

DRAG TOPIA

A Sickening, Otherworldly
Drag Magazine



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*All photos & art done
by Kate Nixon unless
otherwise noted

MEET THE TEAM!



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to DRAGTOPIA! a *sickening, otherworldly drag magazine*. As a team of queer students, we believe in amplifying the contributions of queer and trans people in the fight for a free, more joyful society. We focus on the brilliant world of drag because there are many rich historical and cultural contributions from drag communities and movements, from dance to makeup to consciousness building. You have probably seen drag influencers on TV and social media, but did you know that the very foundations of drag performance have and continue to radically challenge ideas of gender, sexuality and so much more? We will explore these concepts throughout this edition of DRAGTOPIA. Like queer scholar Judith Butler said, gender is not true or false, but surely can be incredible (444)!

We created this magazine in alignment with our team values to cultivate intersectional queer community through educative and accessible mediums. When we say intersectional, we mean taking account of race, class, and other identities as they interact with queer gender and sexualities. Here is a statement from The Combahee River Collective, a group of self-identified Black lesbian feminists, whose legacy we are informed by: "We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society." (279). We strive for these values within our team and through our content by incorporating and equitably platforming different voices and experiences.

Throughout this edition you will find references to feminism, which is the broad set of theories, politics, and movements that fight for women's liberation. Our publication chooses to interact with feminist thinkers because we recognize the invaluable contribution of feminism in understanding the way society works and how it can be better. Incorporated into the pieces are various types of

feminism, which are concerned with social issues through particular lenses. In order to talk about difficult concepts such as race, class, gender, and sexuality that manifest in drag communities, we pull from the knowledges of feminism. Like the illustrious poet and feminist Audre Lorde said, "It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions..." (289).

Not only is the societal othering of queer people a great hardship, but even the prospect of queer community can be daunting when parts feel new and inaccessible. That is why we are bringing you some history you may not know, some language you may have heard but not quite understood and hopefully some laughter in-between. In these pages is a map that pulls queer out of the margins, celebrating the complexity of queer community and drag. We invite you to find yourself and remember that you are not alone as much as we hope you appreciate the unique experiences of queer folk across time and place. Without further adieu, enjoy your exploration of drag in this magazine!



**ZIANAH
GRIFFIN '24
THEY/SHE**

BALLROOM CULTURE'S INFLUENCE ON DRAG

By Mckenna Ryan

Drag today is fairly mainstream thanks in large part to *Rupaul's Drag Race*, but this widespread acceptance is still quite new. The foundations of modern drag are actually centuries old. Crossdressing and other forms of genderqueer expression have been around since Shakespearean times when men played women on stage. From then on, it has been common across time and space for men to dress as women for entertainment purposes (Sanders and Axelrod). Most notably, drag's roots can be traced back to 1970s counterculture. Back then, drag was termed "ballroom", and was a movement of solidarity among queer people of color in New York in which they dressed as a gender that did not match their assigned sex (Hart and Roberson). Ballroom culture was an incredibly influential aspect of queer culture, peaking in the 1970s and 1980s, in which largely Black and Latino queer people hosted parties that centered cross dressing and drag performance.

It may be relevant to consider the class, race, and gender of those who made up the ballroom movement. Poor, queer, and trans people of color in New York are at the bottom of the economic and social structure (Hart and Roberson). Lester Fabian Brathwaite states that "through elaborate performances incorporating and commenting on race, class and gender, the ball community has historically reflected the American Dream and one's exclusion from it." The "American Dream" referenced in this quote refers to the concept that anyone in America can be successful through hard work, an idea that conflicts with the reality of the oppression expe-

rienced by marginalized people (Brathwaite). Resisting this ideal through performance, ballroom performers emphasize the impossibility of being the white, straight, cisgender, upper and middle class American norm. This act of rebellion also shows the political consciousness of ballroom performers (Brathwaite).

