "classy" typically indexes not just class but *upper*-class ideas, and that "trashy" indexes *lower*-class ideas, Guin's persona echoes of the in between place that Kelly describes for herself. However, rather than linking that to age, Guin connects this with having a good drag mother to guide her and the sexual- or desire-based performances she does. She harkens back to the topic of diversity here and calls out the community for not accepting other styles of drag and finishes the response with a quotative performance of what these non-named performers say in response to "different types of entertainment". One interesting thing to note here is that she uses the phrase "it's not what I've been raised to do", language that indexes ideas about home, family, and upbringing,

providing an interesting application of the metaphorical mapping of family onto the community and it's networks of participants.

Guin, like many other young performers, aspires to being a star in this community, and she wants to be accepted by the community and to express herself in her own approach to the art of drag. This seems to be a feeling shared, at least in part, by all drag performers in OKC (and likely elsewhere, too), but it's particularly apparent in the discourse produced by younger and newer performers. Seasoned performers talk about how they have changed, how they have learned how to be the persona they embody, and how they learn to navigate the scene (or otherwise learn to stop caring about its expectations quite so seriously).

The newer names on the strip, however, have everything to gain from establishing their character and being recognized as a talented performer. This may even be part of the incentive for Rae, Alexander, and (somewhat) Celeste's sticking to their performative descriptions of their characters and their having found a safe space in the Wreck Room. It seems very likely to be an incentive for Guin to feel compelled to defend her aesthetic choices. This leaves us with the impression that all of these performers are aware of their negotiating the dynamic state of drag in the OKC drag scene, that that's a part of being in the community, and that learning and adjusting to some community norms is a part of it, too. Another part of it, though, is pushing back against the conservative ideas about what drag cannot be.

6.3 Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed the responses of several questions given by six drag performers, and it has used their talk about Oklahoma, OKC venues, and their own drag to help understand more fully the ways that these performers locate themselves within the scene. In doing so, we

are reminded of some of the critical differences in community engagement between newer and seasoned performers. In studying their regard for language, we begin to see that community position—i.e., roles—appear to be a powerful explanatory factor in this discussion. That is, all the newer performers (excluding, perhaps, Celeste) want to be well-known and to get gigs to perform their drag.

The role of up-and-coming performer would require them to take criticism (which Guin alludes to), to learn to throw and to take shade (Alexander and Rae confirm this), and to participate in the linguistic customs of the community without messing up or appearing like they don't know how to use them. These could easily be mapped onto the motivations for why a performer would be so keen to correct others' use of language, while the more seasoned queens (particularly the performers of color) are more interested in acknowledging their personal observations of language use and the origins of the "code" employed in the community. In that light, the role of drag mentor, or drag elder, could potentially explain these differences as well.

Finally, the broad patterns in types of language matters attended to in the last two questions addressed here are consistent across the speakers, seemingly confirming the important role presuppositional and implicational material can play, even within the questions presented to respondents. Not every performers responded to these questions the same, nor did all of them adjust their language-focus the same with from question-to-question. But they did all make a move to talk about the code overall, or the pragmatics of using it, which appears to be an important takeaway for the future design and study of sociocultural language regard research.

CHAPTER VII

ALL TEA NO SHADE: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter reiterates some of the lessons learned in this research project. It reflects on the ideas that influenced its design, on the data that were collected, and even more on what the process and results mean for future studies. The key ideas covered here are twofold: First is the importance of studying language regard in conjunction with studies of language in general, perhaps especially for sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic endeavors, but beyond those concerns, even into theoretical and cognitive directions. People's ideas about language, their ways of organizing their thoughts on it, and the way they deliver those often strongly-held beliefs can inform us not only of the nature of attitudes and beliefs about language but also of facts about language structure and perception, and, perhaps most of all, about the strategies for organizing practical and abstract information.

The second point is that, the ability to carry out research on language regard, there must be an understanding of identity and, as shown in this dissertation, the ways identity is tied to community and relational roles. People are almost always performing, in one way or another, and that performance is dictated more by the complex roles they perform than by any single demographic factor typically relied on to predict variable choices in sociolinguistics.

