

FAUX QUEENS—FAUXING THE REAL: BIOLOGICAL WOMEN, THE ART
OF DRAG, AND WHY THE REAL *IS* DRAG AND/OR HOW I BECAME
A DRAG QUEEN AND/OR HOW TO PAINT A DRAG MUG

A THESIS

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BY

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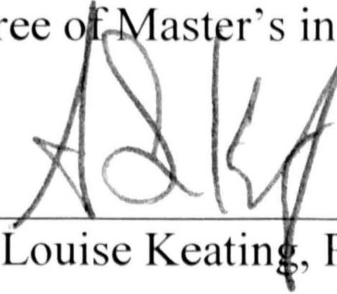
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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Brandi Garcia aka Brandi Amara Skyy entitled "Faux Queens—Fauxing the Real: Biological Women, the Art of Drag, and Why the Real *IS* Drag and/or How I Became a Drag Queen and/or How to Paint a Drag Mug." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in Women's Studies.



AnaLouise Keating, Ph. D., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:



Department Chair

Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

To my mother and father who never forced me to color
within the lines or dim my sparkle for anyone,
to my partner for showing me that all that glitters
stays that way with a little love and care
to all those queens that came before me
and will shine on after me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work hones in on my love and respect for the world of drag as well as what drag queens, and the gay males and transgender females that procure this art form, are to me; how I theorize it while performing alongside of them; and how I've lived it through the Dallas, Texas drag scene. In my opinion, there are three ways to know drag: as an academic, as a spectator, and as an actual drag performer and each mode brings with it its own unique (and highly different) perspective. As an academic, one looks at drag in order to dissect it in ways that make it relevant to the heteronormative world around us and asks questions about what drag can tell us about society at large; as an academic, I express my sincere gratitude for the guidance and (extreme) patience of my thesis chair, Dr. AnaLouise Keating, Dr. Claire Sahlin for all her years of support and encouragement through my undergrad and graduate career, Sandy Swan of the Phil Johnson Archives and Library for her constant help and indefinite book lending policy while I was working on this thesis, and Cece Cox for allotting me the gift of time. As a spectator, one looks at drag with a gaze: male, lesbian, gay, etc. and ends up seeing themselves—what they wish, want, need, and dislike, hidden in the queen's shadow; as a spectator, I am humbly and universe-ly indebted to my mother and father that taught me the only set of eyes I needed was my own, to see the beauty in *all* things, and to question before believing any/everything I saw. As a performer, drag takes on a unique perspective from the other two: the act of being the art, the illusion, the scholarship itself; as a drag queen, there is not enough thanks to give all the queens that allowed me to share in their spotlight before handing me my own: Aaron Davis, without you this would not exist, all the queens in Dallas who let me rummage through their lockers and borrow their

costumes and wigs, and last and forever fairest in my eyes, my drag mother, Jenna Skyy, for never treating me any different than any other queen and making me not only your first drag daughter, but the only bio-female to have such an honor bestowed upon them. And to the woman who knows and loves all the various sides of me, there has been no greater gift than your never ending support, love, reassurance, and laughter. Thank you for loving me just as I am.

This thesis is my attempt to bridge all three of my perspectives.

ABSTRACT

BRANDI GARICA AKA BRANDI AMARA SKYY

FAUX QUEENS—FAUXING THE REAL: BIOLOGICAL WOMEN, THE ART OF DRAG,
AND WHY THE REAL *IS* DRAG AND/OR HOW I BECAME A DRAG
QUEEN AND/OR HOW TO PAINT A DRAG MUG

AUGUST 2012

Can women be drag queens? Is it possible to expand definitions of drag to include those who do not perform their gender opposite? What is a faux queen? Are faux queens drag queens? I examine these and other questions in detail in this work by bridging three unique and very different perspectives: academic, observer, and faux queen. Entering into the dialogue from my personal faux queen experiences, I begin by highlighting drag's history in order to show faux queens as the next evolution of drag and situate her within discourses of drag, gender identity, and gender performance. I argue that drag queens construct and perform their own queered femininity, what I call *flamboyant femininity*, and illustrate how the faux queen connects and models herself in the drag queen's flamboyantly feminine image. I show that the faux is unique in her gender performance and gender identity through examining her amid various other female performances of drag. I conclude by exploring how the faux impacts gender identity by surveying works and individuals that place *faux queen* and/or *drag queen* as a potential transgender identity. Because drag is a visual aesthetic, I include a photo journal, Real to Faux, capturing my process of becoming a faux/drag queen.

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“It is not good enough to imitate the models proposed for us that are answers to circumstances other than our own. It isn’t even enough to discover who we are.

We have to invent ourselves.” Rosario Castellanos

PREFACE

No system of classification can successfully catalogue or explain the infinite vagaries of human diversity.

Gayle Rubin

The construction of a written body of work is really no different than the art of illusion: start with an empty page—a blank face. You begin by playing with the general layout, gathering your ideas, main points, and (perhaps) quotations onto the page—layering foundation on the face, a bit of shimmery highlight, and a gradient of shades for contouring. You write yourself in(to) the work (whatever that means to you); after all, the personal *is* political—add a burst of color on the eyelid and your signature trademark (mine is a random rhinestone on my face). You then incorporate the scholarship and opinions of others whose works both support and challenge your own—create your body shape by adding foam hips, “tucking,” and a stuffed bra (or prosthetic breast plate—known in the drag world as a “tit bib”). You top it all off with an overarching conclusion or “ending”—throw on your highest pair of heels, wig/hairpiece, and your one-of-a-kind handmade costume and viola! Fiercely flawless, you have just attempted and completed both your first written body of work and your first “drag body” of work. However, we know that neither is as simple as my analogy might suggest. Complications occur: you find that your writing contradicts itself; you try to blend colors on your eyelid that don’t work well together; you can’t put your ideas into words let alone get them on paper; you confuse *inspired by* with replication, and creative freedom in your makeup for painting *hard*.¹

¹ In the drag world, the phrase “painting hard” is used when the make-up is not blended properly, i.e. the make-up wears the queen not the other way around. Color, texture, design . . . anything that the mind can image is game in drag make-up; however, the key to the perfect “mug” is to blend it all together. (“Mug” is drag slang for face.)

Sometimes colors, materials, and ingredients do not blend well together—oil-based make-up with water-based cream, spray adhesive on bare skin, metal-set rhinestone jewelry with a chiffon gown. Other times you just need the right kind of tool/brush—one specifically made for shading—to help foster the blending process. In this work, I attempt to be both the brush and its strokes as I blend vantage points within subjects of drag, the drag queen, and its newly emerging component: the faux queen. Bridging, blending, finding points of connection within the multifaceted (and heavily opinionated) world of drag is not necessarily easy, nor are drag's ideas often conducive to one another; however, I feel that finding these moments and places of connection is necessary in order to explain and show this world—a world which is very standoffish to outsiders—in the most panoramic view possible, to the communities that need it the most: queer studies, academia, and the LGBTQ community. It is from a place of honor and respect for all the drag queens who have opened their art to me that I begin the blending process of the various hues that make up the rainbow of our community/myself: the student trying to (creatively) find academic form and function amidst all this abstract tulle, glam, and AB Swarovski crystal gowns and shoes; the voice and performance of the drag queen trapped in my body who joins the gay male drag community in love and admiration, not competition and/or appropriation; and the bio-female who is so attracted to this world of gay male drag that she has dedicated her life and this entire work trying to find her and other's home/place within it.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It's a good thing I was born a girl, otherwise I'd be a drag queen.
Dolly Parton (qtd. in Stevens)

I was seven years old and I was obsessed with Dorothy's ruby red slippers. I watched The Wizard of Oz over and over again fast forwarding to the parts that featured the shoes. I needed those shoes in my life, and I was determined to have them. I rummaged through the all-too-big hand-me-down heels my mother gave me when she was finished with them and found the perfect pair to prep for transformation: a caramel-latte-colored, faux snake-skin, three-inch heel. I asked my mother to take me to the craft store where I had her purchase five tubes of red glitter. Armed with this glitter and an unstoppable imagination, I layered the entire shoe with Elmer's glue and then covered them completely with those tiny red prisms of magic until I had created my very own pair of ruby red slippers. Fast forward to 2009: I am playing a modern-day Dorothy in a drag show and I am watching my drag mother, Jenna Skyy, somewhat in disbelief, as she transforms a pair of white knee high boots in almost the same way I had: red spray paint, spray adhesive, and buckets of red glitter into those same shoes I had created for myself over twenty years ago. At that moment I knew there was no real distinction, save for biology, between me and my drag mother—I, like her, had always been a queen.¹

As far back as I can remember, I have always had an affinity for all things considered to be and accepted as gendered feminine/female excessive. From Dorothy's ruby red slippers, to my

¹ Italicized chapter openings are my reflections and journals on/about my life and performance as a faux queen.

obsession and need to *be* Miss Piggy—the way she could change her look at the drop of a hat (sometimes literally), I have never been one to shy away from all things shiny, sparkly, and rhinestoned. So I am not surprised to find myself surrounded by books on drag queens, hyper-feminine female performance, and any/all things excessively marked feminine. Still, despite however closely and deeply connected I was or might have felt towards the drag queen community, there was still one obvious and blaring question that I couldn't escape: how and where does a biological female² who loves and feels she is all things drag fit into this gay male-dominated community? And then, on a randomly ordinary kind of day, I stumbled upon my answer: in the Wikipedia drag queen entry nestled in-between the various definitions and descriptions was a new term that I, in all my years in the drag, academic, and LGBTQ communities, had never heard: *faux queen*. “A faux queen or bio queen is a female performance artist who adopts the style typical of male drag queens. A faux queen may be jocularly described as ‘a drag queen trapped in a woman’s body,’ though few are female to male transsexuals” (Faux Queen 1). Needless to say, this discovery set me off on a firestorm of Googling, YouTubing, and endless searches for literature, pictures, articles, personal testimonies—ANYTHING that would manifest and deepen my understanding of this new subset of drag. My searches led me to small bouts of victory and sporadic revelations: I learned there was a faux queen pageant in San Francisco that began in 1996 and ended in 2005 (where was I!?!?) and that more bio-females than

² I hesitate to preface “woman/female” with the adjective “biological” because some transgender women in our LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community find it insulting. Since I have yet to find an equivalent term, I proceed with its use in caution and note to my transgender sisters that my usage throughout my work is not meant to categorize women into levels of “realness,” shut them out of the dialogue, or suggest that “woman” is an exclusive rights-only membership available to only those who were born in a “female” body. Please also note: from this point forward “bio” will be substituted for “biological.”

I could have possibly imagined claimed, right along with me, to both feel and identify as a “drag queen trapped in a woman’s body.” But it also led me to more questions and new obstacles: why wasn’t there more literature and scholarship on us? Why and how could I have not heard about these gender performance rebels in all my involvement with my local LGBTQ and drag communities and academic pursuits?