Ballroom culture in this time period had a distinct gender system which responded to the heterosexual gender binary. The typical gender categories were as follows:

(1) Butch queens, who are assigned male at birth that identify as gay or bisexual men and can be masculine, hyper-masculine, or feminine; (2) femme queens (MTF), who are transgender women or people at various stages of gender reassignment - through hormonal and/or surgical processes; (3) butch queens up in drags, who are gay men that perform drag but do not take hormones and who do not live as women; (4) butches (FTM), who are transgender men, people at various stages of gender reassignment, masculine lesbians, or women appearing as men regardless of sexual orientation (some butches use hormones and have surgical procedures to modify their bodies); (5) women, who are assigned female at birth and that identify as lesbian, straight, or queer; and (6) men/trade, who are assigned male at birth and are straight-identified men. (Bailey 370-371)

This quote from gender studies scholar, Marlon M. Bailey, illuminates how these gender categories are based on more than sex, as they also draw from gender expression and sexual orientation. In this way, there appears to be a very real emphasis placed on choice and individual expression in determining gender identity in

the ballroom community (Bailey 371). Bailey explains that transgender people who underwent gender affirming surgery or used hormones were sometimes considered in the same category as cisgender women, highlighting that the community sees sex as something flexible that can be altered over the course of one's life (371). The fluidity of these labels and the lack of binary categorization in ballroom also emphasizes the complexity of identity. Bailey states that, "members of the ballroom community function under more expanded notions of sex, gender, and sexuality. Unlike in dominant society, ballroom communities view and adopt categories of identity as malleable and mutable." (369). These gender categorizations illuminate the possibility of the ballroom community understanding gender as a performance and not biological (371).

What is gender *performance* anyways? Let's look at an example in ballroom. The idea of "realness" refers to an individual's ability to perform the gender they were not assigned at birth to the point that that gender appears to be their "real" sex (Brathwaite). In doing so, ballroom performers showcase the absurdity of gender by perfectly replicating a gender that doesn't match their sex. Judith Butler expands on this point when they state "that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (441). In other words, Butler illustrates how drag exposes gender as a construct determined by personal and societal expectations. Ballroom's unique perspective on gender performance may reveal its constant presence in daily life for all people (Butler).

Beyond the scope of ballroom, performing "realness" is utilized by genderqueer people to visibly mark themselves as heterosexual in order to escape targeted harassment (Bailey 377). This is what we term "passing" today. An especially impactful example of this occurs in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, where Jess, a butch lesbian, passes as a man to gain the opportunities afforded to a straight male. Jess's performance of a gender that they did not necessarily identify with was and continues to be a radical embodiment of drag realness (Feinberg 243).

Many theorize that ballroom culture participants challenge not only traditional gender roles, but also the heterosexual nuclear family unit by creating houses with queer family structures (Bailey). These houses existed to provide housing and a safe place for queer people, especially queer homeless youth (Brathwaite). These structures challenged gender roles and emphasized gender fluidity by allowing queer people to step into the roles of mother, father and child in this found family. The presence of communal living may also challenge the concept that the ideal family unit consists of a man, a woman, and biological children. Ballroom culture houses advocated for alternative living situations that prioritized the needs of people over the arbitrary nuclear family (Bailey 367). These houses also provided a strong support system to the entire "family", helping queer people avoid homophobic and transphobic violence (Bailey 366).

There are some connections to feminism in the ballroom community, as well. Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, an Asian-American sociologist, writes that gender consciousness is a precursor to feminist consciousness. Es-

essentially, understanding one's gender and how it impacts one's position in the world is a necessary step in understanding women's oppression (Chow 285). For example, ballroom houses challenge women's role in the home by allowing transgender women and non-women to fulfill the role of "mother" for the queer family. In this way, biological sex is made irrelevant (as in ballroom gender categorization) and women are liberated from the sole responsibility of housework (Bailey 367). The malleability of gender in the ballroom scene showcases the perspective that gender is something you can actively choose (Hart and Roberson). Overall, many identify transgender liberation as a useful tool in furthering women's liberation.

