

Speaking Like a Queen in RuPaul’s Drag Race: Towards a Speech Code of American Drag Queens

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Abstract Employing Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen et al. in *Theorizing about intercultural communication*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2005) as my theoretical framework, I examine communicative practices and beliefs as to what it means to speak like a drag queen as portrayed within the reality TV show RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR): Season Four. Examining this particular population increases knowledge on how marginalized populations use talk to construct rules of conduct for a coherent identity. Members uphold drag queen speech codes by revealing what it means to speak like a queen. Such items include to look like a “fish,” don’t be “hungry,” be humble, resist negativity, don’t complain, and exude professionalism. These are qualities and characteristics of communication that a drag queen must perform, uphold, and repeat in order to uphold drag family values, thus fulfilling the code of sisterhood that comes with the performance of drag. These are evident within beliefs and everyday talk as portrayed within RPDR.

Keywords Drag queens · Speech codes theory · Identity · Group communication · Reality TV · Social interaction

Introduction

Burke (1966) claimed that humans are symbol-using, and often abusing, animals. Drag queens are no exception. Such symbols may be an “arbitrary word, object, or action that is deliberately created and agreed to by members of a collective as representing the thing to which it refers but that bears no natural relationship to it” (Frey and Sunwolf 2005, p. 185). These symbols stimulate meaning for the group from that which is considered abstract. However, “to be meaningful, symbols must

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be interpreted by members in a relatively similar manner” (Frey and Sunwolf 2005, p. 186). In other words, cultural groups construct, reinforce, and perpetuate cultural values about speaking (Philipsen 1975, 1976). Taking a symbolic interpretive perspective (Frey and Sunwolf 2005) offers insight into how members co-construct a group identity via cultural norms for speaking. Thus, the purpose of this study is to begin initial exploration into particular ways of speaking for American drag queens as portrayed within RuPaul's Drag Race: Season Four. Doing so will provide understanding into the meaning behind drag queen verbal communication. First, I will discuss how drag queens use communication to construct a unique group identity. Second, I contextualize RuPaul's Drag Race. Third, I discuss how Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen et al. 2005) serves as an appropriate theoretical lens for this study. Finally, I share my analysis and interpretations.

Drag Queens, Communication, and Group Identity

Marginalized groups such as drag queens have unique ways of using language to create a shared reality. The presentation of the gendered self is performative in nature by communicating physical and sartorial messages and, thus, particular ways of speaking (Butler 1990). Barrett's (1994, 1995a, b, 1997, 1998) seminal research revealed drag queens as a unique speech community. Since language is a vital cultural artifact, it is crucial to gain understanding into ways in which drag queens use language (Mann 2011). Drag queen language has offered insight into cultural ideologies regarding gender, sexuality, and race (Mann 2011). However, Mann (2011) did not focus explicitly upon how these ideologies are expressed in talk. Drag queen research has predominately focused upon issues related to gender (Taylor and Rupp 2004, 2005; Schacht 2004; Rupp et al. 2010; Friedman and Jones 2011), race (Mann 2011), performance (Moreman and McIntosh 2010), and internal gay community segregation (Berkowitz et al. 2007) or marginalization (Berkowitz and Belgrave 2010; Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2001). Such research identified that drag queens have culturally unique ways of speaking. In particular, it reveals drag queens use nonverbal aesthetics to communicate a coherent drag identity as queens blur gender lines and use performance as a space in which to bend the dominant American gender narrative binary.

Within the larger LGBTQ community, drag queens have not only served as iconic forms of entertainment, but maintain a strong historical stance of communicative actions for social justice. Drag queens have been credited with the start of the Stonewall Riots in 1969 which ignited the Gay Liberation Movement (Zervigon 2009). However, despite their historical role drag queens often experience marginalization throughout the queer community. Drag queens experience double-stigmatization as many drag queens are constituted as part of the larger gay male community as well as the gender-blending community which contains heterosexual cross-dressers (Newton 1972; Tewksbury 1994; Berkowitz et al. 2007). Such stigmatization is present within romantic relationship difficulty amongst drag queens such as having dating options (Berkowitz et al. 2007), as well as how the gay community has constructed drag queens as “the jester” of the gay community in which drag queens exist to perform and entertain, thus deemed only

appropriate for the stage (Namaste 2000). Communication scholars have revealed vested interest within stigma and identity-related research within various marginalized populations such as gay Asian men (Eguchi 2011), sex workers (Basu 2011), and the homeless (Harter et al. 2005). Examining ways in which drag queens create shared meaning via speech codes will contribute to the larger body of literature regarding ways in which stigmatized groups construct a coherent, collective identity. Frey and Sunwolf (2005) argue “Group actions often create unique symbols that bind members together into a group” (p. 215). Understanding the discursive symbols a community uses, scholars may begin to understand how collective identity for drag queens is constructed.