This thesis is an exploratory journey into the world of drag: the art, the illusion, the queens, and how the bio-females who love them make sense in it. While women performing various forms of femininity, sexuality, and women’s roles is not new,³ bio-females performing drag in the gay male drag world⁴ is emerging as something unique. Among the various forms of female drag are female dragging male—drag kinging, woman dragging woman—burlesque or neo-burlesque, and woman dragging man dragging woman—the faux queen. While I touch upon notions of burlesque, particularly neo-burlesque, I am not equipped nor do I have the experience and knowledge in this art form to begin to hypothesize what female/drag performances and identities mean to other female performers of drag. While I take into account and believe these gender performances carry their own gender, political, and social connotations that bring with them their own unique perspectives and relationship to drag, I do so only in relationship to the drag world and to faux queens. What follows is a narrowly focused snapshot into the complex panoramic world of faux queens. My ultimate goal is to illustrate how the faux queen relates to and transforms drag and gender; I argue that the very act of a bio-woman performing as a gay

³ For example, burlesque dance/shows highlight various real and fantasized femininities and female sexualities that may/may not potentially mirror those of the individual performer. I examine burlesque more closely in Chapter two.

⁴ While I have personal reservations about straight male drag queens, their involvement in the world of drag is beyond the scope of this thesis. From this point forward, all references to drag (unless otherwise specified) are linked to gay male drag.

man performing as a “woman” and the choice to more closely align and identify with a drag queen’s version of femininity (what I call *flamboyant femininity*) is exactly the kind of transgression that queer studies, academia, and the LGBTQ community need to embrace in order to expand their definitions and beliefs about gender construction, gender performance, and gender identity. My work on drag is about carving out and creating new spaces between preexisting ones for myself and others that I could not find in anyone else’s theories, scholarship, and media that survey women, gender performance theory, gender identity, and drag.

CHAPTER II

DRAG

Drag's complexity requires that any single interpretation be understood as partial truth.

Keith E. McNeal

I was sixteen years old when I first saw a drag queen perform. I had snuck in to my first gay bar, UBU, with a fake ID purchased from the Corpus Christi Trade Center. After an hour of dance music, the club went dark and the stage became lit, and she (who I would later know as Aaron Davis) came out to a song I've long since forgotten. But what I do remember is her exaggerated female but not really female beauty, her "I demand your attention" stance and presence, and her ability to do a back hand spring in five-inch heels. I didn't know this at the time, but she would be the first queen to give me a backstage pass to the world of drag. Through my avid show attendance and my inability to take "no" for an answer, she not only let me film her transitioning from male to female—stopping just short of the most intriguing part, the tuck—for a show that I would later edit to air on a local public broadcasting station, but she would also become my good friend, mentor, and the first queen to believe in my queendom as much I believed in hers.

As an academic discourse, drag has been interpreted and theorized in a variety of ways: as a misogynistic idealization and perpetuation of female gender norms, a mode of highlighting

the performative nature of gender, and a vehicle to thus conclude that all gender is performative.⁵ To the majority of drag queens who live and breathe it, drag is an art form rooted in their *gayness* and/or *queerness* full of endless potential, limited to only what the mind is capable of envisioning and as far removed from hetero-anything as one can image. To the bio-female who identifies and chooses to perform as a faux queen, drag is an area that she was recently (and reluctantly) allowed to enter *only if* she was performing masculinity, drag kinging, or had attached herself to a queen—and even then some would still question and argue her validity and presence in the art form. Why? In attempting to answer this question, I focus on Esther Newton's and Judith Butler's works because they are the first scholars to theorize and bring drag into an academic framework, as well as the most referenced, quoted, and used by the majority of scholars doing drag and gender theories. Through the examination of drag's history in and out of academia, the drag queen's unique creation of a queer gay male femininity (flamboyant femininity), and the current trends in drag, I highlight drag's evolutionary nature away from both Newton's and Butler's traditional drag scholarship into new realms that ultimately introduce the faux queen as the next logical progression in drag.

Since its introduction in Ester Newton's 1972 publication of her ground breaking work *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*—an anthropological study on the drag queen community she conducted in August 1965 through December 1966, one of drag's most definitive

⁵ Some scholars that exemplify this claim, such as Newton, Butler, and Schacht, will be examined further in this thesis. Others include, but are not limited to Marilyn Frye (see *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Thought*) and Janice Raymond ("The Politics of Transgenderism") who fall within the "tradition of feminist thought [that has argued] drag is offensive to women and that drag is an imitation based in ridicule and degradation" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 126). While Butler is the main proprietor of the theory of drag as representational of the performative nature of gender and thus exposing all gender as performative, others like Riki Wilchins (see *Genderqueer*) and Richard Dyer (see "Getting Over the Rainbow") also subscribe to this school of thought. While I don't necessarily disagree with any/all of these theorists, I posit that drag has the potential to be something outside of what it has traditionally been theorized to be.

and core features is that it is based on performing the gender opposite of oneself—also known as “bio-inversion drag” (Peluso 4). Oppositional and/or bio-inversion drag definitions hypothesize that in order for drag to be read as drag the sex/gender being performed MUST be the opposite of the performer’s embodied sex/gender, as defined at birth. According to Newton, “drag is a double inversion that says ‘appearance is an illusion.’ Drag says, ‘my ‘outside’ appearance is feminine, but my essence ‘inside’ [the body] is masculine.’ At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion: ‘my appearance ‘outside’ [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence ‘inside [myself] is feminine]’” (103, author’s brackets). Newton, perhaps unknowingly, in defining the action of *dragging*, also introduces academia to the theory of inversion: “when impersonators are performing, the oppositional play is between ‘appearance’ which is female, and ‘reality,’ or ‘essence,’ which is male. One way to do this is to show that the appearance is an illusion, for instance a standard impersonation maneuver is to pull out one ‘breast’ and show it to the audience” (101). The 1990’s boom of queer studies saw scholars expound on Newton’s inversion/oppositional definition of drag and use this concept as the framework to build their own theories. Judith Butler built her theory of gender performativity using the drag queen as her main example, defining drag as “fully subvert[ing] the distinction between inner and outer psychic spaces” (*Gender Trouble* 174). In 1996, Sarah Murray stated that the drag show’s focal point “is always the tension between the sex of the performer and the gender of the performance” (346). Over seven years later, Steven P. Schacht and Lisa Underwood’s 2004 anthology *The Drag Queen Anthology: The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators* defined drag queens in their call for papers as “individuals who publicly perform being women in front of an audience that knows they are ‘men,’ regardless of how compellingly female—‘real’—they might otherwise appear” (4). This list is only a small example of works

influenced by Newton's oppositional drag theory. While I do not believe that this oppositional assessment is necessarily wrong, I do think that its overuse limits the findings and the impact of drag's transformative potential and holds drag and its performers in static representations of it/themselves.

The problem arises when bio-inversion definitions of drag monopolize the existing material on drag. For example, oppositional drag definitions limits *who* can do drag to those who *only* perform the direct opposite of their sex/gender and creates stagnant meanings of what a drag queen is, what her art is, and what she represents. The former does not leave room for current trends in drag that include transgender bodies and completely ostracizes bio-males dragging men and bio-females dragging drag queens, and the latter removes personal agency (and voice) from the drag queens themselves. For example, k. d. lang is bio-female who embraces a more masculine femininity in both her identity and appearance. When she chose to dress in drag for "a PETA anti-fur trade protest held at Hard Rock Café in New York" (Willox 283), she dragged as the drag queen not the drag king. In bio-inversion's definition of drag, k. d. lang's choice to drag the drag queen would not be considered drag because drag queen, i.e. the female representation of gender—woman, is not the opposite of her biological sex—woman. Willox comments, "one would assume that k[.] d[.] lang, being a woman would perform drag in male attire thereby using incongruity as the basis of the performance" (275). But she does not. She chooses to drag the gender that she *feels* the most distanced from, female, as opposed to the gender *opposite* of her bio body which would be male. k. d. lang's example brings to the forefront the issues of seeing drag *only* in a bio-inversion way.

While bio-inversion drag can give rise to other performances that can potentially disrupt it,⁶ maintaining these outdated theories does little to reposition or record the transgression of drag as something other than what it has always been. The stagnation of drag limits not only the art form itself, but also the gay men who perform it. Hence, once the drag queen made an appearance in academic and mainstream consciousness, she “remained relatively static since [her] conception” (Willox 275). Commenting on drag oppositional theories’ limitations on the performer, Rachel Devitt states, “if drag must entail a cross to the ‘opposite’ of one’s ‘true’ identity, then that original, that biological sex-based identity becomes normalized and immobile, thus denying both the validity of the performer’s self-identified gender and the power a drag performance has in questioning gender ‘realness’” (30). By the continual and constant use of these antiquated notions of drag, the drag queen and the gay men who perform it are caught within the cycle of other people *telling them* what their art is, what it does and should mean, and what they mean within it.

However, even within the drag community, ideas about what constitutes “real” drag are defined solely by oppositional-based drag models and are often glorified in the more traditional drag pageant systems. Bio-inversion drag theories create an impermeable border around the art of drag in which those queens who do not fall within drag’s own definitive sphere are forced out—specifically transgender women. Drag performer Colby was the first in Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp’s study of the 801 Girls⁷ “to become what is referred to in the drag world as a ‘tittie queen’” (“When the Girls are Men” 2130). While the drag show director was “reluctant to allow

⁶ For instance, while Kurazawa’s 2009 thesis centers queer femme performers as “challenging the *classic drag dynamic*” (13, my emphasis), the “*classic drag dynamic*” refers to bio-inversion drag.

⁷ The 801 Girls are a group of popular drag queens from Key West that are the core of Taylor and Rupp’s research on drag.

her [Colby] to perform” (Taylor and Rupp, “When the Girls are Men,” 2130) because of her surgically altered body, she ultimately let her. In the “old school” drag community “transsexual performers are often viewed as ‘cheaters,’ and are expressly prohibited from participating in the local pageants, most of which are affiliated with the Miss Gay America system” (Hopkins 141).⁸

In maintaining and perpetuating the belief that “drag derives [its] subversiveness from a *mismatch* between sex role and genital sex: the disordering of bodily coherence” (Coles 11, my emphasis), we fail to see the growth and evolution of drag and its performers; we erase those individuals who self-define their performance as drag because they do not fit this outdated mold of drag. When an art form begins to police itself from within, it not only stunts its own growth, but also subconsciously grants those outside of its community access to do the same. Perhaps unbeknownst to them, what Newton and other scholars that adhere to oppositional models of drag have done is tether drag—and the gay male—to a binaric male/female context. This tether to binaries is what made it easy for scholars, like Butler, to read drag as being exclusively representational of the constructive nature of heterosexual gender displays and thus creating the assumption that drag and the drag queen are not happy in/within their own queerness.⁹

⁸ Norman Jones, the first Miss Gay America and the pageant owner from 1975-2005, has expressed his distaste for transgender women in the world of drag stating, “I have a hard time going into a bar restroom and a ‘thing’—something is in there with boobs bigger than I have ever seen with their skirt hike up peeing. . . . The art of illusion is to be a man and make yourself look like a woman. If you go and have that done, you’re not illusion anymore, you’re a fact” (qtd. in Hopkins 141). While I don’t know if current owners Larry Tyger and Terry Eason (known as L&T Entertainment) share Jones’ sentiments, they have upheld (amidst protest) the pageant system’s tradition of not letting transgender women compete in their pageant. For more specifics, see rule fourteen on the Miss Gay America Website.