These complex roles are subject to the same sorts of influences and display the same variation as many socioculturally determined aspects of performance. One principal finding with regard to such influences in this study here is the importance of the way social media and popular culture have drastically affected the local drag scene, to say nothing of its crucial role in conducting linguistic research on this community. These stand out as two of the most significant lessons learned in this Queer Folk Linguistic approach, and I hope in a brief summary of them to be able to illuminate what worked well for this project, what could have been done better, and where we might go from here.

To some extent the two points made here are unoriginal, particularly in that they focus on interests either long-held or otherwise recently given considerable attention. The subtle differences, however, lie in their overlap with regard to the study of peoples' (linguists and non-linguists alike) regard for language and in the study of language variation and change. In this latter endeavor, more and more scholars are recognizing the importance of conducting research and documentation of communities traditionally left unstudied (e.g., Stanford and Preston 2009), both for the sake of broader representation and in the hope of covering more ground in the pursuit of mapping, analyzing, and understanding language variation. With more attention shifting to marginalized voices, however, methodological and theoretical questioning arises, suggesting that many of the basic assumptions made in more traditional social science research are influenced by privileged and limited perspectives on the collection of data and the people that data come from. This point attempts to highlight where this study has attempted to be more aware of those privileges—though it will inevitably fall short in some ways—and how that has led to methodological and interpretive insights for the study of language in society.

7.1 The reciprocity of studying language *and* language regard

The study of language regard has, in one form or another, been around a lot longer than some may think—even within linguistics—despite the surprisingly persistent attitude that non-linguists can't know about language. Research has show, however, that even relatively complex concepts like voice quality, prosody, argument structure, and implicature are available for comment by "regular" folks who have not been formally trained. Although many of these comments may fall short in linguistic even ideological accuracy, the expression ideas and beliefs still tell a great deal about the realities of the respondents' perceived world, of which language is a very important part.

This dissertation is a reminder that people's comments on language are worthwhile subjects of study, and that they are insightful and at times surprising sources of research questions themselves. For example, this study asked, among other things, if drag performers thought that a drag-style of speech existed, what it means to talk like a drag queen, and what performers think about these ways of speaking. The performers' regard for language in this context was twofold: 1) that place- and community-based systems of hierarchy and success (though not necessarily linearly) are tied to ideas of language, identity, and self-representation; and 2) that *roles* (a complex and intersectional combination that can include macro-, micro-, and locally-based identity components) are an important part of how performers navigate their way through the scene and an important factor in the language variation observed in this community. Such broader findings inform both the sociolinguistic situation and suggest where to move next with questions and hypotheses in ways that could have come only from an understanding of the respondents' own comments,.

Many excerpts were analyzed here, and many alluded to language-specific phenomena. The majority of the data dealt with broader topics, but that should not suggest that these performers are not more attuned to finer-grained observations of language use nor that these broader topics (e.g., setting) were unimportant to the analysis of the more direct commentary on language itself. For example, in one discussion which occurred among Gizele, Guin, their respective significant others, and Foxxi, and which centered on the slang that drag queens often employed, a folk acoustic observation occurred. Amidst a series of drag-related slang items that included a released voiceless alveolar stop (e.g., *tea, read(t)y*, cunty,* etc.), Gizele offered the popular and locally-used version of US Southern "honey": *hunty*. Almost immediately after Gizele says this, she notes: "we put that *t* on a lot of words." Her observation is adept, much like the Labov-Preston interchange on linguistic and folk labels with regard to nasality discussed in Chapter 5, since the expression "put[ting] that *t*" succinctly recognizes an articulatory/acoustic phenomenon, albeit outside of the linguist's vocabulary.

This folk linguistic data was interesting enough that, while finishing this dissertation project, a pilot study was begun on the investigation of /t/ release across the speakers covered here in this dissertation. A review of the transcripts, focus on particular sections of the interviews (e.g., "my drag," "drag language," and an additional question on "the purpose of drag"), a check for release bursts in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2020), and an account of intonation units revealed some some emerging patterns. The discussion of drag language seems to consistently co-occur with higher /t/ release, both because of the release bursts common in popular slang and because of the apparent community awareness and interest in it (see Table 6.1 for a brief breakdown of the data reviewed so far).