Individuals are reflections of interacting units (Mead 1934). Barnlund (1988) said “every culture attempts to create a ‘universe of discourse’ for its members, a way in which people can interpret their experience and convey it to one another” (p. 11). Throughout interaction, groups symbolically communicate shared meaning and identity. It is throughout this process that people learn how to encode and decode symbolic meanings that create space for individualized, group expression (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969, Stryker 1980). Stryker (1980) claims that identity not only refers to who or what one is, but also refers to a variety of traits and meanings attached to one’s self by others as well as those that we attach to ourselves. Mead (1934) offers that identities help people to frame interaction as well as to define interaction by supplying shared meanings. It is my intent to begin a scholarly discussion and research agenda to understand what it means to speak like a drag queen. One way to seek this insight and understanding is via the reality television show RuPaul’s Drag Race.

RuPaul’s Drag Race and Reality TV

RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR) is the first reality television show featuring drag queens (Shumaker and Slane 2011a). The season four premiere of RPDR, and the target season of this study, was the number one rated premiere in cable channel Logo’s history (Shumaker 2012, February 1). Thirteen contestants from across the United States and Puerto Rico compete through various challenges which test performance, fashion sense, humor, intellectual ability, teamwork, and time management. Contestants compete both individually and through team challenges for immunity from elimination. However, in the end, only one will demonstrate the charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent (CUNT) RuPaul claims is needed to win the title of “America’s Next Drag Superstar” (ANDS) which results in a prize package including \$100,000, a unique trip from AlandChuck.travel, a lifetime supply of NYX Cosmetics, and a spot headlining Logo’s Drag Race Tour (Shumaker and Slane 2011a). RPDR has been defined as “men dressed as brazen caricatures of femininity parading themselves in front of celebrity judges of varying degrees of relevance in a competition that crosses *America’s Next Top Model* with *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Numar*” (Navarro 2012, April 23).

The tough competition of reality TV offers a visible explanation of what anthropologist Hogan (1975) explained; human “survival was promoted by the quality of the group rather than the accomplishments of individuals” (p. 537). I

recognize that “group” may apply unevenly to reality TV shows, but I believe that scholars can recognize this specific reality TV show as containing groups since individuals are working toward a common goal. By analyzing reality TV shows, group scholars can understand how specific communities construct an identity through language. RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR) features individuals who, although competing, are working towards a common goal and maintain a sense of shared identity as illustrated throughout the show by comments such as “we are sisters” or “this is like a drag sorority.”

I realize that the editing and production process of making TV that “sells,” limits the naturalistic inquiry of this specific group. “Reality” as represented via reality TV is a product of production choices to mold and “choreograph the content into engaging and identifiable viewing for audiences” (Price 2010, p. 452). Such constructions utilize various documentary techniques such as “‘fly-on-the-wall’ recording, talking-head interviews and omniscient voiceover” (p. 452). RPDR is no exception. These techniques are combined with entertainment practices such as “multiple narrative strands, evocative soundtrack and slick editing” (p. 452). Thus, reality TV is defined as a place in which a producer is able to construct, change, and/or impose a message(s) onto its audience through various documentary techniques combined with entertainment practices (Price 2010). Thus, reality TV is purposely “mixed” to contain humor, drama, human interest, and character (Price 2010). Regardless of “mixing,” member talk is still exonerated and placed first which provides space for analysis.

After each episode of RPDR, viewers may watch a brief 20 min episode of *Untucked*. *Untucked* contains footage of “backstabbing, backbreaking, backstage drama that you didn’t see on the runway” (Shumaker and Slane 2011b). *Untucked* takes place within the *Interior Illusions Lounge* where contestants go to await the judges’ critique and RuPaul’s decision as to who will be in the “bottom two.” The two worst contestants, or the bottom two, are forced to “lip synch for their life” for a chance to stay within the competition.

By using episodes from various reality TV shows as a means of data collection, researchers uncovered that reality TV has been found to: reinforce Australian identity constructions (Price 2010); perpetuate gender and class norm master narratives (Franco 2008); couple immoral conduct with pleasurable emotions (Krijnen and Tan 2009); and advance understanding of how narrative responses allow participants to accomplish identity work (Gordon 2011). Via workroom, backstage, and runway performances, RPDR can serve as a lens in which to solicit and explore culturally specific ways of speaking throughout everyday language of drag queens. Thus, speech codes theory (Philipsen et al. 2005) will serve as the underlying theoretical lens for this study.