⁹ Newton writes a lot about the queen’s unhappiness in her work. I attribute this unhappiness to the time frame in which her study was conducted because drag was illegal at the time. As a movement, the LGBTQ community runs the gamut of emotions from shame to being pissed off to being silenced to pride. Drag’s definition, at the time of Newton’s study, is reflective of the political and social context that the queens were situated within. I highlight this for the purpose of showing that the LGBTQ community is not static so how can we believe and/or expect its art to be?

Another closely-related hindering factor found in traditional drag scholarship is that drag has been limited to being read within a male/female heterosexual gender dichotomy. Judith Butler, a key scholar in catapulting drag theory into academic consciousness, states, “as much as drag creates a unified picture of ‘women’ . . . it also reveals that distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regularity fiction of heterosexual coherence. . . . Part of the pleasure . . . of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender . . .” (*Gender Trouble* 175).¹⁰ There are a couple of issues with Butler’s analysis. First, as I will later show, drag is not necessarily a performance/parody/or mimicry of women. Second, while I don’t necessarily disagree that drag exposes the performative nature of *heterosexual* gender, Butler makes no distinction between the fact that the performance that she is using as an example is rooted in queerness and that the performers have made a very clear choice to present themselves in that manner, i.e. drag, and the queen are very aware of themselves and what they are doing. For Butler to dislocate the *gay* male drag queen from his *queerness*—as if queer is some kind of skin that can be shed by the individual—erases the very *queered* experience of being a bio-man entering into a gendered female section of a department store and taking bras, dresses, and heels into the dressing room. The drag queen is not capable of slipping into a repetition of a bio-woman’s female performance because the queen is constantly being reminded that she is in fact a *he*: the dressing room signs

¹⁰ While I have my own personal reservations about Butler, what concerns me is that, while she may have (perhaps) become more “fluid” in her later works (particularly with her respect to her idea of “fantasy” and retrospective reengagement of her conclusion to *Gender Trouble* in *Undoing Gender*), “From Parody to Politics”—which she wrote in the 1990’s, almost twenty years ago—is still being used as the definitive and last word on drag. It is still referenced as if it was just written yesterday. Whether she wanted or expected them to, Butler’s theories on drag have become the academic mainstream general consensus and definition of what drag is. Thus my argument may not really be situated *against* Butler’s theories that were birthed in the 1990’s (a turbulent decade for the then siloed L-G-B-T-Q community), but directed more towards the mainstreaming, unquestioned acceptance, and use of her theories as proof and support that this is all that drag is, means, and/or will be.

labeled woman, the gender coded meaning of a dress and heels, and, sometimes, it's herself doing the reminding to her community when the gay man with/in the queen is looking for love. Butler fails to see the queerness that members of her own LGBTQ community represent. Lastly, gay male experiences of femininity do not necessarily mirror heterosexual experiences of femininity; thus the experience and the performance of the two cannot and will never be identical. In other words, "this [invert/inversion] model reinscribes heterosexuality *within* homosexuality itself" (Tyler 90, my emphasis). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler does not appear to be open to nor offer up the possibility that the gender being performed by drag queen could be and is representational of something other than hetero male/female.¹¹

Fortunately, current scholars of drag are beginning to explore the limitations in Butler's hetero reading and Newton's bio-inversion drag model. For instance, Natalie M. Peluso believes the bio-inversion model of drag "focus[es] on hegemonic constructions of gender, and therefore miss[es] the performance of alternative masculinities and/or femininities, (i.e. it lacks the ability to 'read' any and all performance variations both within and outside of binary gender categories)" (4). Rachel Devitt states "in the hands of scholars drag has been both a kitschy, plucky attack on *and* a ruthlessly misogynistic verification of heterosexist gender norms" (29, author's emphasis). Arguing in contrast to Butler's theories, Annabelle Willox states,

¹¹ What I find interesting is that Butler states in *Gender Trouble* "the sex/gender distinction suggests that sexed bodies can be the occasion for a number of different genders, and further, that gender itself need not be restricted to the usual two. If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are *genders*, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex" (143, my emphasis). So why did she interpret drag within a binaric framework? She could have offered up one of the alternative possibilities that she suggests above. I fail to comprehend how Butler, being a lesbian, can so easily associate queerness, the drag queen, with heteronormativity. As a lesbian, would she see and/or theorize herself within or along the same lines of binaric hetero structure in which the inner workings are not reflective of herself as a queer? So why would she do that to another member of her community?

Butler does argue later that drag has its own melancholia, but the use of drag as an example can be, nonetheless, confusing for her due to its *voluntaristic* nature. If Butler were to claim that ‘drag queen’ is a *gender in itself*, that there are multiple genders of which this is merely one manifestation, then the performer could be said to be performatively constructing ‘drag queen’ through the performed actions. The drag queen, therefore, is only subversive if we assume the *traditional binary* configuration of genders, and if we assume the parody is about women and not simply a self-parodic performance. (282, my emphasis)

In other words, by locking drag into heterosexual and binaric gender constraints, we dislocate drag from the individual performing it (gay male) which ultimately removes any personal definitions and experiences. Seeing the drag queen only through a binaric lens erases the agency of the drag queen’s ability to self-construct and self-define themselves, as well as the possibility that the queen is not performing traditional heterosexual-based gender displays, but is creating, performing, and “constructing ‘drag queen’ [themselves] through the performed actions” (Willox 282). We end up limiting ourselves and the experiences of the performer by reading, analyzing, and theorizing the drag queen in the same scope and manner that they have always been in. We end up not being able to see past our own creations; hence, “the problem is not that we don’t know the gender system well enough but that we know it all too well and can’t envision any alternative” (Wilchins 13). What I, and the above scholars, seek is an alternative perspective to a performance that cannot be stripped away from its own queerness. While Butler’s dichotomous reading of drag as representational of the performative nature of gender has helped bring drag to the forefront of academic scholarship and made it a viable place in which to search for gender-

driven theories, it has also stunted drag's growth as a *living* art form and limited its transformative potential within queer scholarship.

Another fundamental, yet limiting, component of conventional views of drag is the assessment that the drag queen mimics and/or parodies women or, more precisely, femininity. Inversion drag theories ultimately conclude that the gender being performed by the drag queen is that of a "woman" which then leads to the queen being read within a hetero binaric framework as a carbon copy of a bio-woman centered and bio-female owned and based femininity. This reading in turn causes the queen to potentially be read by some scholars as misogynistic. Steven Schacht asserts that many "camp performers take special delight in making fun of women and the feminine in a manner that reifies both women's subordination and men's superiority in society" (Schacht and Underwood 11). And while Marilyn Frye does not engage with drag theory per say, she writes that the drag queen's "effeminacy and donning of feminine apparel displays no love of or identification with women or the womanly. . . . It is a casual and cynical mockery of women, for whom femininity is the trapping of oppression . . ." (137). Her view has influenced and become a building block for others who argue the misogynistic nature of drag. Assertions that the drag queen is synonymous with woman and questions such as "do men make better *women* than women do" (Hallet 1) only further reiterates and propagates the belief that drag and the queen are misogynistic.¹² While I do not argue that all drag is free from misogynistic tones, I do believe that this subgroup of drag is the exception to the rule as drag has multiple identities within the art

¹² Steven Schacht's work focuses on the drag queens in the Imperial Court System. He hypothesizes that drag queens pay "homage to male superiority" making statements such as "'we make better women than women do'" ("Turnabout," 167). Schacht's studies of drag are in no way representative of the art as a whole because he focuses on a small, traditional, and more "for charity" centered subset of the broader drag community. We also must remember that Schacht's work is over ten years old and both the queen and the art form have changed significantly within that time frame.

form itself, multiple people with different life experiences, and multiple ways of reading the queen and the context of what she says. In my experience, most queens do not see themselves as misogynistic; they see themselves as original one-of-a-kind creators. They create themselves out of themselves for themselves: their vision, their version of “femininity,” their take on pop culture and/or reference. One of the main reasons drag is misread is because it’s always been read in a heterosexual context and “one of the differences between straight society and queer society, queer culture or queer consciousness, is that we have a recognition that we form ourselves. At almost every crucial moment of our lives we have to construct ourselves, construct other ways of being” (Nestle and Cruikshank16).

While previous drag scholarship centers drag in bio-woman/female fixed performances of femininity, contemporary ideas of drag are emerging that posit drag as something that lies outside binaric and heterosexual and bio-gender representations of femininity. Scholar Annabelle Willox confirms, “a drag queen is not, in my opinion, pretending to be a woman, nor is the performance merely about women, or femininity (not that the two are synonymous); the performance is ultimately that of a drag queen . . .” (269). Drag diva RuPaul has been an avid enthusiast of drag as its own gender category, infamously stating, “I do not impersonate females. How many women do you know who wear seven-inch heels, four-foot wigs, and skintight dresses?” (qtd. in Phillips and Stewart 28). RuPaul’s assertion of visual excess and gay male femininity juxtaposes heterosexual and mainstream femininity because the latter is about “the work of adapting oneself to a current set of social norms, a work of adaptation and adjustment that must remain invisible. The goal is to look natural while constantly laboring away in private to maintain the façade” (Ferreday 1). Or as stated by Layli Phillips and Marla R. Stewart, “RuPaul’s statement suggests that as a drag queen . . . he is performing an extreme version of femininity that exceeds what

biological women are likely to enact, thus detaching femininity from female sex . . .” (28). In my personal relationship with the drag community and reading/hearing them talk about themselves and their art, the queen sees her drag as more of an act of creation based on *queer* (gay male) notions of femininity rather than a femininity based on replication of a heterosexual (not to mention white, upper-class, able-bodied) woman.¹³ As renowned fashion journalist and editor Hamish Bowles notes, “it’s not even about looking like a woman—it’s a completely abstracted notion, one that has nothing to do with what women really look like or who they are” (qtd. in Brubach 93). RuPaul discusses her process of constructing his femininity in her autobiography *Letting it All Hang Out*, “I love to sit with friends and unstitch . . . the patchwork of my performance, identifying this bit from here and this bit from there. I really see myself as a sampling machine. Even the supermodel drag queen I would later become is a kind of Frankenstein’s monster—a collage made of bits and pieces from old television shows, copies of *Vogue* magazines, and advertisements” (64). What RuPaul is expressing here is that traditional binaric genders do not encapsulate the drag queen experience and how *she sees* herself and her art; therefore, what is needed are fresh perspectives and new ways of seeing and expressing “femininity” that are not bound to gender.