Ballroom may fit particularly well into a Black feminist framework. Most notable, perhaps, is Black feminism's emphasis on intersectionality, or its ability to view an issue based on the multiple systems of oppression involved. This framework speaks to the unique trauma experienced by Black women, who are oppressed by both gender and race. Many Black feminists also emphasize both social and economic roots of oppression (The Combahee River Collective 7). Since ballroom consists of performers oppressed by class, race, sexuality, and gender, this intersectional analysis might be useful. Another relevant aspect of Black feminism is the conception of the personal as political. This can be seen in drag, where queerness is deeply personal and intimate for performers, but positioned as political by oppressors (The Combahee River Collective 3). Overall, feminists and drag performers alike find the other movement useful due to their mutual interest in gender liberation (The Combahee

River Collective 3).

Like all movements, ballroom is not perfect. What are some of the ways that the community has been criticized? For one, there are still heteronormative ideas of sex matching gender identity, especially for transgender performers, through biological surgeries and modifications (Bailey 381). Not only is this still viewed as the ultimate goal in many transgender spaces, but even cisgender ballroom members place enormous value on sex through the use of words like "cunt" and "pussy" to signify that a contestant is giving realness (e.g. "serving cunt") (Bailey 381). According to Bailey, realness, though sometimes a necessary goal for genderqueer people's safety, is still adhering to heteronormative standards (381). Within the movement, there are also accusations of favoritism. White and upper class performers tend to dominate the space, while drag queens get much more attention than drag kings (Sanders and Axelrod).

Drag performers and genderqueer people have been commenting on gender and gender-based oppression through their lived experiences since at least the mid twentieth century. The movement's balls, houses, and six gender categories have laid the foundations for a now widespread understanding of drag, as well as possibly aiding Black and feminist movements of the time. Un-



derstanding ballroom's history as a movement can be quite useful for understanding drag and other queer liberation movements today.

QUEER-SOLES

You've heard of Dr. Scholl's, now make them gayer! Pride themed comfort insoles for those heels you just don't want to give up, as well as queer themed platform shoes with fun designs in the platforms!



AN INTERVIEW WITH AN UP AND COMING DRAG QUEEN

To gain more insight about the real life experiences of young drag artists we had the honor of talking with Angelique/Angelo Patino (she/he/they), a 17 year old Colorado-based up and coming drag queen! We use their names and pronouns interchangeably to affirm the fluidity of the identities they define themselves within. In this interview Angelo talks about his experience as a genderfluid person, a drag queen, and as a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Their words are special to this magazine because Angelique is also a young person navigating queerness like our audience. Here we follow a principle from The Third Wave Manifesta which emphasizes raising awareness of the power and centrality of youth in revolutionary movements (514). Our historical journalist Mckenna Ryan had the pleasure of discussing the joy and complexity of Angelo's participation in drag. Their dialogue includes a feminist lens in anticipation of journalist Paige Kahle's piece that analyzes drag and feminism together.

Angelo's age and involvement in drag allows us to gain a fresh perspective on the politics and possibilities in the drag community. Nevertheless, one person's story does not reflect the narrative of an entire group of people. We encourage you to read with curiosity and gratitude. It is a gift to receive someone's truth and we hope Angelique's words leave you wanting to continue learning about personal and collective histories of queerness and drag.

Photos Courtesy of Angelo Patino



Mckenna Ryan: Why do you do drag?

Angelo/Angelique Patino: I do drag because it gives me life, confidence, and happiness. It helps me feel complete, and I love entertainment and entertaining a crowd!

M: How would you describe your relationship to your gender? Do you see drag as resisting gender norms?

A: I am a genderfluid person because I feel that Angelo and Angelique are sort of a co-existing person. Drag resisting gender norms is sort of true. I just feel that people should be allowed to wear what they want. Fabric is fabric.

M: Does your gender identity interact with any of your other identities? If so, how?

A: Not really, because I feel like being gay and doing drag go hand in hand.

M: Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?

A: I would like to think that, but I don't think I'm feminist by the textbook definition. But I truly do support women in pretty much everything and I think they deserve more.

M: So you support the ideas of feminism but don't personally identify that way? Can I ask why you feel you don't fit the textbook definition?

A: I feel there are hardcore feminists that don't do super good for the cause, and that happens with just about anything. I don't wanna do things that would end up hurting instead of helping.