Speech Codes Theory

Grounded within Hymes (1967, 1968, 1974) ethnography of speaking, speech codes theory (SCT) is well suited to explore ways in which what particular communication (de)constitutes collective drag queen group identity within

RuPaul's Drag Race. SCT is appropriate because (a) it is grounded in observation of communicative conduct within a particular time and space; (b) provides a way to interpret observed communicative conduct; and (c) provides a general understanding of ways in which contestants conduct themselves via communication (Philipsen et al. 2005). SCT is based off of six propositions, which include: (a) within any distinct culture, distinct speech codes exist; (b) multiple speech codes are deployed within any speech community; (c) distinct cultural psychology, sociology, and rhetoric are implied within speech codes; (d) speaking significance is based off ways in which interlocutors create meanings of communicative acts; (e) the act of speaking a speech code indicates the terms, rules, and premises of a speech code; (f) intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communicative conduct may be predicted, explained, or controlled by the artful uses of shared speech codes.

SCT has been used to investigate culturally distinct ways of speaking in a wide range of communities. Within the United States, scholars have identified diverse, yet distinctive codes such as upholding the code of honor by speaking like a man (Philipsen 1975, 1976), the code of listening amongst Blackfeet Indian talk (Carbaugh 1999, 2005), the code of dignity as evident within Nacirema's sit down and talk ritual (Katriel and Philipsen 1981), the code of food and tradition in relation to Lebanese-American identity (Homsey and Sandel 2012), and Ward's (2010) study revealed the role of symbolic action amongst fundamentalist Christians during "I was saved" testimonials. Each of these studies reinforce Philipsen's (1997) claim that distinct cultural codes exist wherever there is a culture.

Drawing upon SCT, I seek to explore whether I can identify aspects of a distinct speech code for American drag queens. If so, I seek to understand what characteristics are present within said code(s) and how it is transmitted. Therefore, I am interested in understanding meanings associated with a speech code as well as how it shapes and guides communicative behavior and influences the sense of collective identity amongst drag queens as value judgments are invoked to demonstrate an appropriate code of speech.

Knowing that the "symbolic framing of a group's projects affects group interaction and performance" (Frey and Sunwolf 2005, p. 206), I seek to understand what symbolic framings for drag queen identity exist as implications of this finding will inform (in)appropriate behaviors for drag queen communicative interaction and performance. Dewey (1922) argued that communication forms ideas about one's sense of self and culture. Communication is, therefore, the vehicle in which the meaning of drag queen values are perpetuated and passed down through generations of drag queens. Thus, I propose the following research questions:

- RQ1: What aspects of a unique way of speaking are evident within this speech community?
- RQ2: How are particular ways of speaking reinforced within this community by members?

In order to answer these questions, I employed the following methods.

Methods and Procedures

Philipsen (1990) believes “any ethnography of communication should be based substantially on the collection, transcription, detailed analysis, and public display of recorded materials” (p. 24). Therefore, for the purposes of this project, all data has been collected via season four of RuPaul's Drag Race. I viewed each episode and transcribed moments in which contestants seemed to indicate culturally specific ways of speaking. Much of this resulted in transcribing moments in which contestants used labels and descriptions of people, metacommunicative terms, or moments in which corrective action was taken by means of pointing out one's culturally inappropriate behavior. All of these discursive acts are relevant for uncovering a culturally distinct way of speaking and code for this community.

I conducted four phases of analysis. First, I began by comparing my field notes with transcriptions. I added notes to each transcript in the margins of the text. Secondly, I looked for recurring themes or native terms that stood out or seemed particularly important or salient within the context of the conversation (Homsey and Sandel 2012). As a researcher, and fan of this show, I focused upon terminology that was initially foreign to me prior to viewing this television series. For example, I focused upon moments when participants used labels for people and metacommunicative terms such as “fishy” and phrases such as “No T, no shade.”

Philipsen (1975) claimed that the place of speech in communication and social life is fundamental to analysis because it provides the space in which researchers are able to discover when and where speech is used and for what purpose. Once I noted initial term usage, I went back to look at whom and when such terms were used. Within this latter stage of analysis, I noticed that there are important ways for contestants to engage and understand what was being said. This stage of the analysis revealed that the ways in which contestants encode and decode language carries specific cultural perspectives for this particular drag queen community, but also for the larger “sisterhood” of drag. Third, I coded transcriptions in order to emphasize dominant trends, such as, what it means to speak like a queen, and what it means to uphold or reject the code of sisterhood for drag queens. Next, I organized similar themes and excerpts together. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) refer to this process as creating a manual method of analysis. I found this to be an extremely beneficial stage in my analysis as I was able to look at each theme and how it is woven into everyday language within a single, solitary document. Finally, I went through each compilation to select prominent excerpts for discussion in this paper. I present data thematically, first focusing upon discussions of what it means to “speak like a queen” or within this context to bear the title of America's Next Drag Queen Superstar (ANDS). Second, I present data which demonstrate what it means to be a drag queen within the larger collective unity in USA, or to uphold the code of sisterhood.