Table 7.1. /t/ release across 6 speakers, with word and IU frequency

	/t/	Words	IUs	Time
Total	743	14,647	2803	3:17:17
My Drag	98	2039	420	16:33
Purpose of Drag	226	3523	586	39:07
Drag Language	298	6630	1298	1:49:18
Drag & Pop Culture	121	2455	499	32:30

As this direction for research continnues, more and more language regard data appear to be both insightful and beneficial in the further design of sociolinguistic questioning and methodology. And while sounds of language are certainly something of popular interest in folk linguistics as well as in this community's talk about language, they are not the entirely the scope or range of language regard and folk linguistic knowledge. Many performers in this study were able to recognize copula absence (usually indirectly) as a sign of drag language and of African American Language/Culture influence on the community.

After transcribing, analyzing, and reviewing over 25 thousand words of data for this chapter, I do believe that Oklahoma City performers constitute a diverse set of English first and second-language speakers, of various and multi-dialectal speakers, of stylistically sensitive speakers, and of many speakers who have been influenced by both African American Language features and other regional influences. The latter influences, particularly AAL, appear to me to be very influential in this community of practice's way of communicating. While I have noticed trends across gender and ethnic identities—from

phonetic and phonological patterns (e.g., /ay/ monophthongization) to morpho-phonological patterns (e.g., 3rd person singular-*s* deletion), the structural/constructional patterns (e.g., double negatives, copular absence), and even in metaphorical borrowing and extension (e.g., *spilling the tea*)—the investigation of these influences and of their potential appropriation and reappropriation warrants more dedicated study, which I am certainly planning to do in the future (see Chapter 6). This chapter, then, is primarily interested in the metalanguage and regard for language uttered in these recorded sessions, much of which is tied to the aforementioned influences.

Table 7.2. Popular "slang" items by frequency

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

Every participant in this project said or referred to "slang" in response to the question on drag-related speech. Of the items mentioned, the most prominent were *tea*

(gossip, news, updates), *shade* (jokes, insults, critiques), *read* (criticism, point out flaws, joke), *live* (impressed, excited, entertained), *jush* (feeling, aesthetics; see Chapter 4), *wig* (hair, pop-culture reference), *boots* (intensifier), *werk* (bravo/perform), *ya:s* (agreement/cheer), *beat* (makeup done well), *snatch* (take for oneself), and for one group discussion session, *bitch* and the **tongue pop** (usually a palatal click). These last two are quite interesting in that the former can be used as a vocative, nound, or discourse marker (see Chapter 4); the latter appears to mark punctuation or acknowledgement.

A quick search within the transcripts for these words, where they occur in use and in the metalanguage elicited by questions reveals that *bitch* is a very high frequency word (0.05% of all words in these data), and that the prominence of the other slang items in these recordings are decreasingly prevalent. Not all the respondents were eager to define and exemplify these words, but of those who were willing to give concrete examples, they were all newer and bourgeoning performers.

7.2 Final thoughts

This dissertation has functioned as a starting point for the theorization and formulation of a Queer Folk Linguistics, and in doing so, has looked at the language use and the stylization, identity-related performance, and variation among a community of drag performers. It offers a number of perspectives to consider, and it encourages a number of future research projects and avenues for inspection. It is my hope that this will be the beginning of important ways of thinking about language regard data, identity, and their potential to shed insight on local and broader ideological realities for queer people, and

particularly in ways that are sensitive to the complexity of gender, race, roles, and intersectional approaches to identity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RODEO Interview Protocol:

1. Residence: What's your hometown? How long have you lived there? Where is your mother from? Where is your father from? Are they both native speakers of English?
2. Age: Date of birth.
3. Sex, Group Membership (see list in #7 below; in this project we are doing only A's and E's)
4. Occupation: What do you do (or are you planning to do) for a living?
5. Education: What level of school did you finish?
6. Network 1 (SOCNET):
    a. How many people who live in this neighborhood are related to you? (SOCNET B)
    b. How many people that you work with live around here? (SOCNET C)
    c. How many people of your same sex that you work with live around here? (SOCNET D)
    d. Do you hang out with people from work outside of work? (SOCNET E)
    e. (The interviewer must determine if this respondent belongs to a high density network —SOCNET A)

