

## Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the many people who made the daunting task of editing these proceedings possible, manageable, and even enjoyable:

Jocelyn Ahlers, Collin Baker, Leela Blimes, Melinda Chen, Colleen Cotter, Amy Davidson, Margarita España, Jonathan Evans, Belén Flores, Sara Gesuato, Kira Hall, Barbara Kaiser, Carrie Lang, Anna Livia, Jon McCammond, Michael Meacham, Monica Oliver, Madelaine Plauché, Paula Rogers, Natasha Warner, Bill Weigel, Esther Weiss, Suzanne Wertheim.

We also thank our many supporters around the world, who eagerly and patiently awaited this volume through countless delays, which can be attributed in part to the doctoral exams of three of the editors during the editing process. For their support and encouragement during these frantic months, we thank our committee members. Finally, we thank the contributors themselves for their willingness to endure innumerable questions about the editing of their papers, in our efforts to produce an error-free text.

We dedicate this volume, with gratitude and affection, to the next generation of the Berkeley Women and Language Group: Jocelyn Ahlers, Leela Blimes, Melinda Chen, Sara Gesuato, Monica Oliver, Natasha Warner.

## “She is *not* white woman”: The appropriation of white women’s language by African American drag queens<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

African American drag queens<sup>2</sup> (hereafter AADQs) are African American gay men who cross-dress in public. They usually perform in gay bars, hip-synching or serving as announcers for strip shows or drag shows. As I was conducting research on the speech of AADQs in Texas, it became clear that one of the main components of AADQ speech was the use of language that reflected stereotypes of middle-class white women’s speech. The importance of this aspect of AADQ speech came up when I was talking to my friend Granger, who produced drag shows. We were discussing his newest prodigy when Granger turned to me and grinned, saying, “You know, I told her she could hip-synch all she wanted, but otherwise I told her to keep her mouth closed, ‘cause she is *not* white woman.” In other words, an AADQ with .at control over the “white-woman” style of speaking may as well not talk at all. The comment also suggests that, at least in some circumstances, the appropriation of white women’s speech by AADQs is a conscious act.

The issue of poor African American gay male drag queens’ modeling their behavior on stereotypes of rich white straight women has been the focus of much of the criticism of Jennie Livingston’s film *Paris is Burning* (1991), a documentary about African American and Latino drag queens and transsexuals in New York City. In addition to criticism of Livingston’s appropriation of AADQ culture, critics of the film have “read” the drag queens in it as poor self-hating queers of color who wish they could be white, rich, and straight. With the exception of queer theorist Judith Butler (1993), critics of *Paris is Burning* see AADQs as coveting the power represented by their white patriarchal oppressors. For example, in a provocative essay on the film, bell hooks writes:

Significantly, the fixation on becoming as much like a white female as possible implicitly evokes a connection to a figure never visible in this film: that of the white male patriarch. And yet if the class, race, and gender aspirations expressed by the drag queens who share their deepest dreams is always the longing to be in the position of the ruling-class woman then that means there is also the desire to act in partnership with the ruling-class white male. (1992:149)

Similarly, in a collection of articles on queer film and video, Jackie Goldsby argues that this love of white culture is entirely understandable:

That the children [i.e., drag queens] ... want what these life-styles represent is entirely explicable; indeed, their desires are wholly logical within the scheme of consumer capitalism. They *should* want to be Alexis Colby and Blake Carrington (or Ronald and Nancy Reagan, for that matter) precisely because they are of color, poor, and queer, living in one of the most class-conscious cities in the country (1993:111; my italics)

The assumption that the drag queens in *Paris is Burning* wish that they were women may be a result of Livingston's failure clearly to distinguish drag and transsexualism in the film. Livingston perpetuates confusion between *sex* and *gender* by conflating transsexual men, who actually *do* (or want to) become women, with gay men who are content with their sex (but question traditional gender roles by dressing as women). This confusion creates the sense that drag queens wish they were women, thus reifying the myth that gay men are somehow uncomfortable with their biological sex.