M: How have you understood the relationship between drag and liberation movements like feminism, if at all?

A: Drag sort of hand-holds feminism. It takes the things that are being pushed away and puts that in the spotlight. Drag has always been a way to uplift not only the LGBTQ+ community but the feminine community too. They sort of piggy back off each other I'd like to think.

M: I think that's a fantastic point. Going off that, what have

been your experiences regarding inclusion within drag communities? Are there certain groups or people within drag that are valued more highly than others?

A: Well, in the media with Rupaul's Drag Race, I've found that the skinny white queens get the biggest fans. And I try to uplift everyone I can. All drag is absolutely valid. It sucks because trans and Black people in the ballroom scene were our trailblazers. We wouldn't have drag if it wasn't for the Black trans queens, kings, and individuals. We wouldn't be here.

M: Do you think of drag as being for a particular audience? Who do you perform for?

A: It's honestly up to the people's minds. I will perform for anyone. I mean, last night I performed at my high school talent show and it was amazing. It felt so crazy to have people I thought would hate me, love me. If you have an open mind to artists and drag, it's for anyone. If I were to choose between people who would hate me and people who would love me, I'd choose people who love me and overall that would be people in my own community.

*Interviewee's answers edited for clarity.

Throughout the interview, Angelo discusses a lot of different aspects of identity, to include body size, race, gender and sexuality. They generally avoid following the fallacy discussed by Lorde: "too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all" (290). When discussing conflict and discrimination in drag, Angelique addresses how bodies and identities are often interacted with. They so potently proclaim, "We wouldn't be here [without Black trans and drag people]". This statement rings with Lorde's in affirming the existence and outstanding contributions of those most

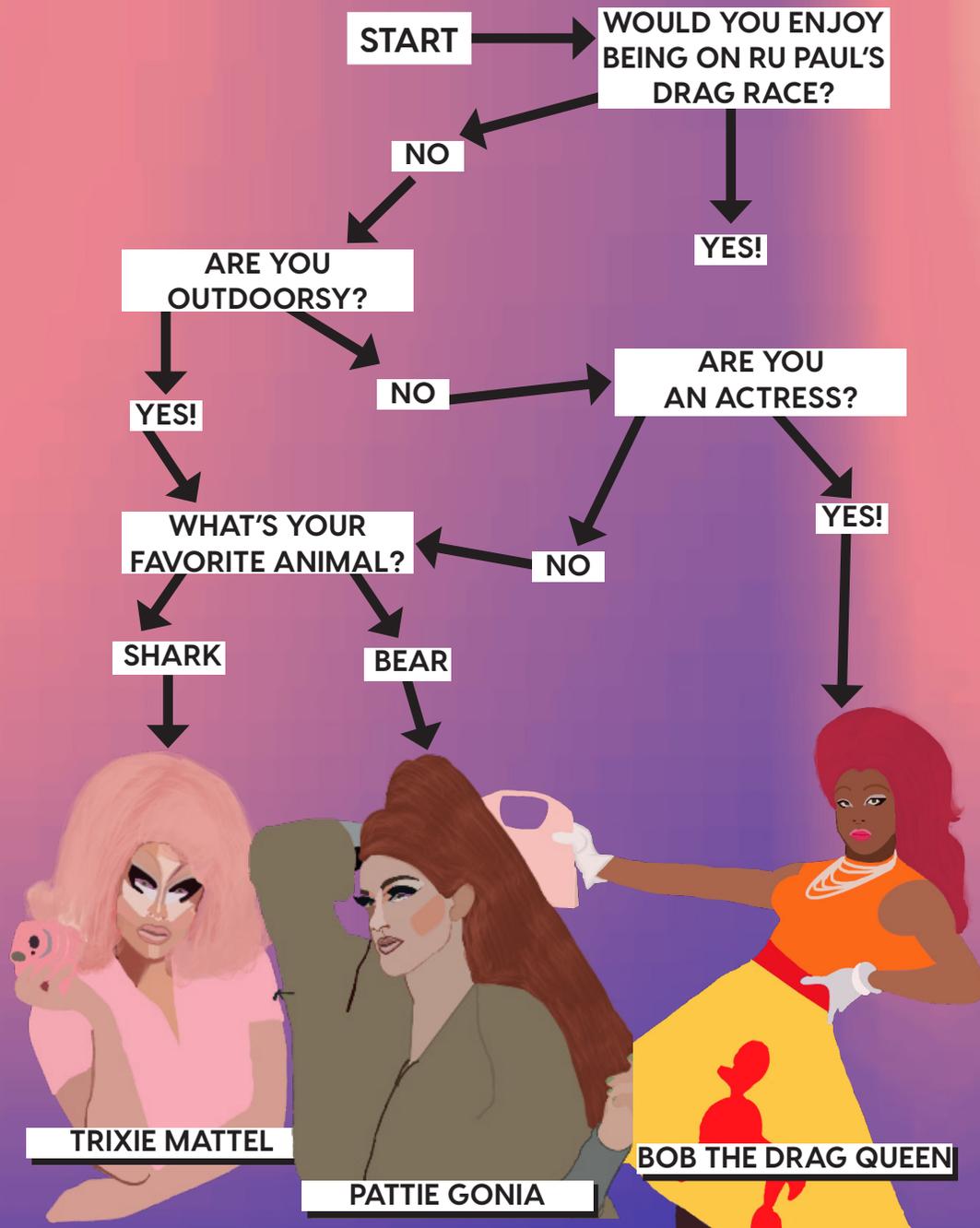
marginalized.