7. Network 2 (ETHNET): This may be hard, but can you give me an estimate of your good friends' backgrounds? Around here, there are at least the following groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and European-Americans from both big cities like Tulsa and Oklahoma City and from smaller towns and rural areas. What percentages from those groups are your close friends and associates? For example, if half of your close friends and associates are African American, you would tell me half or 50%. If a fourth of your close friends and associates are Native Americans you would tell me a quarter or 25%. Please do the best you can (and let's try to make it not add up to more than 100%!).
    a. Rural and/or small town European-Americans _____
    b. African-Americans _____
    c. Native Americans _____
    d. Mexican-Americans _____
    e. Big City (e.g., Tulsa) European-Americans _____
    f. Other _____
8. Conversation starters:
    a. What is the best thing about working/living around here?
    b. What does the rest of your family think about the area/its schools/the weather/etc?
    c. How did your family come to Oklahoma?
    d. Have you ever done anything that was really dangerous? Can you tell me about it?

e. What's the funniest or most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you?

f. What kinds of games did you play around here as kids.

9. Folk linguistic Questions

a. How old were you when you found out that people from all over the US didn't sound like people from Oklahoma.

b. What do native Oklahomans sound like? What makes them different from people in surrounding states?

c. Has anybody ever made fun of you for the way you say things?

d. Do young people around here sound like Oklahomans when they speak English?

e. Do boys and girls/men and women talk differently around here?

f. Do you think you talk like (other) Oklahomans?

g. Do all the people in Oklahoma talk pretty much the same way, or are there regions in the state where people sound different? Is they sound differently, I'd like for you to draw regions for me on this little map, and you can write in any kinds of identifiers you like on the map as well to illustrate the way people talk there or the kinds of people who live there who speak distinctively. (Please remember to discuss this map with the respondent after he or she has drawn boundaries and written labels.)

10. Reading Passage: I'm going to give you a short story to read. It's less than a page long. I'll give you a minute or two to look it over, then I'll have you read it out loud.

11. Word List: I'm going to show you some words on the computer. Just read the word on the screen, and I'll hit a button to have it move on to the next screen.
12. I'm going to give you a little Oklahoma grammar and vocabulary list. I'd very much like to know what you say and what others say about these things we're interested in?
13. You may hear people around here pronounce words like 'pin' and 'pen' with the same vowel. Do you? Have you ever heard other people pronounce it this way? Do you know of any groups or subgroups around here who do pronounce it that way (more than others)?
14. You may hear people around here use the phrase "fixin' to" to mean that they are getting ready or about to do something. Do you say this? Have you ever heard other people say this? Do you know of any groups or subgroups around here who say this more than others?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment and methods:

*Figure A.B.1.*Sample recruitment flyer advertised on Facebook, in 39th St. venues, and passed out during OKC Pride 2018 weekend.

Recruitment Script

Dear potential participant,

I am investigating Oklahoma drag and looking for participants! **If you are involved with drag performance in Oklahoma**, please consider participating in our study.

This study consists of either a **45-minute interview** or a **45-minute focus group** meeting. Participants are only asked to do one or the other. In the interviews, you will be asked about yourself, about your drag persona, about language used in the drag world, about your experience in drag in Oklahoma, and your attitudes towards all of that.

In the focus group meetings, we will meet in small groups and listen to sound clips of queens in the media and from around here. We will talk about different speech styles, what they mean to you, and how you interpret them.

In this study, we are **not at all** interested in "right" or "wrong" and would never refer to the results of this research this way. Instead, we are fascinated with how language changes from place to place, and our study will contribute to the scientific knowledge of those changes. I would be happy to discuss the objectives of this research at any point before, during, or after the interview/focus group.

Thank you so very much,

Bryce

Participant Information

Title: Acoustic and Ethnography Study of Oklahoma Drag Performers

Primary Investigator
Bryce E McCleary
PhD Candidate, OSU English Department

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the speech styles, language attitudes, and experiences of drag performers in Oklahoma.

What to Expect

In the interviews, first you will be asked a little about yourself, your drag persona, and your history with drag. Then, you will be asked some questions about drag in Oklahoma, about language used in drag, and about how you feel about all of that. Altogether, this interview should only take about 45 minutes of your time.

Focus group participants will listen to different clips of drag queens in media and from around OK and will be asked about the ways that they speak, their opinions on them, and their interpretations of speech styles. Altogether, this focus group meeting should only take about 45 minutes of your time.