One reason for the belief that the drag queens and transsexuals in *Paris is Burning* actually want to be white may be Livingston's absence from the film itself. The film contains many interviews between Livingston (who is white) and various drag queens and transsexuals. In general, the speech of the drag queens/transsexuals during these interviews does not reflect any stereotypical notion of "African American English" (hereafter AAE). Their speech could be seen as an approximation of or accommodation toward Livingston's "Standard" White English. Given the important effect of audience on speech (Bell 1984) and the unique problems of interviews (Briggs 1986), it is possible (indeed, likely) that the African American drag queens interviewed for the film spoke in a "white-woman" style (rather than in a variety closer to AAE) because of Livingston's presence during the interview. In fact, during my own research I encountered AADQs who used only a "white-woman" style when speaking to me (a white gay man), even though they would use other styles with other interlocutors.

Thus, the presence of a white interviewer cannot be ignored as a possible influence on the speech of the drag queens and transsexuals in the film. Livingston never actually appears on film, however, and her absence reduces the interview to a monologue. By removing herself from these exchanges, Livingston creates the sense that viewers are witnessing the "true" identity of the interviewees rather than a presentation of the self intended for a white audience. Thus, what may be linguistic accommodation to a specific audience is falsely presented as an act of personal identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) by which the African American or Latino speaker is supposedly attempting to enter into white society.<sup>3</sup>

There are, of course, factors other than language choice that influence hooks's interpretation that the drag queens and transsexuals in *Paris is Burning* wish they could be white. As a linguist, however, I cannot help but be drawn primarily to the role of language in shaping this interpretation. In this paper, I do not mean to

suggest that hooks's interpretation is unfounded or to imply that none of the drag queens and transsexuals presented in the film have undergone "colonization of the mind." Rather, I hope to call into question the assumption that language choice is necessarily a marker of "desired" identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985), including gender and ethnic identity.

As Marcyliena Morgan (this volume) has pointed out, William Labov's (1972) focus on unemployed adolescent males in his study of AAE has contributed to stereotypes of what constitutes a "real" African American identity. Sociolinguistic research has typically perpetuated the myth that one must speak AAE (and must usually be a heterosexual male) to qualify as a "true" African American, leaving many African Americans classified as "lames" (Labov 1972) or simply ignored. This myth of what constitutes African American identity is especially relevant to African American gay men, who are often treated as having to "decide" between identifying with African Americans or with white gay men (Peterson 1992; Simmons 1991; Smith 1986; Timney 1986). Due to the stereotypical view that AAE is somehow tied exclusively to young heterosexual males, the use of "Standard" English by African American gay men (including drag queens) contributes to the argument that they have somehow abandoned the African American community by identifying themselves as gay.<sup>4</sup> Thus, simplistic conceptions of the relationship between language and identity in sociolinguistic research serve to reinforce the racism and homophobia prevalent in American society.

In this paper, I would like to closely examine the presence and use of a "white-woman" style of speaking among AADQs. I hope to demonstrate that a close examination of language use among AADQs suggests an ambivalent, sometimes critical, sometimes angry view of whiteness that does not lend itself to a simplistic explanation of "wanting to be white." After discussing the issue of drag and misogyny, I will discuss the ways in which AADQs create a "white-woman" linguistic style. Then I will examine examples of speech (primarily from performances in gay bars) that show how this "white-woman" style of speaking may be used to criticize white society.

#### DRAG AND MISOGYNY

Many scholars (primarily feminists) have argued that gay male drag is misogynist because drag queens present an exaggerated mockery of women (e.g., Ackroyd 1979; Frye 1983; Lurie 1981; Tyler 1991; White 1990; Williamson 1986).<sup>5</sup> In response, a number of queer theorists and gay male scholars have countered that drag is not "about" misogyny but rather about questioning traditional gender roles (Butler 1993; Dynes 1990; Moran forthcoming). For example, Judith Butler (1993) argues that drag points out the fact that all manifestations of gender are actually "performances" divorced from biological sex, thus displacing heterosexist assumptions concerning the relationship between sex and gender.