The drag queen’s queered sense of femininity not only challenges traditional thoughts and scholarship about drag, but also begs to be differentiated from it. José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of disidentification highlights the queen’s doing, performing, and being something other than traditional gender categories. Disidentification is

¹³ Since color, class, dis/ability, and/or age of the ideal woman that the drag queen is said to mimic is never mentioned in scholastic analysis, we (myself included) assume that she is all of the above, white, able-bodied, young, fit, etc., and (of course) straight. Obviously the drag queen’s performance of “femininity” is not tied to attracting a mate—male or female—it is well known in the LGBTQ community that “no one wants to date a drag queen”) which raises concerns to the validity of this argument.

about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its working to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identification. Thus disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (31)

In this process of disidentification, the queen takes mainstream femininity and its markers, deconstructs it, and reconfigures it according to their visions. New York drag queen Lavinia's description of her "femininity" embodies the disidentification strategies Muñoz describes. She says drag "was never about female impersonation. It's about the feminine principle in the male. There's emphatically the feminine and masculine within the male. I'm not trying to be a female, not at all. I'm trying to bring out the feminine principle within me—and not deny it, and not deny my maleness as well" (qtd. in Chermayeff, David and Richardson 41). Marianne Larochelle and Jose A. Guzman Colon experienced a new drag performance emerging in the San Francisco drag scene and labeled what they saw "glam gender." In their collaborative photo-profile project, Jose A. Guzman Colon defines glam gender as "an exploration of gender, sexuality, and beauty . . . confront[ing] traditional views on each head-on. Its fantastical characters and iconic imagery dare viewers to check their preconceived ideas about what is and isn't beautiful" (7). As drag queens themselves and scholars like Muñoz and Guzman Colon note, drag queen performance is something other than a simple replication of "woman" or "femininity." Taylor and Rupp witnessed this firsthand in their ethnographic study of the 801 Girls of Key West Florida and

conclude, “‘drag queens’ emerge as an in-between or third gender category that insists there are only two. . . .creat[ing] their own authentic genders, suggesting that rather than eliminating the notion of gender categories, we need to expand the possibilities beyond two or three to a whole range of possibilities including drag queen (“Chicks with Dicks” 130-31).

In addition to expanding gender categories beyond the male-female binary to include drag queens, I also believe that we need to expand femininity itself, shifting it beyond its singularly heterosexual bio-woman-centered definitions. As a bio-female I do not believe that I “own” the rights to the female experience, and I am at times turned off by (some of) the heterosexual and militant sects of the women’s movement (such as the still currently held Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival) that limit the reclaiming of *woman* to those born in a female body. I believe there is much that mainstream feminism and the women’s movement can learn from looking at gender from a queer perspective that can include but is not limited to drag queens. Femininity looks and is experienced differently as a gay male than as a female—regardless of sexual orientation—(and vice versa for masculinity), and it is this version of femininity espoused through a gay male drag lens that I term *flamboyant femininity* (a flamininity perhaps?). As a theory, flamboyant femininity serves multiple purposes: to encompass the drag queen’s disidentification from bio-woman femininity to incorporate all the visual, eccentric, and non-conformist glam gender—everything that the drag queen is and represents—; and to set the drag queen’s “femininity” as a valuable experience and equal to bio-femininity . . . all the while removing the constrictions of gender by defining it as something outside of the binaric system as based in the creation of an unconventional femininity.

While works—such as Newton’s and Butler’s—began the dialogue and discourse on drag, it does not hold that their works still define and represent what drag is and has become in

the twenty-first century. Now we must ask ourselves, do we see drag as replication/mimicry of current heterosexual modes of femininity or as something else entirely? I offer flamboyant femininity as something outside traditional understandings of drag—a space in which explorations of the self see no boundaries, no hegemonic gender constrictions, and societal and cultural enforced limits. After more than thirty years since drag’s inception into academic discourse, it is not possible to expect drag to be and mean the same thing today as it did in the past. The sustainability of any art form is based on its ability to morph, grow, and change with current ideas and the current times. For drag to survive as a queer art form, it must remain pliable and shape-shift around what it itself has produced as an evolutionary versions of itself: the trans drag queen, the bio-male dragging male king, and now the faux queen. As a spectator, performer, and student of both drag and women’s/gender studies, I believe that the drag queen (as well as others in the queer community) can and does *construct* and *create* new spaces in the gender spectrum. The drag queen “as neither feminine nor masculine but rather presenting their own complex genders” (Taylor and Rupp, “Chicks with Dicks,” 117) then becomes a site in which other gender identities (not just those based in mimicry or inversion) can be unearthed, discovered, and created.

CHAPTER III

THE FAUX QUEEN AND THE ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS AND FLAWLESSLY UNCUSTOMARY WORLD OF DRAG¹⁴

I look at drag queens and I think, *that's how I feel as a woman . . .* It is not being a girl, it is watching yourself be a girl. I go to drag queens as my mentors and my roles models because they were the ones who believed completely and passionately in their femaleness . . . they knew exactly the work it took to get there . . . they could take the dress off and be the messiest looking guy in the coffee shop, but in 25 min could be the most ravishing beauty. They made femininity make sense to me.

Amber Hollibaugh

I had been doing drag for years before I even knew to call it that. We were doing a Wicked production and my drag mother was playing Elphaba and asking around to cast Glinda. Without even thinking about it I jumped up and said "I'll be Glinda." To which she glanced at me with that mischievous yet approving grin and simply said, "you better bring it." Right after I volunteered, I was immediately barraged with negative thoughts: what would this predominately gay crowd think when they saw a bio-female—a "REAL" girl—performing one of our most beloved gay pop culture characters? Would my community—the same one that I perform for every third Saturday—accept me in this new role—"pretending" to be a drag queen? There was nothing different in what I was doing on stage from any other month per say, but it was the awareness that calling it drag brought to it and the idea that I, a bio-female, was performing drag opposite Jenna Skyy—THE drag queen—of our show. These thoughts raced in my head up until the flash of a second when my music came on and I went on stage and did what I always did.

¹⁴ This title is in dialogue with Steven P. Schacht and Lisa Underwood's anthology *The Drag Queen Anthology: The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators*.

Once off stage, the uncertainty, voices, and questions reemerged: “oh my god, they didn’t clap,” “they hated it!!” I was walking amid the audience when an “excuse me” lifted me from my self-berating. A Gaybingo regular called me over and excitedly said, “I L O V E Wicked. I’ve seen the Broadway show with the original cast and I L O V E me some Kristin Chenoweth. And I’ve seen a lot of queens do this number and you were by far the best Glinda I have seen.” And in that moment I felt validated. It’s not that I needed outside validation to confirm that I was just as good as Jenna. On the contrary, what that audience member validated was that others finally saw me as I saw myself: as a lesbian woman who loves the drag community and the gay men who perform it so much that she wanted, just once, to put her gender aside and be seen as one of them.

When I first read Hollibaugh’s words, I felt like (finally) someone got it. Someone else knew how I felt when I was among drag queens. Hollibaugh’s identification as a “woman” via the flamboyant femininity of the drag queen reflects the same feelings of many faux queens. It is in the connection to the drag queen’s flamboyant femininity that the faux begins to understand and construct her femininity—one that is always high drama, glitz, glamor, and camp—but always acutely aware of the very real presence of her vagina. This sex organ affects—whether she wants it to or not—her relationship and acceptance in the drag world and how some drag queens view and respond to her, but it also has the potential to expand definitions of drag to uncharted horizons and more fluid understandings of gender performance and identity. Familiarizing and digesting the historical and transgressive history of drag along with understanding the faux’s unique connection to the drag queen—including the mother-daughter apprenticeship-like relationship—is absolutely crucial for someone outside of the drag world’s ability to comprehend all aspects of the faux queen: who she is, why she chooses to align and identify more closely with the drag queen’s flamboyant femininity as opposed to her own gender bound femininity. Reduced

to the most simplistic definition, a faux queen is a biological female who performs and (for some) identifies as a gay male drag queen. But she is far from simplistic. From her choice to identify as a “faux” queen instead of any of the other identifiers available, to her relationship to other female drag performances, and most importantly how her emergence in the world of drag helps transform drag and expands its definition to produce innovative spheres of gender performance and gender identities, this chapter explores in depth the multiple layers of the faux queen.

FAUX QUEENS AND FLAMBOYANT FEMININITY

Not all bio-female performers of drag or drag-esque performance can be defined as faux queening, and not every bio-female performer of drag identifies as a faux queen. Under the umbrella of female drag there’s a multitude of identifications and just as many diverse ways that bio-females understand and describe their relationship to drag. Some of our many avatars include: bio queens, female-female impersonators, femme queens,¹⁵ femme dragsters, and drag queens. And there are just as many variations concerning what our unique drag art is/should be called: “draglesque,”¹⁶ (Queen Bees) feminist drag, female-to-female drag, and “everything from ‘bio-queening’ to ‘exploding femininity’ to good old fashion drag queening” (Queen Bees qtd. in Devitt 27). Not to mention what some scholars writing on and about our form of drag label it as “high femme drag” (Peluso), “radical femininity” (Shapiro), “lesbian drag queen[ing]” (Schacht,

¹⁵ As defined by the House of Naphtali, a ball community, femme queens are “males at varying stages of gender reassignment” (2). Thus femme queen is a term used in the African American LGBTQ and ball community to describe a MTF who is taking hormones; therefore, I caution its use among bio-females and scholars as a descriptor of bio-female drag.

¹⁶ This is a unique term which appears to be conceived from within the burlesque community. I first heard this term in a myspace blog by self-identified bio queen Miss Luscious Ladypop, a member of the performance troupe the Queen Bees. The term is unique in the sense that it marries drag to burlesque equally and appears to have begun to branch out into an art form in its own right. While I appreciate its originality, it does not fully encapsulate how I theorize faux queen’s drag performance.

“Four Renditions of Doing Drag”). Each of these identifiers offers their own distinct perspective and view of female drag performance. Our choice then to identify as a faux queen instead of any of these other identifiers directly reflects how we as individuals see our relationship to the drag queen and how we envision and define our role and performance in drag.

Through the embodiment, construction, and performance of flamboyant femininity, the drag queen gives the faux a unique vehicle and lens through which to experience femininity. Because there are almost no social scripts that regulate and/or police the construction of male femininity the same way that there are in a woman’s life (men contend with scripts that rigidly define their masculinity by the femininity they are *not supposed* to embrace—i.e. men *don’t* wear dresses, play with dolls, wear pink, etc.), the drag queen is not intrinsically socialized and bound to a femininity as defined by heteronormative society. Thus the drag queen is free to construct, explore, and move about femininity without all the historical and social baggage (and backlash) attached to their exploration as there would be for the bio-female. For example, the idea of a bio-woman wearing a pair of six-inch heels for no reason other than her own personal enjoyment and love of heels is often dismissed because historically “first” and “second” wave feminist have equated heels with patriarchy, social conditioning, and manufactured and consumerist standards of beauty even as emerging feminists as well as other females try to reclaim them along with other feminine identifiers. Femme-identified poet and performer Meliza Bañales reflects back on being a femme in the 90’s:

There was a lot of femme bashing and I don’t think I’m exaggerating when I say that. It was the nineties . . . there was a lot of protesting stuff like beauty pageants. You know things like that, things that are feminine . . . things that had to do with being feminine that didn’t have to do with like natural stuff, like

menstruating or child birth, or something like that was an ‘appropriation by the man’ . . . and you’re just expressing your internalized hatred of women. . . . for a woman to wear lipstick in that town she was like practically blacklisted . . .

people think I’m exaggerating but I wasn’t. (qtd. in *FTF: Female to Femme*)

Femininity (as lived by women regardless if it is flamboyant or queer), is constantly centered and analyzed around heterosexual men and not as an identity of self-proclaimed agency. Or as Carole-Anne Tyler suggests, “postmodern critics argue that because both gender and sexuality are organized around the phallus in our culture, there can be no escaping phallic effects” (89). More importantly, if one (the drag queen, the faux queen, the lesbian, the femme, the straight woman, etc.) tries to claim that their femininity is in fact self-constructed, chosen, and self-defined they are often dismissed—“any appeal to identities or desires beyond or before the phallus and its signifiers is both too utopic and essentialist” (89). Drag queens are not “conditioned” to wear heels, nor is it culturally mandated for them to do so. Drag queens offer females one alternative to experience their femininity from a perspective that falls outside its traditional definitions and highlight a different angle from the one that they (both pre- and post- women’s movement) have been exposed to or as Wesley Morris explains, “whatever it is that some women feel they’ve lost touch with in the 40 or so years since the women’s movement, drag gives them a chance to rediscover it” (1).