Risks

There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain appreciation and understanding of how linguistic research is conducted and of language and drag in Oklahoma. There is no compensation for this study.

Your Rights and Confidentiality

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free NOT to answer individual questions or withhold any information you don't feel comfortable sharing. You're also welcome to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

The records of this study will be kept private. All names, including drag personas, will be anonymized unless otherwise specified. Otherwise, there will not be any information which could identify you. Research records will be stored on a password-protected digital storage

device in a locked drawer in a locked office. Only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records.

Contact

You may contact the Primary Investigator, Bryce McCleary, at the following email address and phone number should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: **bryce.e.mccleary@okstate.edu ; 405-314-3899;** If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at **223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377** or **irb@okstate.edu.**

If you chose to participate: We will need your informed written consent before we proceed to the interview questions and/or focus group session.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

Consent Documentation:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

Preface the signature lines with the following statement (expand if appropriate):

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

And I authorize that I may be recorded using (indicate by circling):

1. *Microphone*
2. *EGG*
3. *Video*

I want to be referred to as:

_____

In the event that the participant does not want to indicate a pseudonym or their otherwise preferred name, the researcher will assign them an anonymous name.

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

Personal Information

Name (print):

Gender Identity:

Age:

Ethnic Heritage/Identity:

Life outside of drag (type of work, school, hobbies, etc.):

Experience with Drag (years, months, etc.):

Is there other information you want to share? Or other information I ought to know?

Best form of contact:

Interview Template

Introduction

- Tell me about your drag persona. Who is she? What's her name? What's she about?
- How do you describe your drag?
- What was your first experience with drag? Seeing it? Trying it?
- How long have you been doing drag?
- Is it different now than it was when you started? Or than it has been before?

Section 1

- What is the purpose of drag?

Section 2

- How would you describe drag in Oklahoma?
    - What do you have to do to be an OK drag performer?
    - Is there a way to be successful at doing drag?
    - What do you have to do to be successful?
    - Is it different here than in other places?
    - Is it the same for everyone?
- What has your experience with drag been like?

Section 3

- Do you think that performers of color have a different drag experience than white performers?
- Are there any differences in kinds of audiences? Or in different venues?
- It seems to cost a lot to do drag, both with money and time. How do people afford it?
- What's your favorite and least favorite things about drag?

Section 4

- Is there such a thing as a drag-style of speech?
- What does it mean to talk like a drag queen?
    - Does everyone do that?
    - What about in Oklahoma specifically?
    - What are some things that drag performers say?
    - Do different queens use different styles in their speech while in drag?
- Are there any differences in the way you talk in or out of drag?
- Do any queens around here sound like celebrity queens in media, like on Drag Race?
- Drag slang?
- What's something you'd like to say to other members of our OK community?
    - Performers? Fans? People who aren't from OK?

Section 5

- What do you think about the growing popularity of drag? What about *Drag Race*?
- Do you enjoy the drag scene in Oklahoma?
- Do you like the ways of talking around here? Drag styles? Oklahoman styles?
- Are there any misconceptions about drag, language, or life in OK that you want to share?

APPENDIX C

Selected RODEO Responses:

Extract AC.1. Initial responses: 'Can you tell if someone is gay based on how they talk?'

Urban respondents		
1	*Darren*:	uh, I think, I think yeah…I mean I can hear, I can- I've, I mean I work in a
2		restaurant, and I will pass a table and be like that person's gay, just based on, the
3		way they're talking, but they're speaking to, to other people at the table
4	*Patrick*:	(laughs) ye-, I think so yeah, I think, oftentimes, you can make a correct assumption
5		based off of that that
6	*Ernest*:	I can't definitively tell anything…but yes, their voice usually lead me, to believe,
7		that they're gay
Rural respondents		
8	*Pepper*:	um no, I don't ever, I don't like to judge a book by its cover, I don't, ever assume
9		that someone's, I don't care if I see a drag queen, I'm not gonna assume that he's
10		gay until I hear it out of his mouth, like, straight from the horse's mouth (laughs), so
11	*Chance*:	um stereotypically I, like, I jump to conclusions, but then, um, I, usually try to retract
12		those conclusions and stuff and, think that, you know just because someone talks a
13		certain way, it doesn't mean they live a certain sexuality, or have like beliefs, um,
14		it's very biased when, you do that, and it's very shortcoming and, I don't know
15	*Jim*:	um, sometimes, you might, think so, but, not all the time, I would say…I don't think
16		you can tell someone's sexual preference, you can tell if they're more feminine or
17		masculine by their, the way they talk, so that, can lead you to believe one way or
18		another, but it's not always necessarily true