It seems that these scholars are arguing at cross purposes. That is, the fact that an action questions traditional assumptions concerning gender roles does not preclude the possibility that it is misogynistic. As Aki Uchida has pointed out, both difference and dominance should be seen as "simultaneously composing the construct of gender" (1992:563). In dressing as women, drag queens point out the superficiality of notions of gender difference. Yet questioning difference by mimicking those that are dominated (that is, women) does not necessarily undermine the social hierarchy that maintains male domination. Given the oppression of women in American society, the stance that the only important aspect of drag is that it questions gender stereotypes is similar to arguing that whites' wearing blackface is simply a means of questioning the notion of ethnicity (while ignoring its racist overtones).

AADQs appropriate a stereotype of white women's speech for use in their drag performances. Even though they may reproduce this stereotype, they use a variety of strategies to ensure that listeners are aware that they are both male and African American. By doing so, they call into question the assumption that "talking like a lady" is part of "being a woman." Nevertheless, many of their comments convey misogynistic representations of women. My intention in presenting these data is not to offend readers but rather to point out the complex relationship between gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

#### THE "WHITE-WOMAN" STYLE IN AADQ SPEECH

The "white-woman" style of speech used by AADQs represents a stereotype of the speech of middle-class white women. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the "white-woman" style as a stereotype rather than as a reflection of how white women actually speak. It has been argued that because it was based on speaker intuition and informal observation (as opposed to natural language data), the "woman's language" (WL) described by Robin Lakoff (1975) represents a stereotype of white middle-class women. For example, Sally McConnell-Ginet has written:

Lakoff herself was not unaware that acceptability judgments might well reflect systematic beliefs about how gender does (stereotype) or should (norm) affect speech better than they reflect actual usage. ... But even as stereotype, Lakoff's WL seems most relevant for the WASP middle class populations that American researchers have mainly studied. (1988:83)

Indeed, Lakoff notes that her WL represents white middle-class speech (1975:5) and remarks that it may reflect a "stereotypical image" of women's speech (1975:59). Because WL represents a stereotype of how middle-class white women talk (or "should" talk), I will use it as a basis for discussing the "white-woman" style of AADQ speech. Here my use of the term *white-woman* is intended to reflect this stereotyped representation rather than the real behavior of any actual white women.<sup>6</sup>

Lakoff summarizes the main characteristics of WL as follows:

1. Women have a large stock of words related to their specific interests, generally relegated to them as "woman's work"; *magenta* ... *darr* (in sewing), and so on. ...
2. "Empty" adjectives like *divine*, *charming*, *cute* ...
3. Question intonation where we might expect declaratives: for instance tag questions ("It's so hot, isn't it?") and rising intonation in statement contexts ("What's your name, dear?" "Mary Smith?").
4. The use of hedges of various kinds. Women's speech seems in general to contain more instances of "well," "y'know," "kinda," and so forth. ...
5. Related to this is the intensive use of "so." Again, this is more frequent in women's than men's language. ...
6. Hypercorrect grammar: women are not supposed to talk rough.
7. Superpolite forms ... women don't use off-color or indelicate expressions; women are the experts at euphemism. ...
8. Women don't tell jokes.
9. Women speak in italics [i.e., betray the fear that little attention is being paid to what they say]. (1975:53-56)

Of these nine elements of WL, AADQs utilize only the first six. Several of these, such as the use of precise color terms and "empty" adjectives, overlap with gay male speech. However, AADQs typically distinguish between the two styles of speech. For example, the "empty" adjectives in the gay-male style of speaking are characteristically "gay," such as *flawless*, *ferce*, *fabulous*, and so on. In the "white-woman" style, the empty adjectives are more similar to those discussed by Lakoff. For example, in (1) an AADQ asked why I was studying "drag language." When told that I was a linguist, she responded with *Oh, really*, *that's cute*, where *cute* seems fairly void of meaning.<sup>7</sup> In (1a), also from a Texas AADQ, the use of *really* and *cute* provide further examples of "empty" adjectives. (Note also the use of intensive *so* in example (1a).)<sup>8</sup>

- (1) A: ... drag language? What is ...  
 B: He's a linguist ... linguistic.  
 A: (overlap) My brain is dead.  
 A: Oh really ... that's cute.