It is also important to understand that the drag queen’s performance of flamboyant femininity does not necessarily carry the same risk that it does for bio-females. One could argue that the drag queen’s “femininity is a kind of gender holiday, whereas female femininity is definitely a full-time job” (Gilbert 75) because it is not socially expected for the gay male to be feminine whereas for the female it is. Since birth, most bio-women have been barraged with all

things pink and frilly, encouraged to play with dolls and their mom's make-up, and embrace all things feminine because that's "what little girls are made of." Any deviation from that norm and both gender and sexuality come into question. For a woman to play with flamboyant femininity comes with the fear that "any performative, excessively feminine behavior may be used against [her]" (Gilbert 75). There is a very real fear that if, I as a lesbian bio-woman, embraces too much femininity I will no longer be visible (not that I ever was) in my LGBTQ community; thus the flamboyantly feminine lesbian is read as straight and the flamboyantly feminine straight woman is read as easy or a slut. The drag queen provides one variation of proof that a female can wear six-inch heels out of her choice that is free from heterosexually-coded beliefs and can proclaim a femininity that is not contingent upon outside forces for its definition. While a faux queen's bio femininity may be on display, the faux chooses to construct and perform as a gay man dragging "female," thus constructing her femininity by adopting the drag queen's hyper-queer-feminizing of *their* gay male experience, i.e. flamboyant femininity. As faux queens we *live* for that connection. We can be overheard camp-ily referring to ourselves as 'a drag queen trapped in a woman's body,' "gay man trapped in our vagina," "drag queen with a pussy," and "genetically challenged drag queen."

I choose to identify as a faux queen because I believe that other options (like bio queen, female-female impersonator, and female drag queen) semantically and figuratively lock me into a context that prioritizes my biology over my drag, my experiences, and my personal relationships to drag queens. However, the choice to identify as a faux queen is not without its share of critiques. Case in point, the term bio queen emerged because some female performers did not like prefacing their performance with the word "faux." Bio queen "developed from the previously contested term 'bio faux queen' . . . the international drag king and queen community cautioned

[using] the term bio faux queen, identifying instead as bio queens, because it is felt that by naming this behavior as faux we are suggesting that it is an imitation of true, authentic, natural and superior behavior, and thus the lesser of a binary dualism” (J. Taylor 6). While the term “faux” can mean fake or replication, there is also the potential for faux to be re-conceptualized, reclaimed, and thus transformed into something independent and of its own creation. An example of the transgressive nature of reclaiming the term faux can be seen in the fashion world. Faux fur and leather were first considered to be a cheap replication and/or knock-off for the “real” thing; however, after the inhumane ways animals were killed simply for their fur, faux fur arose as a humane alternative and has now become its own independent fashion genre. I favor and choose to identify as a faux queen because it emphasizes the drag queen’s flamboyant femininity while acknowledging a certain limitation to which I, as a female, can actually experience drag queen.

For fauxs (like myself) who value our connection to drag queens, performances such as burlesque and neo-burlesque do not fully actualize our desires for a non-bio-women-based femininity. Debra Ferreday call this emerging subculture, “the new burlesque” (1), which she defines as “promot[ing] the production of an elaborately feminine identity” (1). Among the new burlesque is a subsection called neo-burlesque which “centers on the creation of performances that draw on the style of classic burlesque, combining it with influences from drag culture and popular culture to create a new theatrical genre” (Murphy 1) and “pokes fun at homophobia, bible thumpers, and other topical events” (Gwyther 1). Both burlesque and neo-burlesque performances appear to place emphasis on the role of how their own bio-gender—female/woman—is reinterpreted, reconceptualized, and/or reframed, therefore creating and performing what I call bio-female centered drag. While burlesque and neo-burlesque can and do contain elements of drag, their focus appears to be on reframing and reclaiming the female experience through a

female (whether it is queer—lesbian—or not) perspective of femininity. Neo-burlesque performers “describe their onstage personas as caricatures of hyperfemininity, while also acknowledging overlaps and intersections between their *lived identities* and their interest in neo-burlesque” (Murphy 2, my emphasis).

In the “Bio Queen Manifesto” (see Appendix A) presented at the International Drag King Community Extravaganza (IDKE), bio queens state that they as performers “perform various kinds of *femininities and female genders*—from heterosexual housewives to working dominatrixes—which are not equivalent to [their] ‘real life’ identities” (qtd. in Girls from the Cleveland Kings, my emphasis). In other words, some bio queens, burlesque and neo-burlesque performers take various women’s roles and identities, camp them up, and present them on stage. Or Lola the Vamp says, “when I perform it is to show the girl, whereas some performers take the approach of caricaturing or ‘burlesquing’ the girl” (qtd. in Ferraday 1). Regardless of the amount of camp or physical resemblance to drag queens, burlesque and neo-burlesque performances are still rooted and grounded in a *bio-female’s experience of femininity*.¹⁷ Represented on stage as bio-female centered drag, these performances emphasize “the relationship between neo-burlesque and their lived identities, portraying neo-burlesque as a means of exploring their identities as *women . . .* as a means of exploring an attachment to *lived, feminine identities*” (Murphy 80, my emphasis). While there is no definitive way for the faux queen to completely disengage from her lived experiences as a female as those experiences may inadvertently show up in her performance, her performance is focused on *detaching* herself from her lived bio-female experience and focus on flamboyant femininity.

¹⁷ These *bio-female experience s of femininity* can also be queer and house potential challenges to mainstream femininity; however, these performer’s experiences of a queered bio-female rooted femininity is beyond the scope of this essay.

The subtle difference between the bio-female centered drag of the burlesque performer and the flamboyant femininity drag of the faux queen can also be seen from an audience's perspective. In an interview, Sir La Muse, a bio-female drag performer in the UK, refers to the Seattle based The Queen Bees—the founders of the “Bio Queen Manifesto”—as “*femme* drag, but I always felt like there was so much stressful sexual tension wrapped up in it, that [it] was still this kind of tits and ass show . . .” (qtd. in Elliot interview, my emphasis). Sir La Muse highlights that for some female drag performers it is more important to create the *illusion* of femininity than it is to focus on the bio-female body and the femininity already encoded on it. Like many females interested in performing drag, Sir La Muse did not see herself in any of the available female drag performances. While burlesque and neo-burlesque focus on ultimately exposing or revealing the girl in its climax, faux queens work hard to conceal their clear markers of bio-woman and bio-femininity. Unlike burlesque where the illusion is disturbed by the revealing of their physically female bodies, the faux queen, as a bio-female, wants the audience to question if what they are looking at is a “real” girl or a drag queen.

It is also important to understand how the faux differs from the more subtle and perhaps subconscious performances—specifically masquerade (Riviere). While some works on masquerade focus on excessive femininity,¹⁸ the analysis is always entrenched within heteronormative culture and gender; it does not take into account how a queer perspective *queers* the performance of female itself. An important distinction between the faux queen's flamboyant femininity and masquerade is that the faux queen is conscious and a very active and engaged agent in the creation and construction of her “femininity.” Whereas masquerade and female/woman/femininity performance may not be a conscious decision or choice, the faux queen

¹⁸ See Mary Ann Doane's “Film and Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator.”

deliberately and purposefully puts on her flamboyant femininity making her an active agent in the construction and performance of it.

Martin Shingler highlights the distinction between the subconscious performance of masquerade and the flamboyant femininity of the faux queen in his study on Bette Davis' film persona, Miss Moffat, in his work entitled "Masquerade or Drag: Bette Davis and the Ambiguities of Gender." Shingler, speaking on masquerade and the conscious performance of femininity, states that the "behavior of Riviere's acquaintances was supposedly unconscious and compulsive whilst Miss Moffat's performance of feminine frailty is clearly conscious and purposeful" (181). In examining Davis' portrayal of a "young and beautiful twenty-four-year old" (182) in the movie *Mr. Skeffington*, he explains that in order for her to juxtapose her age and the fact that she "was never considered a great beauty" (182) "[Davis] portrayed her character with an excessive femininity" (182) eventually analyzing Davis' performance of "the role of Fanny Skeffington as if she (Bette Davis) were a man playing a women . . . Her masquerade of femininity comes remarkably close to that of female impersonation, to drag" (185). I would argue that Davis' performance is in fact drag and exemplifies the essence of how a faux queen performs flamboyant femininity and how easily it blends into gay male drag.

More recently other descriptors of female drag have emerged such as "high femme drag" (Peluso), "radical femininity" (Shapiro), and "lesbian drag queen[ing]" (Schacht). On a superficial level high femme drag and radical femininity come close to faux queening; however, they are still centered in a bio-female's experience as a woman. Peluso coined the term "high femme drag" as a way to "disentangle 'performed identities' from the real of 'queening' while still preserving its integrity as a specific form of drag performance" (10). Eve Shapiro highlights female performers in the performance troupe Disposable Boy Toys as "radical femininity" where

the performance is “a political act of queering femininity and honoring the history of femmes in the queer communities” (258). Both of these performance theories strip the drag queen out of flamboyant femininity and reposition it onto bio-female bodies. Stephen Schacht’s work on bio-female drag performances in the Imperial Court System describes the lesbian drag queen as “subscrib[ing] to conservative ideals of feminine beauty in that they tend to have longer often permed hair and paint their nails; wear make-up, dresses and gowns, and high heels . . .” (“Lesbian Drag Kings” 90) But Schacht fails to see that the lesbian drag queen can stand alone as a performer and analyzes her only as the “lesbian drag kings . . . contextual contrast . . . without ‘her,’ ‘he’ would have little meaning in this [drag] setting (“Lesbian Drag Kings” 77-8). While I believe there is enough space for multiple interpretations of female drag performances, none of these options recognize and value the close relationship to the drag queen that the faux has or explores femininity from any perspective other than the bio-female.

While the faux queen’s choice to align with the drag queen places them within the queer aesthetic of gay male camp, their unique position (i.e., having a vagina) creates the potentiality of the expansion of camps definitions. For the faux queen, the camp comes in when the audience, who is used to seeing “femininity” paraded on stage via a gay male body, is left to question whether the performance they have just seen is enacted by a “real” woman or man. Here the disassociation of the audience from their comfort zone (what they believe drag is supposed to be and/or what a bio-female is supposed to look like) gets turned upside down. Muñoz recognized the potential of camp in non-inversion drag when he defined camp as a “strategic response to the breakdown of representation that occurs when a queer, ethnically marked, or other subject encounters his or her inability to fit within the majoritarian representational regime . . . It is a measured response to the forced evacuation from dominant culture that the minority subject

experiences” (128). It is the audience members’ discomfort (and perhaps even attraction to the bio-female in the illusion of the drag queen) that leads them to inquisitively ask, “don’t you have to be a guy to do drag?” “But then, aren’t you just a pretty girl?” The *queerness* behind both the drag queen’s performance of flamboyant femininity and the faux queen’s performance of the drag queen performing flamboyant femininity is precisely what decenters it from the grasp of heteronormativity and mainstream hegemonic constructions, definitions, and theories.