Analysis and Interpretations

Charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent (CUNT) are four characteristics RuPaul argues that “America's next drag queen superstar” (ANDS) must possess. Talk used

throughout RPDR exemplifies how such a CUNT should speak. Throughout RPDR Season four, contestants' talk revealed appropriate patterns of behavior which are acceptable and unacceptable for ANDS. These culturally specific codes revealed not only what is appropriate for the winner of RPDR, but also what it means to speak, and act, like a drag queen.

Look Like a "fish."

Being "fishy" or "like a fish" are terms and phrases used by members of RPDR to invoke both an identity and cultural premise for how drag queens should act and communicate. Throughout the competition contestants claimed to exude "fishiness." In addition to claiming a "fishy" identity, contestants were threatened by other members' ability to exude "fishiness." To be "fishy" is another way of saying, like a girl. This is valued amongst group members and is perceived to be a quality that one must have in order to be ANDS. When shooting her magazine cover photo during a challenge Phi Phi O'Hara attempts to remove any hint of masculinity to achieve fish status, thus making herself more competitive:

- Phi Phi: I want to look like, like a hot Miami piece of ass. Like you want to visit me.
- Photographer: Work. Here we go. You look like it to me.
- Phi Phi: Good.
- Phi Phi: Hold on. I don't want my muscles showing. I gotta look like a woman (fluffs hair).
- Photographer: Do you want to look at them [the photos]?
- Phi Phi: Yeah. I feel sexy already, so let's look at them.
- Phi Phi: (when looking at photos) I'm prettier than the other girls aren't I?
- Photographer: I'm not saying anything.
- Phi Phi: You should.
- Photographer: Laughter.
- Phi Phi: Delete that one (pointing to an image on a computer screen). That looks like a man. I look like Sharon [another contestant] in that one.

Phi Phi's comment not only reveals the coveted quality of appearing to be a "real girl," but also reveals that to possess physical masculine traits or characteristics is undesirable. Judges reinforce this aspired identity with statements during runway performances. For example, Michelle Visage, one of the judges, said approvingly "Real fish, caught in the net" after seeing Chad Michaels on the runway. Judges also looked down upon those who appeared too masculine within the competition. One drag queen, Milan, was said to "Read dude in a dress" by one of the judges. This statement reveals that ANDS must defy physicality and construct, if not embrace fully, strong, believable femininity. To be "fishy" also means to be a strong group member. When meeting Kenya Michaels, Willam, a fellow contestant, reflects within a commentary "Kenya looks fishy...and I was like crap, now I gotta be the funny one and not the pretty one." Willam's comment demonstrates that "fishiness" is a force to be reckoned within during competition. If one is unable to perceive being able to appear more girl-like than another, alternative tools should be

utilized, such as humor, to arrest attention from onlookers who might be drawn to the fishiest of them all.

Queens reinforced the premise of rejecting masculinity by confronting others when they left the contextualized feminine box. Queens also pointed out mistakes their sisters make to reinforce the cultural norm that drag queens should look like believable women. For example, when Milan, continued to perform androgynously Willam asked, "What's up with the androgyny thing this week? No boobs. You got read [or critiqued] about androgyny last week a little bit." This statement not only points out the behavior that should be corrected, but also reveals disbelief and rejection of the performed behavior. It also sends the message to Milan that she must strive to be more girl-like.

Don't be Hungry

Hunger or the act of "being hungry" within this community refers to the act of being too competitive or having a "cutthroat" attitude which disregards drag sister bonds which are expected to be maintained at all times even during competition. The following excerpt reveals the unique way in which hunger is utilized by this particular community.

Phi Phi: It's going to be quite interesting on the runway tomorrow. I'm just thinking about how much I'm gonna whoop Chad's ass in this challenge.

Latrice: You're hungry honey.

Phi Phi: Damn right I'm hungry! I don't understand what makes me so much hungrier than you guys, though.

Latrice: We feel you behind us pushing us down the stairs, I saw that movie girl.

Phi Phi: (commentary) Yeah, I'm a hungry bitch! I mean, this is a competition. There is so much at stake. There so many opportunities from this. They are just concerned because they know that I'm here to win it.

Within this conversation between Latrice and Phi Phi the definition of hunger is visible. Latrice's corrective statement of "You're hungry honey" attempts to point out to Phi Phi behavior that she should correct or alter because it is exceeding that which is appropriate. Phi Phi acknowledges this corrective action, but doesn't understand the demarcation between her "unruly" hunger and other member's socially acceptable hunger. Although not explicitly stated, Latrice's response that "We feel you behind us pushing us down the stairs" reveals that too much competitiveness results in undesirable hunger which could lead a sister to do an unspeakable act such as pushing someone down the stairs. Such an act is known to cause serious injury and/or death. This metaphor denotes the serious and dangerous stance that hunger brings into one's life and community. However, hunger also may be contained and expressed within socially appropriate means. In the following excerpt members discuss the hunger of Phi Phi O'Hara which provides further cultural understanding.

Chad: Bitch is hungry.

Latrice: //She's hungry.

