**Queen Mary**
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# Talking beyond the binary: queer and genderqueer speech

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# Outline

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> Queer and genderqueer/non-binary

> Previous research

> Research questions

**Methodology**

> Broad methodology and foci

> Speech data

> Researcher as insider

> Analysis

**Implications**

# Queer and genderqueer/non-binary

**Queer:** active and conscious resistance to strict definition on the basis of sexuality (cloudy; amorphous; uneven)

**Genderqueer:** queer as applied to gender

**Non-binary:** anything falling outside of the binary man/woman or female/male system of gender

**Trans(gender):** anyone whose gender differs from that assigned at birth, at least partially, at least some of the time; genderqueer/non-binary generally included
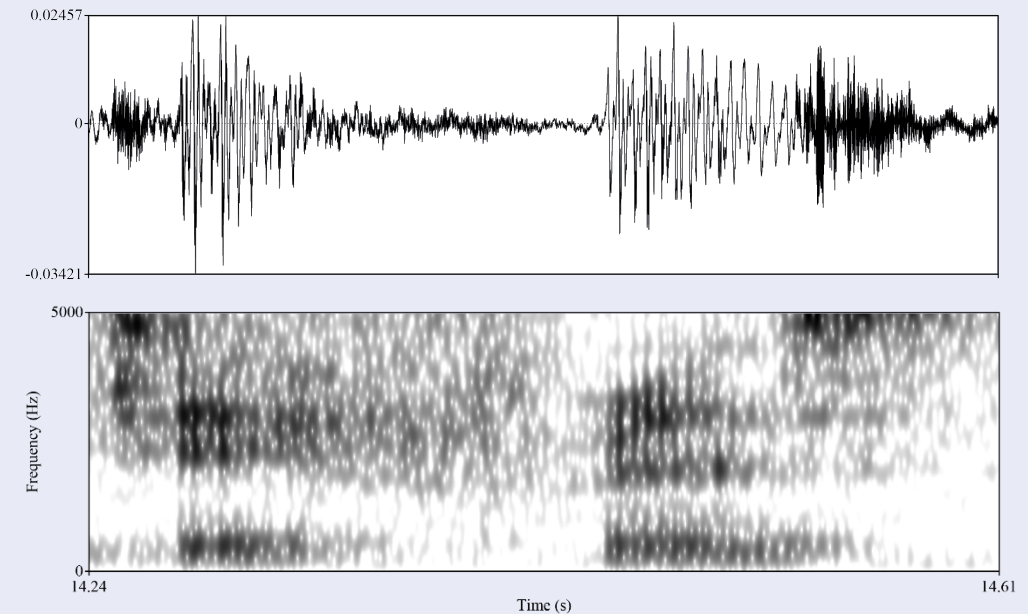
> All are multiply defined, including umbrella definitions

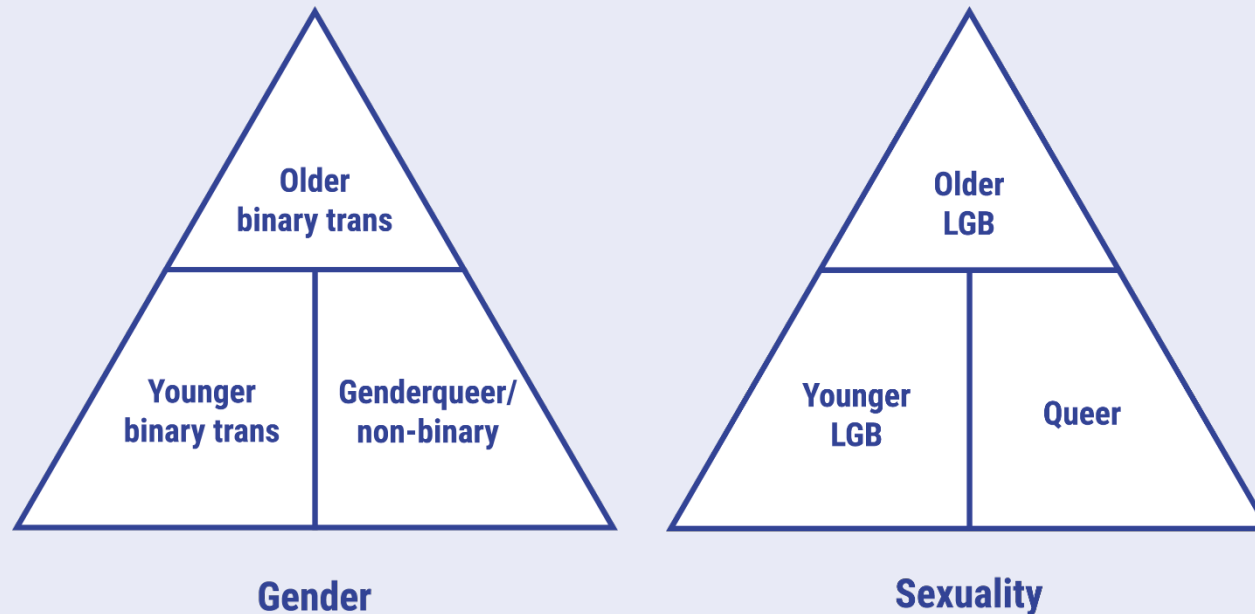> Queer and genderqueer/non-binary identities increasingly visible