- (1a) Oh, my, my ... I lost a ring y'all and I am vexed [= vexed]  
*Really* vexed, because ...  
 I have no idea where it is and I just bought that little ring and it's *so* cute.

Example (2) is taken from an interview with RuPaul (a nationally known AADQ singer) on "The Arsenio Hall Show." This example demonstrates the use of final high intonation on declarative sentences (Lakoff's second characteristic of WL):

- (2) L H L L H\* L  
 You guys, I wish there was a camera so I could remember  
 H\* L H  
 all the love you're sending to me

L H  
and the ..  
L H  
the love energy from over here.  
L H\* L  
You're absolute the best.

The use of hedges is demonstrated in example (3), again from RuPaul on "The Arsenio Hall Show":

- (3) And, you know, and they picked that up, and they know that, you know. You know, I'm about love and that it's not, like, it's really not a sexual fetish type thing, although it can be and I have nothing against that.

In all of these examples, AADQs use careful, "Standard" English phonology. This phonology is perhaps the most salient feature of the "white-woman" style. Examples (1) through (3) are intended to demonstrate that the elements of WL that reflect stereotypes of "ladylike" behavior in American society are reflected in the speech of AADQs. This "white-woman" style is generally the most common speaking style among AADQs, and, as noted in the introduction, the ability to use this style is considered vital to the success of AADQ performance. The use of this style also distinguishes AADQs from other African American gay men. Thus, it functions both to index stereotypes of white femininity and to construct a unique drag-queen identity.

As noted earlier, AADQs do not adopt the last three characteristics of WL (avoiding off-color expressions, not telling jokes, and speaking in italics). Although all of the features of WL are related to "acting like a lady," these three are perhaps the most important keys to "ladylike" behavior. Lakoff notes that they may indicate that women realize "that they are not being listened to" (1975:56). One major difference between the "ladylike" behavior represented by WL and the behavior of AADQs is that "ladies" do not make themselves the center of attention, while drag queens often do little else. AADQs sometimes flaunt the fact that they do not meet the standard of proper middle-class women's behavior by using obscenities for effect. In example (4), a drag queen points out that she is not supposed to use words like *fuck* and *shit*, accentuating the fact that she deviates from the prescribed linguistic behavior of middle-class white women:

- (4) Are you ready to see some muscles? [audience yells] .... Some dick?  
Excuse me I'm not supposed to say that ...  
words like that in the microphone ...  
Like shit, fuck, and all that, you know?  
I am a Christian woman.  
I go to church.  
I'm *always* on my knees.

The last line of this example, *I'm always on my knees*, is an example of signifying(g) (Abrahams 1976; Gates 1988; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Smitherman 1977). Signifying is a rhetorical device used in African American speech and is defined by Claudia Mitchell-Kernan as follows:

The black concept of signifying incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations. Complimentary remarks may be an insult in one context and not in another. What pretends to be informative may intend to be persuasive. Superficially self-abusing remarks are frequently self-praise. The hearer is thus constrained to attend to all potential meaning-carrying symbolic systems in speech events—the total universe of discourse. (1972:165-66)

The statement *I'm always on my knees* is an instance of signifying because it has a double meaning. In the context of the utterance, it suggests that the speaker prays all the time. Because it is spoken by a drag queen in a gay bar, however, it also insinuates that she frequently performs oral sex on other men. In signifying, the meaning of an utterance does not rest solely on referential meaning. Rather, an utterance is valued because of its ability to index an ambiguous relationship between the signifier and the signified. Thus, the signifier does not simply correspond to a particular concept, but indexes a rhetorical figure or skill at verbal art.