Chad: //Bitch is a threat. However, she needs to go home. (points at door)
(Latrice nods and tosses hands up.)

Sharon: And she always seems to be willing to think of ways to get other people sent home in unfair ways.

Within this dialogue between Chad, Latrice, and Sharon, they reveal that hunger is interpreted as a threat within this community. At the same time, this dialogue hunger is seen as both positive and negative. The discussion of Phi Phi as a “threat” reveals an understanding of her accomplishments and abilities as a drag queen, but also reveals that hungry people have no right to earn the title of ANDS. This is largely due to the fact that hunger reveals a “shady” personality trait deemed unacceptable by the drag community. This is exemplified within Sharon’s comment that Phi Phi’s hunger leads her to attempt to disqualify potentially fierce queens through unfair means. Therefore, queens and ANDS must be fair players.

Be Humble

Speaking with humility, by not bragging, is an additional characteristic prominent throughout RPDR which exemplifies what it means to speak like a queen. The following excerpt by Phi Phi O’Hara reveals her response to Willam’s perceived lack of humility.

Throughout this entire competition so far, you’ve sat there and said like snooty comments about stuff or like you have done this, this, or this to rub it in our faces. I don’t take that. I don’t tolerate it. You are no better than any one of us here. You know what? Congratulations! You got some gigs that the rest of us didn’t do, but don’t make us feel like shit because you sat there and got these opportunities.

This statement reveals that in order to speak like a *true* queen one must not brag about accomplishments and opportunities other queens, within their presence, may not have achieved or been able to partake. Speaking in ways that honors one’s own accomplishments provides the potential to make others within this particularly community “feel like shit” due to not achieving such success. Further interaction with Willam reveals her to be a queen that resists conforming to such a cultural premise even when corrective behavioral actions are taken to point out to her that she is not operating, or speaking, like a proper drag queen.

Willam: This was my first time in the bottom two. I wasn’t happy to be up there...

Dida: Did it humble you?

Willam: It didn’t add any humility to me.

Latrice: (commentary) Humble pie is what Willam should be. If it was anybody else other than Jiggly [in the bottom two, thus competing against Willam in the lip synch] she would have went out [or lost] last night.

This excerpt displays a queen’s action in which one attempts to remind another of the code of humility one must operate within. However, Willam rejects this dominate code which results in another’s commentary that she needs not only

humility, but an entire pie to consume to group her into culturally appropriate manners.

If a queen lacks humility, it is appropriate for others to point this out and criticize her. For example, when discussing her fight with Willam, Phi Phi said "I don't want to be in that room with that stupid bitch. I'm tired of her sitting there talking shit, and she just has to seem like she's better than everybody, so I had to let her know." The appearance of being perceived as better than another queen is described as a negative quality within this statement. Here, Phi Phi takes corrective action to inform Willam that she is violating the role that queens should be humble about their accomplishments.

Resist Negativity

Throughout each episode of RPDR, contestants who expressed themselves in ways that were perceived by others to be "negative" were seen as undesirable.

When Jiggly expressed concern regarding how judges will respond to a team challenge Princess continued to resist eye contact while sewing and said, "That energy you are giving off is bringing everybody else down. Girl, I cannot be bothered with it right now." Princess' comment reveals that negativity, or negative energy, not only influences those that are the recipient of the speech act, but also communicate a larger aura that influences group behavior. Princess' comment also denotes a time and space in which negativity is not accepted: while working. The following conversation further explicates this:

Willam: Who do you think should go home next Dida, out of the top six?

Dida: Um. (pause)

Phi Phi: Do you want to know who I think should go home next? I think you should go home. You are bringing down morale around here, and your negativity, and the stuff that you've been doing, it's representing everyone as a whole. And that's not how it should be, cause I don't want my name to be tarnished because of your behavior.

Phi Phi's comment upon Willam's perceived negativity reveals that group morale is influenced by her behavior. This conversation denotes that communicating negativity, verbally or nonverbally, affects the entire group. What this conversation doesn't reveal is what behavior is perceived as negative and, therefore, is uncharacteristic of a true drag queen and certainly not within ANDS. Although specific negative behavior is not mentioned we also learn that such behavior has potential to cause the entire group to lose face. Such comments reveal that negativity is an undesirable characteristic that detracts from the "good" one has in her life.

Don't Complain

One way in which to refute negativity is to not complain. The following excerpt reveals negative qualities expressed by participants that reveal complaining is inappropriate behavior for drag queens.

- Phi Phi: I'm tired, sick and tired of hearing her [Madame LaQueer] complain about her damn feet. Bitch. (.) Get some shoes that fit your feet! You knew what you're getting yourself into when you were joining the show. And she wants to wear the *tiniest* heels. Bitch, that isn't gonna support your big ass body!
- Latrice: (Laughter.) You need chunks, baby, chunks! (kicks feet up to show her chunky heeled shoes)
- Phi Phi: You know what? Seriously, you are bigger than Madame, but I've yet to hear you complain about it.
- Latrice: Ain't no need in complaining. Own your shit. Be a man. (.) Bitch, you a man. Let's just face it (.) we all men.