While I make a concerted effort to highlight all the things the faux queen is not and to differentiate her from all other related discourses on female drag and woman-based performances, I do so not to create rigid definitions and clear-cut lines, but to illustrate why, in addition to the above, an understanding of *faux queen* is needed to help complete discourses on bio-female drag, performance, and identity. Faux queens help bridge a femininity that is rooted in bio-woman with the possibility and potential to see beyond that bio-gender in hopes of introducing new configurations and identities into existence. Always with the awareness that we must be careful as scholars (and myself in particular because of my personal attachment and involvement with the drag community) not to forget that multiple and divergent identities can emerge from within a single identity itself. The term “faux queen,” like the term “queer,” allows for multiple gender performances, identities, and sexualities—lesbian, straight, bi, bio women, trans woman, burlesque, neo-burlesque, bio queens, femme dragsters, etc.—to be housed within it. Just as there is no one definitive lesbian identity, there is no singular type of drag/faux queen. A permeable and morphic border along with an embracement of inherent contradictions in defining and constructing faux queen allows for multiple and divergent interpretations of what drag is to the females who perform it and the possibility to continue to learn, grow, and most importantly to evolve as an art form.

PROFILE SECTION

In order to help bring faux queens into a panoramic view and because she is relatively new to academic and LGBTQ consciousness and discourse, it's important to show that there is a history that precedes them as a theory. The following women's experiences, along with many others including my own, illustrate that being a faux queen goes beyond replication, masquerade, or burlesquing of a preexisting femininity. On the contrary, these women are breaking new ground in the world of drag by finding points of connection within themselves, drag, and the drag queen. Like myself, these women set out to prove that when female marries the preservation of drag as an art form with a sincere search for something outside their own experiences of woman, along with honoring the queen's complex web of experiences—as both a queen and a gay man—this world dominated by gay males becomes both accessible and permeable; not through force or appropriation, but through a shared love of drag which leads to prefixes—faux drag, and bio—that cause separation and discontinuity between communities to organically drop, semantics gets pushed aside, and thus she simply *becomes* her art form: an illusionist, a drag queen, and a performer of something that transcends gender.

Carmelita Tropicana

While Tropicana may not have been aware at the time that she was creating and participating in a new form of queer drag performance, she illustrates that faux queens have been around (if only in a skeletal form) since the early 80's (and perhaps much earlier), although they did not make their way into the queer conscious until much later. Arguably—because she did not identify as such—one of the first faux queens, Carmelita Tropicana performed at the New York woman centered WOW café in the 80's. Tropicana describes herself as being born a “woman, Catholic, Latina, with low self-esteem genes” (135), but the act of getting into a character and

performing changed her. She describes her win at the Ms. Lower East Side Beauty Pageant as her “biggest orgasm” (35). In Tropicana, we see an example of the faux queen, who not only performs as such on stage but also lives her flamboyant femininity in her daily life. José Esteban Muñoz has said of Carmelita Tropicana that “she appears and participates in various forms of media...always within character, undermining notions of authenticity and realness in favor of *queer* self-making practices. This self is not limited to one performance persona” (139, my emphasis). Tropicana, through her creation and performance of various characters, was acutely aware of her “queer self-making practices” which can be tied back to the drag queen’s (and later the faux’s) awareness and creation of flamboyant femininity. As a faux queen, Tropicana creates various performance personas using the tools of the drag queen to build, construct, and create multiple drag identities that she then infuses with her own great flamboyance and eclectic-ness.



Figure 1: Carmelita Tropicana courtesy of Jim Moore

Ana Matronic

In 1997, Ana Matronic, one of the pioneers of the present-day faux queen movement and a current member of the group Scissor Sisters, was the first bio-female to make it to the finals of the annual Miss Trannyshack pageant in San Francisco.¹⁹ Matronic has always been very open about her faux queen identity. When asked in an interview “how can you do a drag act if you’re a woman?” Matronic replies, “RuPaul said . . . ‘you’re born naked and everything you put on after that is drag.’ And I was really attracted to that. I evolved my own set of characters that I would perform at this drag cabaret” (2). She talks about how getting into drag is no different than a drag queen, stating “except for having to tuck away a penis, I do everything a drag queen does: stuffing a bra, putting a wig on my head, putting on tons of makeup on” (qtd. in Nagy 3). Matronic was one of the first faux queens to bridge the faux and the world of drag and be fully accepted and named as a bona fide drag queen surpassing “the status of faux queen to actual queen” (2). Being called a “drag queen” by the drag community is the highest compliment a faux queen can receive; it means that the faux, through her dedication to the art form and knowledge of its history, and her flawless performance and embodiment of flamboyant femininity, has transcended her bio-gender and simply becomes an illusionist. While she might not have won the title of Miss Trannyshack in 1997, she did set the precedent for other females to compete in the pageant. In the audience of that show was another pioneer of the faux queen movement, Fauxnique.

¹⁹ The Miss Trannyshack pageant was based in San Francisco, California and was started in early 2000 by drag queen Heklina.



Figure 2: Ana Matronic

Fauxnique

Fauxnique is perhaps the most well-known faux queen because she was the first bio-female to win the coveted Miss Trannyshack title. With that title win she not only carved out a performance space for other faux queens in San Francisco, like Cricket Bardot and Holy McGrail, but also made the drag community take notice of bio-female's drag performances as a valuable contribution to drag as an art form. Her performance piece *Faux Real* examines through dance, music and theater the most puzzling aspect of the faux queen, "a real woman who is a drag queen? I don't get it. Does she just . . . feel that way?" (Faunisque, "Faux Real"). Fauxnique is such a staple in the San Francisco drag community that veteran drag queen Jose A. Guzman Colon (aka Putanesca) has said she "helped redefine the word 'tranny,' which has traditionally been used only to describe men who dress as women, for future generation of drag performers" (Larochelle and Guzman Colon 30). She says of her drag persona, "Fauxnique typifies and expands a particular evolution of drag-based performance . . . that is . . . going beyond camp show-tunes into the realms of punk rock, horror, high drama, and total gender subversion. In this realm, the definition of 'drag queen' expands from 'man as woman' into another kind of mutable

creature, allowing Jenkinson to embody Fauxnique as clown, monster or diva, but always with an exaggerated sense of glamour and femininity” (Fauxnique, “Monique Jenkinson”). Through her drag performances, she dares her audience to answer no to the question: can a “real” woman be a drag queen?



Figure 3: Fauxnique

RESPONSES TO FAUX’S PRESENCE IN THE DRAG WORLD

After I competed in my first drag pageant (I was first alternate), my drag mother told me that a fellow queen and pageant competitor was extremely relieved that a “real” drag queen won the pageant. Jenna asked why, to which the queen replied “because she didn’t want a ‘real’ girl to win over a ‘real’ drag queen in a *drag* pageant.” While at first I was angry, after I calmed down I

realized two things: (a) she didn't know my history and daily involvement with not just the drag community, but the LGBTQ and HIV communities, and (b) because she didn't know the context in which I was coming into the of drag world she was being protective of the art form that to her was probably representational of a variety of different things and experiences. What I learned from that experience was that while drag is very much a part of my gender identity and provides me with a creative outlet, I needed to understand and respect that there were experiences attached to drag that being a lesbian I could identify with, but I could never *fully* understand because I am *not* a gay man.

There are very real oppressive and (sometimes) violent experiences attached to the gay men who perform drag that we, as bio-women coming into drag, must understand before claiming, "I want to be a drag queen." Just like as women we ask that the drag queen to acknowledge the fact that their understanding and performance of flamboyant femininity does not carry the same social stigmas and risks that it does for us, we also **MUST** acknowledge and attempt to understand the real history of persecution that drag queens have faced from the heterosexual community and within their own community as well. The queen in my story was expressing the same concerns that Hedda Lettuce voiced when she found out that bio-women were competing in the Miss Trannyshack pageant, "I don't think a woman could really call herself a drag queen without understanding what that means politically—the history of men dressing up and being arrested and persecuted for it. A woman who dresses up doesn't have to face these issues" (qtd in Nagy 64). I do not believe that Hedda Lettuce and the queen in my story are voicing a hatred for women; nor do I believe that they are holding up a "gay males only" sign at drag's entrance. Rather, they are expressing their fears that their queer experience as gay males and the persecution that they have faced in trying to become comfortable with/within their

“feminine” and drag selves will be overlooked and unacknowledged by women who see drag as appropriation of “women” and/or only see the glamorous side of it. When women who are/want to do drag say things like “for me it’s about having a good time . . . I kind of feel like drag queens shouldn’t have all the fun” (“Faux Queens’ Bend Gender Bending”), why should gay men “have all these sources of material and all these images form themselves? They don’t own them, and it’s time to not simply reclaim them . . . but to actually appropriate them” (Brosan 85), and/or assert that drag has “been taken over by men but I think it’s fabulous to reclaim it” (Cathy P qtd. in Brosan 88), it should come to no surprise that we are sometimes treated as trespassers. The drag queens’ underlying concern is that straight, bi, and lesbian women will attempt to appropriate and reclaim drag as a performance of women without fully realizing that (a) it is not about the performance of women, but about the drag queen’s interpretation and creation of queer flamboyant femininity, and (b) drag is also not a privilege for them and is directly linked to oppression, threats and sometimes full-fledged violence. What also needs to be part of the dialogue is that while I want to be a drag queen, I by no means wish to replace her in her community or erase her relevancy from LGBTQ history. The faux queen’s love and adoration of the drag queen “does not erase the firey females that fuel [her] identity-making machinery; rather, it lovingly retains their lost presence through imitation, repetition, and admiration” (Muñoz 31). The faux queen in her *transfiguring* of the identification site of drag queen retains the all the complex histories and experiences of the queen.²⁰

Still others have voiced their concern about what a female’s place in the world of drag means: would a bio-female performing drag render the drag queen obsolete? If women can and

²⁰ For more on “transfiguring an identificatory site” (Muñoz 31) see page 31 in Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queens of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

do perform drag then what place does the gay male drag queen have? In a section called “Idea of the Day” in the online version of the New York Times, the editorial staff asked “in an odd result of the mainstreaming of gay culture, ordinary women are flaunting their inner drag queen . . . this raises the question: what’s the point of drag now anyway?” (“When Women Become Drag Queens”). Or as Wesley Morris asks, “if Lady Gaga is so good at this sort of ironic gender theater—if ‘drag’ is just something for anyone to try on—what’s left for the Lady Bunny’s of this World?” (1). I don’t have any concrete answers; however, I can propose that the inclusion of females will only help drag grow and evolve. There was (and still is) a time where transgender women were met with the same kind of resistance when entering into the drag world, and their inclusion in drag did not render the drag queen obsolete. And I don’t believe bio-females will either. The field of gender performance is often described as a “battlefield, long ridden with and mines of interpretation, appropriation, and identity” (Devitt 29), but through dialogue these mines can transform into sites where innovative and ground-breaking styles of drag emerge.

CHAPTER IV

THE FAUX QUEEN, GENDER IDENTITY, AND TRANSGENDER DIALOGUES

LAS: Even though we do not cross from our assigned-at-birth gender to the ‘other’ gender—the way transgender is often thought of—we still chose to live a different gender. If a high femme goes to a baby shower and *struts* her stuff, she will be read as being as queer as a drag queen would.