# Previous research

> "Researchers interested in the linguistic construction of gender and sexuality continue to frame their research in terms of the well-established binaries" (Zimman *et al.* 2014: 1)

> Sociolinguistics key to understanding binaries and what lies beyond (Bershtling 2014; Bucholtz 2014)

> Small body of work on non-binary identities, but without phonetic focus (e.g. Blackwood 2014; Davis 2014; Zimman *et al.* 2014); lack of sociophonetic work on queer identities as defined here

> In trans studies: focus on phenomenological, humanities-based approaches over empirical, social scientific

# Research questions

1a  How do queer and genderqueer individuals use speech to construct and present gendered and sexual identities?

1b  How does this practice vary by context, topic and political/ideological affiliation, and what can such variation tell us about contemporary structures of gender and sexuality in Britain?

2  To what extent are gender and sexuality indexed differently across age groups? In particular, have recent changes in British society's treatment of gender and sexuality affected the ways in which queer, lesbian/gay/bisexual, genderqueer and trans individuals use language to construct their identities?

# Broad methodology/foci

> Sociophonetics

> Individual/social/contextual factors

>> Setting (e.g. Bell 1984, 2001;
Podesva 2007, 2011a, 2011b)

>> Topic of discussion (e.g. Coupland 2007;
Levon 2009; Schilling-Estes 2004)

>> Political/ideological alignment (e.g. Levon 2010a, 2010b, 2011)

> Historical processes (Levon 2014: 101): social/legal advances

# Speech data: speakers

Gender pyramid:
- Older binary trans
- Younger binary trans
- Genderqueer/non-binary

**Gender**

Sexuality pyramid:
- Older LGB
- Younger LGB
- Queer

**Sexuality**



Map data ©2017 Google

> 30 adult speakers split across six groups

> Age at which major legal acts of 2004 (Civil Partnership; Gender Recognition) received royal assent

> London English: lived in London majority of school life

# Speech data: method

> Recruited from (LGBT) groups and individually

> Speech data:
> > Sociolinguistic interviews
> > Self-recorded conversations in multiple settings, e.g. with family; friends; colleagues

> Target variables (based on previous gender/sexuality sociophonetic work):
> > /s/: duration, intensity and spectral features (e.g. Munson and Babel 2007; Stuart-Smith, Timmins and Wrench 2003)
> > Pitch: mean f0, span and dynamism (e.g. Law 2015)
> > Voice quality: e.g. creak and falsetto (e.g. Podesva 2007; Zimman 2015; Zimman, Becker and Khan 2015)

# Researcher as insider

> Agency, autonomy and voice important issues in research on identity
>> Popular debate around films like *The Danish Girl* and *Nina* (cis playing trans; Latina playing Black/African American)
>> Standpoint epistemology/feminist standpoint theory (e.g. Harding 2004; Harding and Wood 2014; Rolin 2009; Rouse 2009)
>> But not always simple: "we can do better than 'cis = problematic and trans = not problematic'" (Vincent 2016)
>> Most importantly: we should seek to represent the plurality of lived experiences

# Analysis



> Primarily quantitative: patterning of sociolinguistic variables

> Complementary qualitative analysis (e.g. Eckert 2012; Levon 2014; Podesva 2011b)

> > Conversation/discourse analysis to explore:

> > > situated meaning of patterned phenomena

> > > topic-based variation in context

> > Room for ethnography?

# Implications

> Focus on binaries in sociolinguistic work on gender and sexuality has:

> > obscured experiences of those outside binaries
> > resulted in empirically, politically and ideologically insufficient theory

> This study:

> > fills empirical gap, extending previous work in sociolinguistics and trans studies
> > refines theories of gender, sexuality, ideology and normativity, particularly in relation to language

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