The conversation above reveals that in order to speak like a queen, one must not say any complaints. Latrice's comment that one needs to own their shit and to be a man reveals that one must not only be independent and capable of relying on one's own strengths and talents, but also that complaining disqualifies one for the title of ANDS. Phi Phi praises Latrice for not complaining about her feet, which are assumed to hurt, which acts as a type of reward for upholding particular ways of not speaking within this community. As Phi Phi and Latrice's conversation continues, their talk reveals further insight into what meaning complaining holds.

- Phi Phi: Honestly, I'm ready for Jiggly to go home. I'm tired of hearing her complain I'm tired of her making excuses...
- Latrice: This ain't a school for drag. Let's face it, she just took a bunch of pom-poms and she just threw it on top [of her float].
- Phi Phi: It looked like third grade arts and craft.
- Latrice: It just looks horrible. It's horrible.

Phi Phi and Latrice's conversation reveal complaining is a communicative strategy used by younger, inexperienced queens that have not yet fully acculturated to the drag community. The speech act of complaining is viewed as the act of excuse-making which has no place within the professional drag world. Such an act is viewed as horrible, or in other words, "horrific."

Exude Professionalism

Professionalism is a constant theme throughout tenured drag queen communication. Professionalism refers to the overall action, attitudes, and beliefs that a true queen exonerates in her everyday life. In order to explicate this code for conduct I share a series of excerpts which make discursive claims. First, when discussing Alisa Summers' breast plate Willam not only makes fun of them by calling them sponges or muppets, but uses Alisa's breast plate as a starting point to remind all competitors that professionalism is a must:

They are sponges and there are muppets. They are muppets. You know the girls with plotchy body make up, runs in their tights, visible padding, lines right here (points to her buttocks), it needs to be stopped, there's a thing called

a hand mirror and you look (fluffs hair using hand as a mirror) and then you see the back.

Willam's talk performs assumed corrective action by reminding other queens that the named physical characteristics she has witnessed lack the quality of a true drag queen. Similarly, but taking a more direct approach, Latrice condemns three drag queens for their lack of professionalism in a competition called the Snatch Game in which queens impersonated famous celebrities and answered a series of questions hoping for a match by a guest judge.

I thought the Snatch Game was the most romper room fuckery that I have *ever* experienced in my life. I could not *believe* the shenanigans that was going on in the front row. Completely unprofessional! Completely childish! And that is *not* (hits table with fist) what I came here to do!

During one challenge in which contestants had to construct a pride float Jiggly Caliente was not only late with her design concept, but was not ready when it was time to line up for the runway. Phi Phi O'Hara and Chad Michaels describe this moment:

Phi Phi: (commentary) I'm looking around the room and I'm in drag, and everyone else is practically in drag, and Jiggly is still stapling and gluing stuff to her float and I'm like, *hello* (.) you have minutes left until you have to be in drag and on the runway.

Chad: (commentary) Jiggly really kind of irritated me a lot in the work room today, because she wasted a lot of time. When it came time to line up she still wasn't ready. There's no excuse for someone being late or looking shotty. I'm a professional. Professional.

The above utterances express drag queen identity and related family values by addressing actions and values that should be followed. Lacks of professionalism were not only considered "shotty," but were viewed as a waste of time by tenured, "professional" drag queens. This implies that drag queen ways are culturally distinct from non-drag queens or that some drag queens may depart from traditional paths which result in culturally inappropriate ways.

Code of Sisterhood: Uphold Family Values

The notion of "family" or a "sisterhood" came up repeatedly throughout the season. This served as a central foundation in which all cultural displays were built and interpreted, including what it means to speak like a queen and ANDS. Terms used referring to the group such as "family," "sisters," "sisterhood," and "sorority" reveals this reality. Contestants discussed being linked together which demonstrates how each member's behavior essentially affects, influences, and provides potential to honor or dishonor the collective. Throughout their talk members reveal a sense of loyalty and comfort which are freely offered to members of the drag sisterhood.

- Dida: We are a family here. And if you have something to say, if you're hurt, if you need to get something off your chest, whether it happened 15 years ago, two days ago, we are here to listen to you no matter how bad it is. No one judges.
- Jiggly: But that has nothing to do with the show!
- All: It does!
- Princess: That's why everybody said your name today [RuPaul asked who should leave the competition]. Because you have this barrier and everyone would just rather get rid of you because you can't come to terms with it and it's spreading this negativity amongst the whole group.
- Dida: And it's just like, girl, we want to know. We want to talk to you. We want to get to know you but this wall. (gesture)

The dialogue continues as qualities of drag family are revealed.