AH: As a femme you have decisions about how you will appear as a gendered person. And when you’re doing it, you don’t take a deep breath and say, ‘Ah, I’m finally me.’ Instead, you go, “Ha, I finally actually look like the way I think a girl who isn’t a girl looks.’ When I look at drag queens—that’s how I see myself—I like looking like a drag queen. It matters to me that I look that way. When I look to and identify with that construction, I am also transgendered.
Amber Hollibaugh

As much as I love the nights that I get glammed up in my heels, eyelashes, wigs, and all my flamboyantly feminine-ness, I still feel in my everyday doings—at the grocery store, writing this thesis—like a drag queen. Drag queen and flamboyant femininity are as much a part of my make-up as being brown, a woman, and a lesbian are. While I may identify as a lesbian, it is not how I choose to identify within my queer community; I choose to identify as a faux/drag queen. As an identity, the lines between faux and drag blur, and faux queen becomes more about how to negotiate flamboyant femininity and meld its excess into daily life. Faux queen becomes a gender identity in much the same manner as “femme” has become a subset of lesbian identity. Harris and Crocker state that “femme gender identity is not simply role-playing in which certain sets of clothes or behaviors are on a daily basis easily assumed or discarded. Femme queerness is a sustained gender identity, a chose rather than assigned femininity” (5). Identifying as a faux queen is not about playing dress-up or about women “role-playing,” i.e. putting on and then removing the make-up, pads, wigs and then assuming a mass produced heterocentric femininity,

as a drag queen; it's about being, believing, and living flamboyant femininity in everyday life: wearing false eyelashes at a work function, drag jewelry to a movie, and/or an attitude that you are always (regardless of whether you are in or out of face) a queen. Flamboyant femininity, like femme, is a chosen gender identity.

The dynamism of faux queens is such that you don't necessarily need to perform as a faux queen in order to *identify* as one. Faux queen, as I see it, serves two purposes: to describe my relationship and performance in drag, but also to describe how I identify myself in everyday life. And I am not alone; other bio-females feel that faux queen is more than just a performance. London-based faux queen Madame Synth states in her blog, "I have found my gender identity and I came out last night again to my best friend on the phone. My soul felt at peace . . . I am a faux queen" (1). The World Famous *BOB* is known throughout the drag and burlesque world for identifying and considering herself FTF for twenty years, since she started creating drag characters at fifteen that reflected her own confused sexuality" (Nagy 67). *BOB* says that, "from about sixteen to seventeen, I thought about having a sex change to become a man to dress up like a woman" (qtd. in Nagy). The World Famous *BOB* eventually found her peace within her own femininity through burlesque, which she still performs and teaches. Madame Synth and The World Famous *BOB* are just a two examples of how some females need more than the available identifiers to describe how they feel on the *inside*.

A much less discussed, but equally important, aspect of faux queen is the relatively new theory that flamboyant femininity and its sister incantations, the high femme and femme, are actually part of the transgender spectrum. *FTF: Female to Femme* is a documentary that focuses on the possibility of high femme as a transgender identity. Directors Elizabeth Stark and Kami Chisholm interview scholars, musicians, and actresses who claim high femme or femme as a

gender identity. Stark and Chisholm procure their interviewees' voices, stories, and experiences to argue the need to recognize femme as a trans space. Towards the middle of the documentary, we watch as Veronica Combs, a performer, begins her transition into flamboyant femininity: she starts by applying long false eyelashes, places a wig over her shaved head, and zips her knee-high patent-leather four-inch-heel boots. Amidst the physical transformation happening in front of the camera, we begin to see her subtle inner shifts: attitude, stance, and persona. Midway through her transition she starts refers to herself as a drag queen and when one of the directors asks her "does this feel like a transition?" Combs chuckles and responds, "there is definitely a transitioning happening. I go into performance mode . . . a different person comes out" (qtd. in *FTF: Female to Femme*). Much in the same manner as *femme*, faux queens via flamboyant femininity allow for gender identity exploration without heterosexuality and other constrictive norms being attached to it. As a potential trans identity, faux queen bridges the space between a female's exploration of flamboyant femininity as blended (but still very much emphasized) into her gender assigned at birth with the space where blending becomes not enough to temper her strong need and desire to transform her outside to mirror the drag queen trapped within her female body.

The claim of femme and faux queen as a transgender identities is not without its criticisms. Faux queens also caution about the potential appropriation that such a claim has. Dr. Lukki, a self-described "big, bad, bald drag queen" cautions "that the appropriation of certain identities is potentially problematic" and is "wary of using the term FTF to describe faux queens because trans women are using it to describe themselves" (qtd. Nagy 64). Even Amber Hollibaugh, who identifies her sense of femininity through the drag queen, cautions women, faux queens, and all others claiming a transgender identifier "not to pose as part of a movement (like transgender) that they aren't primary players in" (220). However, she cannot deny the validity in

this argument, saying “at [least] an aspect, as there is for stone butches, of transgendered experience. When you design girl-ness, when you make up the way you are female, that’s a transgendered experience” (220).

While my discussion of faux as a trans identity is brief and barely breaches the margin of complexities in this emerging issue, at the heart of this claim is the need to express the discontinuity between the faux’s femininity and identification of woman as defined by mainstream heterosexist culture and one in which she constructs and defines for herself based on queer perspectives—that may or may not include her own. Faux queens and other femme identities want to be visible in a society and culture in which we are invisible. For the flamboyantly feminine lesbian women, like myself, when “we get more feminine we get perceived as straighter, rather than as transgendered...” (220) and that is clearly NOT how I, and others, see ourselves.²¹ As it stands, our current options for bio-women identities are too limited to fully embrace the wide spectrum of human and female diversity.

²¹ One has to only glimpse at my list of works cited to see the multitude of works by “femmes” and other excessively feminine women to see that we have been trying to carve out our space in queer studies, the LGBTQ community, and drag world for quite some time.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE QUEEN AND I

Hi my name is Morgan. I [am] 19 year[s] old and I saw my first drag show probably four months ago and I immediately thought these are men lookin[g] utterly fabulous, entertaining, and living their lives outside of the box. I'm a women naturally blessed with boobs, a flair for fashion, make up and entertaining, and a huge personality. I had finally found my niche but people told me that there is no wa[y] you can be a drag queen, you're a girl. I like you found that Wikipedia site and knew what my life goal was. This is my calling! I love all things drag related. Findin[g] your website tonight made me cry because I knew I wasn't alone. You've given me hope. And to you I say THANK YOU a million times over.

Morgan aka Clarisse de'marco (qtd. in Skyy)²²

Morgan's words echo my own when I found out that I had a "name." Finding yourself mirrored not just in one person, but in an entire community is like finding your soul-family. And there are constantly others out there who have just now stumbled upon *faux queen* and found themselves reflected back proclaiming, "oh my god. Everybody's always told me all my life I look like a drag queen. I never knew I had an outlet" (Beatty 1). *Faux queen* resides in a space that cannot be filled with preexisting forms of female performance and offers the same unique creative freedoms that drag does. In drag, nothing is too excessive and anything could be expected. Drag is a place where contradictions can live (binaries, feminism, etc.) and a place where the queer act of "femininity" is explored through bodies that would not see it as a confinement, drain, or hassle, but as a celebration. A celebration of our queerness, excess,

²² While this quote is word for word, I edited and revised for punctuation, grammar, and MLA requirements. Please note that no words have been changed from its original format.

glamour, and all things shiny, sparkly. A celebration in the rainbow of colors that we are often asked to dim.

I have often heard stories of women hearing about the term “faux queen” and telling their gay male drag queen friends, “I want to do that” to which the queen replies, “you can’t just *do* drag . . .” to which my first reaction is why not? But then I remember what the other side of my family has gone through to wear the same dresses, the same shoes, the same makeup as me, and I remember the complexities of life and people’s lived experiences. I think it’s a little bit of both: in this case a girl can have her cake and rhinestone eyelashes and heels as well: it’s celebrating in the fun and campiness that is drag, but never forgetting that within that camp and fun lies people’s oppressed experiences, and those real life experiences can never be stripped away from drag itself. Isn’t that what makes any art form, art: the balance between illusion and the reality that at any moment everything can be stripped down and you’re left staring back at the blank canvas wondering what will happen or what will I be next?

EPILOGUE

“It’s a good thing I was born a drag queen, otherwise . . . well, I’d still be a drag queen.” Brandi Amara Skyy

The hardest thing that you can ask of yourself is to closely examine what you have constructed (in an image that is a patchwork of a vicissitude of mediums, decades, and material) yourself to be and attempt to explain and, in the process, validate your existence. I am not these words. I am first and foremost a queen. I am fiercely committed to my drag community. I feel that sometimes we as scholars forget that the theories we write about are based on REAL communities that exist. And these communities have a very vivid imagination and their own vision along with knowing exactly what they mean to their LGBTQ community, society, and themselves. I have tried my best to blend all three of my voices and I do dream about the day that one of my drag sisters enters into academia and disproves us all, Butler, Newton, Schacht, Peluso, and myself, just because I’m so curious as to what she would say to all of us . . . all of these theories about her and her art. Luckily, I am not married to these words, but I am married to the experiences that I have had, my drag community, and my commitment to being the best damn drag queen who ever lived. The point of my thesis is that as queens, we need to enter into the discourse and the begin to dialogue; and it is all of our jobs, as drag and faux queens, to respond, deconstruct, only to reconstruct these words and ideas in our own fabulously flawless images of rhinestones, sequins, and all that glitters within us.

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APPENDIX A

Bio Queen Manifesto

The following is a transcript of The Girls from the Cleveland Kings' myspace blog posting "What It Means to Be a Bio Femme" on June 20, 2007.

The Bio/Femme Queen Manifesto

This piece was inspired by an open letter originally written to the dragking community, and presented November 2001 at the closing plenary of IDKE3 as a way to address both policy regarding and recognition of Bio Queen performance in drag king spaces. We'd like to publicly thank Jay Sennett, who was extraordinarily supportive of Bio Queen activism during the conference, and graciously gave us the time to present our letter.

During IDKE3, we heard many people talk about the transgressive power of drag. Regardless of our specific gender identities off stage, gender is something which can be and is performed on stage. Drag illustrates the performative nature of gender, not just in front of an audience, but in every day life.

Many of those involved in the burgeoning drag king scene may not be familiar with the term 'Bio Queen'. As with many definitions, we can't offer concrete, stable meaning for the term, nor are we invested in creating one. For the sake of discussion, we offer the following: Bio Queens are 'biologically female' or 'female-identified' individuals who consciously perform 'female' genders as a means of engagement, critique, and/or celebration. Bio Queens performances insist that there are many ways to perform gender. As women, we perform various kinds of femininities and female genders—from heterosexual housewives to working dominatrixes—which are not equivalent to our real life identities. Our gender performances may resemble or be connected in some way to our gender identities off stage, but they are valid *performances* nonetheless.