I would like to suggest that the use of white women's speech among AADQs is itself a type of signifying. That is, it indexes not only the social status or identity of white women but also the ability of a particular AADQ to use the "white-woman" style effectively. If AADQs actually wanted to be white, one would expect them to use white women's speech in an attempt to gain the social standing afforded to white women. Frequently, however, AADQs use the "white-woman" style as a type of dialect opposition (Morgan, this volume) in which AADQs contrast this style with other styles of speaking, primarily AAE, to highlight social difference. In the remainder of this paper, I will present several examples of dialect opposition. These examples are often cases of polysemy (as is example (4) above), reflecting the ambiguity of signifying(g). I hope that these examples demonstrate that although the "white-woman" style is a vital characteristic of AADQ identity, its use does not imply an underlying desire to be white.

In example (5), a Texas AADQ moves from speaking fairly "Standard" English in a high-pitched voice to using an exaggerated low-pitched voice to utter the phrase *Hey what's up, home boy* to an African American audience member. This monologue occurred in a gay bar with a predominantly white clientele. The switch serves to reaffirm the fact that the AADQ is African American and biologically male, while simultaneously creating a sense of solidarity with the audience member to whom it is addressed. (Note: *a butt-fucking tea* is anything that is exceptionally good.)

- (5) Please welcome to the stage, our next dancer.  
He is a butt-fucking tea, honey.

He is hot.  
 Masculine, muscled, and ready to put it to ya, baby.  
 Anybody in here ( ) hot ( ) as ( ) fish ( ) grease?  
 That's pretty hot, isn't it?  
 (Switch to low pitch) Hey what's up, home boy? (Switches back)  
 I'm sorry that fucking creole always come around when I don't need it.

Notice that the speaker apologizes with *that fucking creole always come around when I don't need it*. In this statement the word *creole* is pronounced with a vocalized /l/, and the verb *come* is spoken without the "Standard" English /+s/ inflection. Thus, in apologizing for her use of AAE, she continues to include features characteristic of AAE in her speech. This helps shape the statement as a form of signifying by implying that what is spoken does not really convey the meaning that is actually intended.

Example (6) was performed by a Texas AADQ in a gay bar with almost exclusively African American patrons. It consists of a monologue about selling rat traps for use in various neighborhoods in Houston. The speaker begins the monologue by taking on the voice of a white woman who is shocked by the number of African Americans in the bar (line 2). As she moves from rat traps for white neighborhoods to those for African American neighborhoods, her speech switches from the "white-woman" style to AAE.

- (6) 1 I don't wanna take up all your time
- 2 I know y' all wanna disco, ooh—all these Black people.
- 3 OK! What we're gonna talk about is, um, rat traps, um.
- 4 [pulls a small mouse trap out of a bag]
- 5 This is a rat trap from [name of wealthy white neighborhood]
- 6 It's made by BMW. It's real compact.
- 7 It's, thank you. <obscured> it's really good.
- 8 It's very convenient and there's insurance on it.
- 9 And this is from [name of same wealthy "white" neighborhood as in line 4].
- 10 [pulls a large rat trap out of the bag]
- 11 OK, now for [name of a housing project with primarily African American residents].
- 12 This rat trap is made by Cadillac. It's a big mother fucker.
- 13 [pulls out a gun]
- 14 Now for the [name of the "ghetto"] you just don't need no rat trap.
- 15 'cause those mother fuckers look like dogs out there.
- 16 Shit!
- 17 I put in a piece of cheese, the mother fucker told me,
- 18 "Next time put in some dog food."

As the monologue begins, the "white woman" realizes that she shouldn't talk for too long, as the "Black people" probably want to "disco." The "white-woman" style is used to mimic the white stereotype that African Americans "love to dance." The AADQ switches to AAE in line 9, at the beginning of the discussion about the

rat trap for residents of the housing project. The descriptions of the rat trap contrast the current living conditions of whites (5-8) and African Americans (9-15). While whites even have insurance on their rat traps, African Americans are forced to deal with rats the size of dogs. Thus, the different speaker voices created through dialect opposition serve to amplify a critique of the inequality in existing social conditions of whites and African Americans.