- Phi Phi: And girl if you ever need someone to talk to I'm here. If you want to cry out get my shoulder, then I'm here to listen. This is your family.
- Dida: You have to understand that what was said on that stage was said out of nothing but love.
- Latrice: Amen.
- Dida: We love you.
- Jiggly: Ya'll don't even know me.
- Latrice: Exactly. But what I do know of you, I love. And you're probably not used to that, but that is the kind of person I am, and that is the kind of people I roll with.

This excerpt reveals that the drag queen community encompasses a larger sisterhood that expands beyond the show. Merely being a part of this family allots one the ticket and "birth rite" of obtaining access to a larger collection of sisters that will assist one throughout hardships and difficulty. The following excerpt reveals that sisters will even come to one's aid when they do not ask for it. After Phi Phi O'Hara won a mini-challenge which was rewarded with the chance to call home, she gave her prize to Chad Michaels, who was separated from his husband on their eighth anniversary. This random act of kindness is one that was performed due to one's family status. The sister-bond need not be repaid, but rather is one in which kindness is freely given.

- Phi Phi: I really want you to have my phone call.
- Chad: Are you sure you wanna do that? Because I feel funny about it, Phi Phi.
- Phi Phi: Honestly, I really wanted to win it for you.
- Chad: Thank you so much.
- Chad (commentary): I'm really excited that Phi Phi is going to give me her phone call. It is really unexpected and really sweet.
- Chad: I owe you a big one girl.
- Phi Phi: No you don't, you're my sister.

Implied, but not directly stated is the belief that drag queen family is strong because even within the larger queer community it is different and faces further resistance and persecution than members who do not perform as drag queens. Through this family of sisters, attitudes, beliefs, and values are transmitted throughout interaction. The next excerpt illustrates that ANDS must not only internalize, but should embody family values from the larger drag community within one's personal aura. Within this excerpt RuPaul asks the final four contestants one final question on the runway in front of the judges.

- RuPaul: Which one of these *bitches* does not deserve to be in the top three? Let's start with Sharon Needles.
- Sharon: I'm going to say Phi Phi O'Hara. She has a very cutthroat attitude. To be America's next drag superstar we need a sweetheart. As drag queens, I think we need to show as much heart and family morals amongst sisters.
- Phi Phi: //Bull shit. What you said, right now, is a complete lie. I value family morals. You're on stage lying is what you're doing.
- Sharon: //I'm not lying.
- Phi Phi: //But you are.
- RuPaul: Phi Phi O'Hara, same question.
- Phi Phi: I would definitely have to say Sharon. For him to stand on this stage and tell that I don't value family is bull shit. If I'm cutthroat, then so be it. I'm a fierce competitor and I deserve to be here.

Sharon's comment reveals that by being cutthroat Phi Phi is breaking the code of sisterhood in which drag queens should be competitive, but not "cutthroat" or too aggressive (AKA hungry). Instead, competitive behavior should be laced with love and respect, even when trying to win the title of ANDS. By being hungry within this excerpt Phi Phi is perceived to disrespect the code of sisterhood that it takes to speak like a *true* queen: America's next drag superstar. Like most sisters, appropriate rules for conflict exist and are evident within RPDR.

Sibling Rivalry: Rules for Sisterhood Conflict Conduct

Sibling rivalry as portrayed within RPDR reveals culturally appropriate ways of engaging in communicative conflict. These include "barking" or stating one's annoyance and moving on, and that one must not throw the other "under the bus" in order to improve one's own name and reputation. Such utterances reveal drag queen identity and family values by exposing actions and values that should be followed and upheld by the speech community. These acts imply that sisterhood ways of drag queens are culturally distinct from non-drag queens, or that some drag queens may depart from family traditions and act in culturally inappropriate ways. In the following excerpt, I present a more explicit example as to what is non-drag queen. In this scene, contestants were each assigned a heterosexual male, who was also a father, to makeover as a queen. At one point in the episode one of the dads picked a fight with Chad:

- Chad: Why are you getting such a bad attitude right now?
 Sharon's dad: Because I have my diva bitch attitude, and we're gonna win it. You guys just need to stay home.
 Chad: Oh I see. It's just your diva bitch attitude.
 Sharon's dad: Yeah. Stay home.
 Chad: Bitch, I didn't come here to stay home. *Occifer*.
 Sharon's dad: I hope it isn't your last stay here tomorrow.
 Chad: But you know what?
 Sharon's dad: What?
 Chad: You aren't going to fucking, come up in my mother fucking workroom and talk to me like this, *sir*.
 Sharon's dad: I just did, didn't I.
 Chad: Well you know what? Maybe you need to be fucking removed with your bad ass mother fucking attitude. Fuck that shit.
 Chad: Sharon...
 Sharon's dad: Are you going to let this bitch talk to me like this?
 Chad: I'm a bitch now?
 Sharon: Do *not* call my sister a bitch!