Extract AC.2. Jim on “two extremes”

yeah, well growing up in the- in the part of the state I did it wasn’t, I wasn't really a part of the LGBT community cause there wasn't one, and it was-- I wasn't even out until I was in college and I was like 23, or 22 years old so-- and that was only a few years ago, and so… I think that that growing up as p- pretending to be straight in a town where everyone sounds like a country person it maybe did- it- have a little bit of like— this is just how people sound and then I moved to college and I started hanging out with gay people more and I'm like, oh this is how other people sound… so that kind of probably had somewhat of an influence, just growing up in two more extreme or seeing the two more extremes I guess

APPENDIX D

Additional excerpts on the OKC drag scene:

Excerpt AD.1. Alexander, Rae, and Celeste on the Wreck Room

1	Interviewer:	if you were going to place your aesthetic in one venue here, including venues that are
2		closed, where would it be
3	Alexander:	Wreck Room
4	Rae:	Wreck Room
5	Celeste:	Wreck Room
6	Alexander:	they were seriously so open,…yeah, but they were open to every one and every thing,
7		like I said I miss them so much, that's where I started my drag
8	Rae:	m-hm
9	Alexander:	that's where I, finally found me
10	Interviewer:	what happened, why did it close down
11	Alexander:	yes, I actually, I, got the full information, cause like I said I celebrate a lot of things
12		there, for myself, um the funding was running low, we had, no money to pay rent, we
13		were about seven months behind on rent there, no money to pa electricity water, and,
14		we just couldn't keep the doors open anymore, um, the owner, Michael Baxter,
15		Roslyn, what's her last naeme, I can't think ofherlast name, but she wa spaying money
16		out of pocket, just to keep it open, and, it was getting to the point where she couldn't
17		even pay her own bills

Excerpt AD.2. Foxxi on her pride in growing and adapting as an entertainer

Foxxi: would I go back and be the same Foxxi, hell no I like my costumes and big hair and shit no ma'am, but that's just me as an entertainer and a performer, I have grown to love pageantry and big and jewelry and things like that that's what, was instilled in me and that's what I've grown to love and adapt to

Excerpt AD.3. Foxxi on The Boom audience

Foxxi: hell yeah, I mean if you do drag in a crowd like Boom, I have to put the crowd out before I do anything, I know what they want wanna hear, I know if they regulars they want some Cici [Ciara] or some Cardi or do some dancing, now if I go out of town, I take it to something they ain't seen before, but if I work at certain places where it's like a country bar, a bitch don't know no, country by heart

Excerpt AD.4. Foxxi on her first drag performance

Foxxi: my very first performance was, Boom- oh not Boom, Copa open Thursdays uh, Talent Thursdays, it was hosted by [DRAG QUEEN], and, ((CLAPS)) you know it was a contest, it was, everybody sign up, do one number, the crowd chooses, you know if you win you win uh fifty dollars that night and come back and get the rest of the hundred dollars as a special guest, and, you know bitch, I couldn't lip sync to save my life bitch, if RuPaul's x-, if that show was back then bitch I sho would have went left cause bitch I couldn't, I- no I can't, lip sync for shit, ((LAUGHS)) cain't lip sync, I could dance, but, you know that's what got me in the door, and, people don't-- like-- I mean like, people forget like I've been- I've fought myself way to the top bitch I did every open talent night, you can think of, and, back then you know, it was open talent it's how you got noticed, every bar had they own girls, every bar had they own show, they own girls who they liked, they was booked, but, being so young I didn't know that that's how it worked, and like when I first got my very first booking on [DRAG QUEEN'S] show on the Sunday at Copa, I didn't know we got paid bitch, I was back there like, oh I'm happy to be here bitch and, and they was like well, stay after the show cause you get paid bitch me and [FRIEND] was like <Q we get paid? Q>, [HOST] <Q yeah bitch you get a check Q>, <Q oh we get a check Q>, well it wasn't a check it was cash

VITA

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