In example (7), an AADQ uses the "white-woman" style to address a group of white people in a bar that is predominantly African American. Before this exchange, the AADQ has been speaking primarily in AAE. When she turns to address the white audience members, she switches to a "white-woman" style. The word *doing* is pronounced with L\*H intonation (McLemore 1991), stereotypical of younger white middle-class women in Texas.

- (7) Oh, hi, how are you doing?  
 White people. Love it.  
 I.. I'm not being racial 'cause I'm white.  
 I just have a <obscured> I can afford more suntan.

In this case, the "white-woman" style serves to distance the white audience members. Like the "apology" for speaking "creole" in example (5), this example implies that whites must be spoken to in White English. Example (7) reverses the situation in which the white people have come to watch the AADQ by momentarily making the white people the center of attention in a room full of African Americans. The speaker jokingly states that this switch in styles is not racist, because she is also white and only has a better suntan, thus pointing out the irony of the fact that many whites place great value on darkening their skin while maintaining negative attitudes toward Blackness.

Unlike the previous examples, example (8) is not typical of AADQ performances. I include it here because it deals with a complex set of issues revolving around white stereotypes of African Americans. In this example performed in an African American gay bar, an AADQ uses the "white-woman" style in acting out an attack on a rich white woman by an African American man. Acting out the rape of any woman is a misogynistic act. While not excusing this misogyny, it is important to note that the main impetus for this piece of data is anger concerning the myth of the African American rapist. As Angela Davis has pointed out, fraudulent charges of rape have historically been used as excuses for the murder (by lynching) of African American men.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> In the history of the United States, the fraudulent rape charge stands out as one of the most formidable artifices invented by racism. The myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications. If Black women have been conspicuously absent from the ranks of the contemporary anti-rape movement, it may be due, in part, to that movement's indifferent posture toward the frame-up rape charge as an incitement to racist aggression. (1983:173)

Because it is based on the racist stereotype of African Americans as having voracious sexual appetites, the myth of the African American rapist operates under the false assumption that rape is a primarily sexual act (and not primarily an act of violence). The myth assumes that all African American males are desirous of white women and are willing to commit acts of violence in order to feed this desire. The fact that this assumption has no basis is especially heightened in the context of African American gay men, who may not be desirous of *any* women. Nevertheless, the patrons of the bar must continuously deal with the ramifications of the myth of the Black rapist, including unfounded white fears of violence. Lines 1-21 present the attack on the white woman, in which the AADQ, in interaction with a male audience member who assists in the scene, uses primarily the “white-woman” style, mixed with AAE:

- (8) 1 I'm a rich white woman in [name of wealthy white neighborhood]  
 2 and you're going to try to come after me. OK?  
 3 And I want you to just ...  
 4 I'm going to be running, OK?  
 5 And I'm gonna fall down, OK? OK?  
 6 And I'm just gonna .. look at you ...  
 7 and you don't do anything.  
 8 You hold the gun ...  
 9 Goddamn- he got practice. [audience laughter] <observed>  
 10 I can tell you're experienced.  
 [The audience member holds the gun, but so that it faces down, not as if he were aiming it!]  
 11 OK hold it.  
 12 You know you know how to hold it, don't play it off ...  
 13 Hold that gun ... Shit ... Goddamn ...  
 14 [Female audience member]: Hold that gun!  
 15 That's right fish! Hold that gun! Shit!  
 16 OK now, y'all, I'm fish, y'all, white fish witch!  
 17 And I'm gonna be running cause three Black men with big dicks chasing me!  
 18 [Points to audience member] He's the leader, OK?  
 19 Now you know I gotta fall, I want y'all to say, "Fall bitch!"  
 20 [Audience]: Fall bitch!  
 [The AADQ falls, then rises, makes gasping sounds, alternating with “bun-biddy-bun” imitations of the type of music used in suspense scenes in movies/TV]  
 21 Now show me the gun!  
 [The audience member holds up the gun and the AADQ performs an exaggerated faint]