'Drag king' started with a simple definition: a 'real woman' 'playing a 'man'. We know that this definition doesn't work for many of us, just as the boxes our culture offers (M or F) don't work. People often assume that those boxes are a comfortable fit for female-identified women or femme dykes, but they are not. When Bio Queens are told, "You're girls playing girls, what's radical about that?" or when we are excluded from drag performances, our form of gender performance is devalued and invalidated. Many kings don't identify as women or female, but their performance of masculinity on stage is still valid and valued. We can see the potential and power within trans-identified drag king performances; we can allow individuals the right to claim their own transgender identities and perform variations of those identities as and in drag. Therefore, we need to open our definition of transgressive to include all active performances of gender, including those of Bio Queens.

We care deeply about the drag king community; we have great respect for the importance of self-defined space for communities. We'd like to offer two examples of the many ways of creating such communities. Consider the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival: many of the issues surrounding MWMF come from the organizers' inability to engage with an evolving culture. On the other hand, various queer organizations which began under the rubric of 'gay' over time have become LBGTQIA. This evolution certainly brings its own difficulties, but the struggle builds a stronger, more dynamic community, one based on mutual recognition and respect for difference. Consider the first example—a community built on exclusion and rigid definition ('womyn-born womyn'), and the second, one built on inclusion and the ability to evolve along with its constituents. Clearly, IDKE is an example of the latter.

Drag is certainly entertaining and fun, but it's also highly political. We'd like to begin the dialogue within our community in order to push at our boundaries and definitions. We assert Bio Queens are already vital members of this community, and not just as back-up performers or cute side dishes. We make important contributions to drag performances and dialogues, and we want our participation recognized and respected. We do not want to be tolerated or even invited into your space. We want to work together in a shared space to build community, inspire each other, and challenge the mainstream world's views on gender.

by *Eve* (full name edited out) aka Summer's Eve
Kentucky Fried Woman
Tristan Taormino aka Miss Triss
And Venus Envy²³

Source: The Girls from the Cleveland Kings' myspace blog posting "What It Means to Be a Bio Femme" on June 20, 2007

²³ Please note that the author's stopped referring to themselves as bio queens shortly after this was written.

APPENDIX B

Real to Faux: Becoming a Queen



Blank Face



Full Body Shot



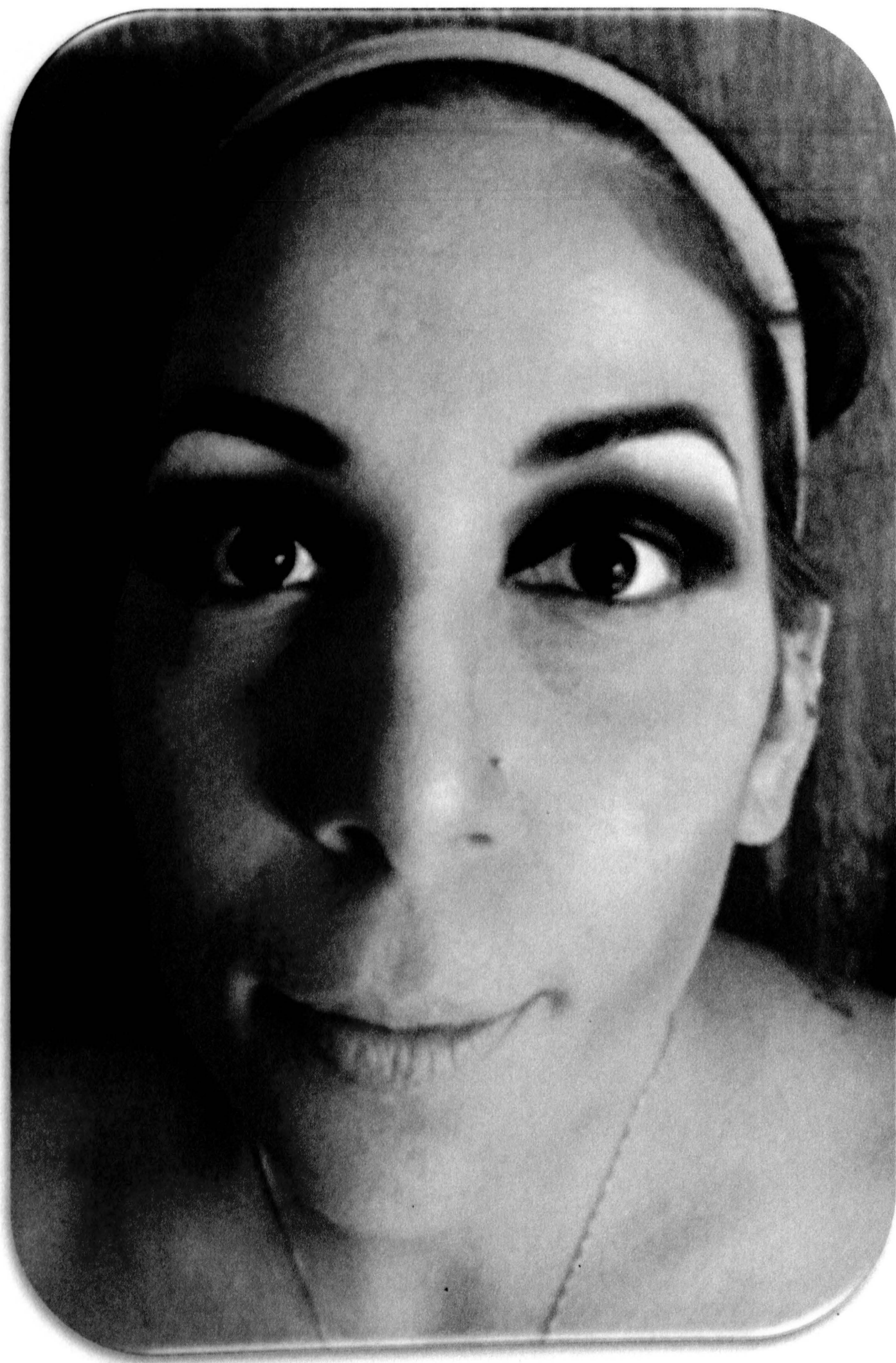
Ben Nye Foundation



Highlight and Contour



Blend, Powder, and More Highlight



Eyebrows and Eyeshadow



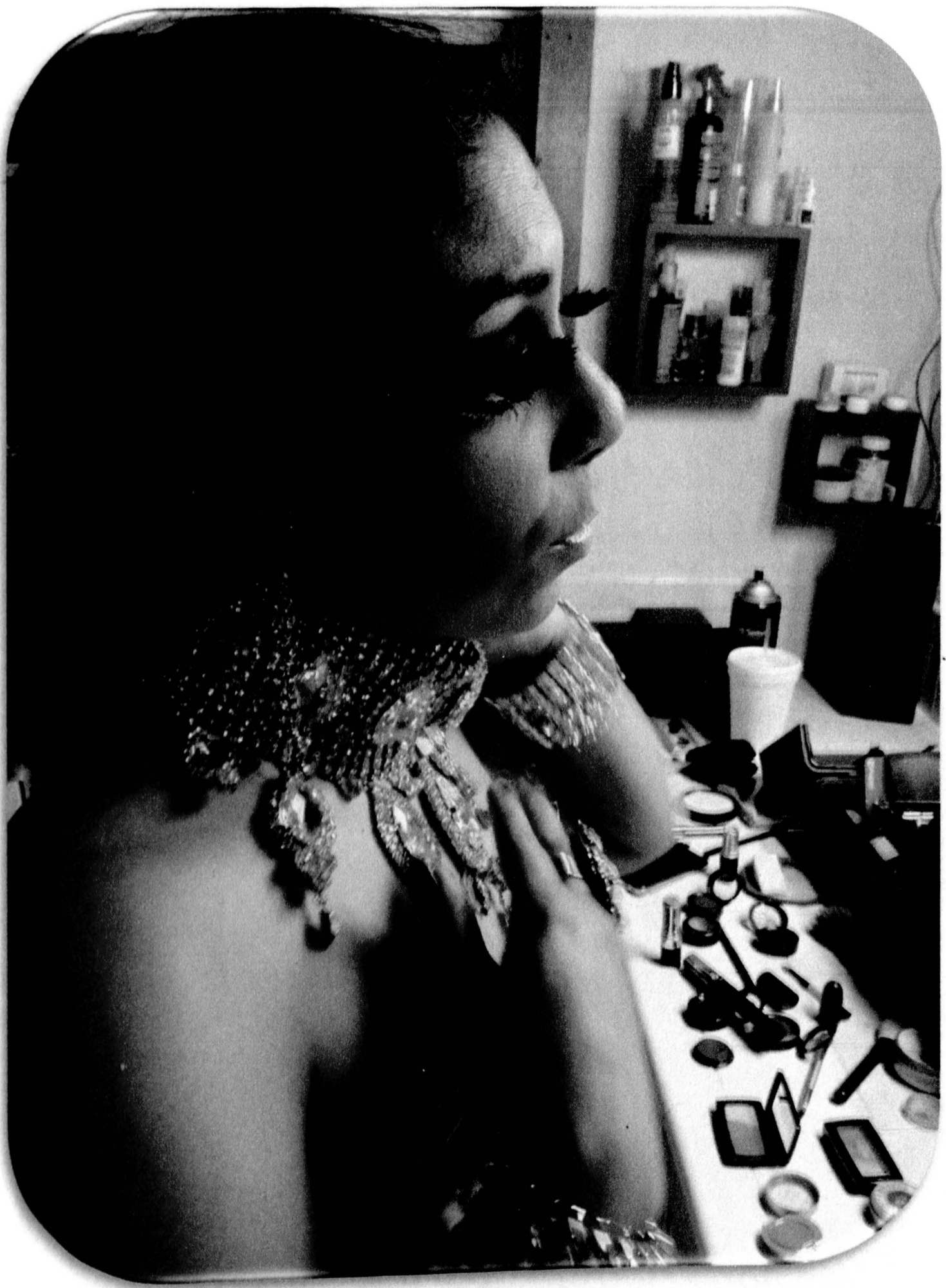
Eyeliner



Eyelashes, Embellishments, and Lipstick. The Final Face.



Dress and Shoes



Jewelry



Final face, wig, and embellishments



Final: Faux Queen 1



Final: Faux Queen 2



“The Kit”

Photo Source: Candace Collins

APPENDIX C

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Brandi Amara Skyy <somakiss6@gmail.com>

Tropicana Photo

Jim R. Moore <jimmoore@vaudevisuals.com>
To: Brandi Amara Skyy <somakiss6@gmail.com>

Wed, Mar 14, 2012 at 11:18 AM

Dear Brandi:
YES!
You have my permission to use the photograph in your Thesis.
One-time use only!
Please do not distribute the image to any other venues.
Thanks
Jim
[Quoted text hidden]



Brandi Amara Skyy <somakiss6@gmail.com>

Asking your permission

Krista Smith <ky.fried.woman@gmail.com>
To: Brandi Amara Skyy <somakiss6@gmail.com>

Mon, May 7, 2012 at 1:26 PM

Hi Brandi,
Its great to hear from you

[REDACTED]

Sadly, I don't know if there was anything attached to your email but bottom line, yes you are welcome to include the "bio queen manifesto" in your thesis. I would love it if it were duly noted that the folks who authored stopped referring to themselves as "bio-queens" shortly after it was written but otherwise...I think it is fine for you to use it.

Thank you and good luck with all that you have going on and I look forward to connecting soon.

Thanks!

xoxo

Krista

[Quoted text hidden]