This statement reveals that a drag queen's space and place is her own. The statement "You aren't going to fucking, come up in my mother fucking workroom and talk to me like this, *sir*." reveals queens maintain territory which is designated as a *safe* space. This space should be free of conflict and should not be entered unless one is invited. Discussion of the conflict occurred backstage while contestants waited for critiques.

- Phi Phi's Dad: I know you had a little bit of a (hand gesture) you know.
 Sharon's dad: That's how we play. We were absolutely playing.
 Sharon: And you know what? It's no different between me and the girls, it's just, but when we do it, we read each other's looks and we read each other's attitudes. We don't ever bring like some kind of violence to it.
 Chad: //Right.
 Sharon: And when I hear that, it just freaks me out.
 Sharon's dad: Nobody brought violence to it.
 Chad: commentary. I didn't really care if Mike [Sharon's dad] was gonna come for me and try to beat me up. I just wasn't having it. You don't come for my people. Whether it is James or [Sharon] Needles, or whoever, like you aren't coming for my people if I have anything to do with it.

Physical violence is something that drag queens view as a problem. Within this excerpt the hyper-masculine conflict, as demonstrated by Sharon's dad, violated a cultural code of how to engage in conflict. Hyper-masculinity is perceived as violence within this context. Sharon reveals that coming for someone's look or attitude is proper mode of conflict engagement, but by entering into one's space and

not “reading,” or attacking one’s look or attitude sends the signal that physical violence is the goal of the attacker.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aspects of speech code (Carbaugh 2005; Philipsen 1997; Philipsen et al. 2005) that I identified relate to the “code of sisterhood.” This code reveals the notion of what it means to be an American drag queen as evident within RuPaul’s Drag Race: Season Four. As the data demonstrates, talk about what it means to speak like a queen permeates the everyday life of contestants on a range of levels. To have sisterhood, means to uphold the family values of what it means to “speak like a queen.” Such talk expands and reinforces the meanings of RuPaul’s criteria that to be the top of the top America’s next drag superstar must possess charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent. Members uphold drag queen speech codes by revealing what it means to speak like a queen. Such items include to look like a “fish,” don’t be “hungry,” be humble, resist negativity, don’t complain, and exude professionalism. These are qualities and characteristics of communication that a drag queen must perform, uphold, and repeat in order to uphold drag family values, thus fulfilling the code of love, respect, and dignity that comes with the performance of drag. Throughout the competition, members that uphold this code and spoke like queens reported feeling confident on the runway. Phi Phi shared the following commentary on her runway performance: “Walking down the runway, I’m feeling *super* sexy, and flirty, and I’m just having a good time out there. It’s a fishy outfit. I look really pretty. And I look glamorous.” This reveals one example of the benefits of speaking like a *true* queen: confidence. RuPaul acknowledged fulfillment of the code by saying, “This is the best Phi Phi has ever looked. *Very* Cosmo girl. (.) No Photoshop necessary.” RuPaul’s feedback and fellow judges’ critiques on RPDR serve as a benchmark as to the fulfillment of cultural codes.

This code of sisterhood is transmitted both through practice and talk about the practice, which is often portrayed via corrective action accounts within this context. Such practices fall within larger traditional means as to what it means to be a drag queen which, although touched upon, are not fully evident within this reality TV show. This study provides initial insight that in order to be “successful” drag queens, as perceived by the drag community, must not only speak like a queen, but must uphold family values. Hierarchy exists amongst drag queens which reveal “successful queens” often reap rewards such as significant status, self-affirmation, and empowerment via drag performance (Hopkins 2004). It is plausible to assume that contestants on RPDR may be viewed as drag celebrities who influence dominate drag rhetoric.

Examining this particular population increases knowledge on how marginalized populations use talk to construct rules of conduct for a coherent identity. To speak like a queen, offers one the opportunity to be a part of a larger “family of sisters” that offer love and support regardless of duration of relational length. This study reveals “turf” or “territories to which outsiders are not invited or welcomed”

(Philipsen 1975, p. 15) unless speaking appropriately, particularly within conflict settings.

Further research would do well to explicate these claims. Future research should employ ethnographic observations of drag queen performances, as well as individual and focus group interviews to better understand what it means to speak as a queen across/between the wider global community of drag. Doing so provides potential to understand how speech patterns are (dis)similar across the global drag community. Within the United States, in-depth interviews with drag queens could offer a means at which to compare and contrast regional American drag queen ways of speaking. This may offer unique ways of speaking like a queen throughout the United States. Additionally, examining how this particular reality TV show has influenced the speech codes within the LGBTQ community will increase scholarship regarding the influence of media on collective identities of marginalized groups. Uncovering similar cultural codes may also negate perceived differences between conflicting communities. Thus, it is my belief that scholars and laypersons may learn much by speaking like a queen.

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