It is interesting to note that the man holding the gun doesn't “do anything” (lines 7-8). Despite the AADQ's insinuation that he is “experienced” (line 10), the audience member fails to hold the gun correctly until a woman in the audience yells at him (line 14). The “white woman” pretends that “Black men with big dicks” are chasing her through the park (line 17) and faints upon seeing the man with the gun

(line 21). Thus, the African American man is basically passive throughout the exchange and the “white woman” reacts primarily based on fear fed by racism.

In the remainder of the segment, the corollary to the myth of the African American rapist is presented, the myth of the promiscuity of the African American woman. Again, Angela Davis has pointed out this connection:

The fictional image of Black man as rapist has always strengthened its inseparable companion: the image of the Black woman as chronically promiscuous. For once the notion is accepted that Black men harbor irresistible and animal-like sexual urges, the entire race is invested with bestiality. (1983:182)

In lines 22-26, the same scene is acted out with an “African American woman” (speaking AAE) rather than a “white woman.” The “African American woman,” upon seeing the large feet of the man with the gun (which implies he has a large penis as well), consents to having sex with him, saying that the gun is unnecessary (line 25-26):

- 22 Now this Black fish ....  
 23 <observed> Black men's running after her ..  
 24 I ain't no boy! Fuck y'all! Fuck y'all mother fuckers!  
 [AADQ looks at the gun]  
 25 You don't have to use that baby, I see them size feet.  
 26 Come on! Come on!

Thus, this example touches all aspects of the myth of the African American rapist, both the sexist assumptions concerning the “pure and fragile nature” of white women as “standards of morality” and the racist assumptions concerning the “bestial nature” of African American women and men. For the audience in the bar, the performance might serve as a means of venting anger spawned by living in a racist society.

## CONCLUSION

The examples discussed above suggest that the use of white women's speech by AADQs cannot be interpreted as simply reflecting a desire to be white. Indeed, example (8) is a far cry from Goldsby's suggestion that poor African American gay men want to be Nancy Reagan. While the “white-woman” style is sometimes emblematic of status, it is also used to highlight a variety of more critical attitudes towards whiteness. Thus, the appropriation of aspects of dominant culture need not necessarily indicate acceptance of its dominating force. It can serve as a form of resistance. Of the drag queens and transsexuals in *Paris is Burning*, Judith Butler has written:

This is not an appropriation of dominant culture in order to remain subordinated by its terms, but an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making

over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake—and sometimes succeeds. (1993:137)

Yet (contrary to Butler's overall analysis), I believe that arguments concerning the misogyny of drag cannot be brushed aside. While the examples in this paper suggest a form of resistance toward racism and homophobia, they do little to call into question the sexism in American society. Thus, I do not mean to imply that interpretations (such as that of hooks) of AADQs as misogynists who have been subjected to "colonization of the mind" are totally invalid. Rather, I would like to propose that they do not fully account for the complex nature of drag among African Americans. Instead of accepting a single explanation for phenomena such as drag, let me suggest that we follow the advice of Michel-Kernan and carefully "attend to all potential meaning-carrying symbolic systems in speech events—the total universe of discourse" (1972:166).

## NOTES

1. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Grainger Sanders (1954-1994). Grainger inspired this research and assisted both in collecting data and in shaping my understanding of African American drag queens. I could never have thanked him enough. Additional thanks to Gregory Clay and Kathryn Semolic for facilitating my research. Thanks also to Keith Walters for many helpful discussions. Finally, I am thankful for insight gained from numerous comments by the participants at the Berkeley Women and Language Conference, especially Bonnie McElhinny, Susan Phillips, and Amy Sheldon.
2. I use the term *drag queen* to make explicit the distinction between (gay) drag queens and transvestites (a clinical term for cross-dressers regardless of sexual orientation) or transsexuals (biological males who actually feel that their sex is inherently female and, when possible, usually undergo sex-change operations).
3. On the effects of this absent interviewer in sociolinguistic research, particularly in the work of William Labov, see Mary Louise Pratt's (1987:56-7) discussion of the work of David Siverman and Brian Torode (1980).
4. Philip Harper (1993) discusses the use of "Standard" English as an "effeminization" of African American males. For a review of arguments that homosexuality is alien to African American society, see Kenneth Motenro and Vincent Fugua (1994).
5. Judith Williamson (1986) argues that the misogyny of drag is due, in part, to the fact that it is always men who impersonate women. It should be noted that in the bar where the majority of my research was conducted, female drag shows (feshians dressing either as men or as "glamorous" women) occurred with the same frequency (weekly) as male drag shows.
6. One objection to my use of WL to discuss the speech of AADQs has been that WL does not reflect the local (i.e., Texas) norms for women's speech. Indeed, the form of WL used by Texas AADQs includes forms typical in Southern speech (such as *y'all*). In addition, AADQs sometimes use fronted vowels and intonational patterns that are stereotypically associated with younger middle-class white Texan women (McLemore 1990). These latter forms are, however, generally used with specific reference to young white women and form a unique style distinct from the more prevalent "white-woman" style discussed in this paper.
7. Transcription conventions are as follows:  
 < >      obscured material

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| [ ]            | text-external information                      |
| { }            | segments removed from data to ensure anonymity |
| <i>italics</i> | emphasis                                       |
| H              | high intonation (see McLemore 1991)            |
| L              | low intonation                                 |
| H*/L*          | pitch accent                                   |
| ( )            | short pauses forming separations between words |
| ...            | longer pauses                                  |
| <u>    </u>    | material under discussion                      |
8. Following community norms, I use feminine pronouns to refer to AADQs when they are actually in drag. Within the community where this research was performed using a masculine pronoun to refer to a drag queen in drag is generally considered an insult.
  9. For additional historical background on the myth of the African American rapist, see John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988:215-21). For discussions on this issue that focus on language, see Peg O'Connor (1992) and Birch Moonwoman (1992).

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## Cultural projections in constructed linguistic examples: Gender representations in introductory texts

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### INTRODUCTION

Recent work in the field of language and gender increasingly emphasizes that we shape and are shaped by the linguistic practices of the communities and cultures in which we live (e.g., Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992a, 1992b; Ochs 1992; Polanyi & Strassmann, forthcoming; Thorne 1993); thus, we need to consider the cultural embeddedness of the practice of gendered language use.<sup>1</sup> This study considers how textbook representations can influence the enculturation of students into the community of linguists. Textbook examples can deliver subtle (though probably unintended) messages about who is invited to join the already established community of practice. Studied here are the books that linguists write as invitations to the community of practice of linguistics: the recent editions of five widely used introductory texts. At issue is how the texts represent females and what the implications of such representations are?<sup>2</sup>

I document how the culture of linguistics—as reflected in the constructed linguistic examples of the syntax chapters of introductory texts—both underrepresents females and negatively or stereotypically portrays their roles. Given the principle of the autonomy of syntax (a foundational principle of most current theories of modern generative linguistics whereby form is considered apart from other issues of content or context), some linguists might resist the claim that the portrayal of the world in example sentences is a serious or significant issue, seeing example sentences instead as "merely data"<sup>3</sup> used to illustrate linguistic principles and paradigms. However, while trained linguists might easily separate issues of syntax from semantics or pragmatics, novices exposed to gender-biased linguistic examples may not so readily ignore the content as they study form.

This study thus addresses several questions: Is the underrepresentation or negative representation of females in introductory linguistics texts a significant issue? If so, how does it arise, and what can be done to remedy it?

### REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALES IN INTRODUCTORY LINGUISTICS TEXTS

Many linguists question the need to impose strictures on the creation of linguistic examples, regarding this move as dangerously normative, prescriptive, or hegemonic—principles at odds with the liberal traditions of twentieth-century