Despite Angelo not exhibiting significant alignment with an understanding of feminism, he showcases an understanding of what movements owe to Black women's activism. A similar sentiment from this interview is shared by The Combahee River Collective, "if black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (276). Angelique's belief agrees with the foundational politics of these Black feminists. To learn about the specifics of a couple of feminist frameworks, read our next article.

Above all, the snippet of Angelo that we get to receive here sets an example of how real people see and navigate the world. We see her excitement and passion about drag shine through these words and hope that you find spaces that inspire similar feelings. Importantly, Angelique is critically aware of the legacy of struggle that has informed the art they embody and perform. From ballroom to present, drag continues to express itself in ways that are personal, political, and full of fun!



Which Drag Queen are YOU? Take this quiz to find out!



DO DRAG & FEMINISM WERK?

By Paige Kahle

I'm sure you are familiar with the ideas of feminism and drag separately, but what do you know about them together? Let's break it down a bit and give you a taste!

First, I will introduce a bit about the complex identities across feminists and feminisms! Judith Butler brings up an interesting point in their book *Gender Trouble*. Butler essentially states (if placed into a feminist lens) that a feminist does not look/act one certain way, feminist identity is created through personal feminism thought/work and identity together. To quote Butler exactly: "My argument is that there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler 181). Butler illustrates identity's complexity and the impossibility of enclosing it into a box, just as feminism refuses to be categorized.

Many different feminist writers and theorists have taken deep dives into the complexity of feminist identities. Intersectionality (a term you might have seen on social media or thrown around in conversations) encapsulates this idea. Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and defines how individual characteristics (race, class, gender, etc) "intersect," a term and idea not just relevant in feminist theory but in other liberation and equity seeking circles. This same idea has been discussed, particularly by Black feminists, before this term was coined in 1989. Theorizing and writing about how different parts of one's identity interact is not a new concept. For example, Adrienne Rich's 1980 *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* discusses the experiences of lesbian women and feminists and explains

the unique oppression they face. She unpacks the forms of male power that affect lesbian women specifically and uniquely from "physical brutality to control of consciousness." A few specific examples of these exertions of male power would be "cramping their creativeness," "denying women their own sexuality," and "using them as objects in male transactions," (Rich, 299). After a little taste of "intersectionality" and feminists' illustrations of complex identities, you can think about how the different parts of one's identity interact within each person. Think about yourself and the different identities you hold, how do they affect and create your life experience?

Many feminists have written about the pressure put on women, particularly women of color, to choose an aspect of their identity over the others (being black vs. being a woman). Audre Lorde discusses this while also expressing the implications of utilizing her whole identity in her feminist 1984 work *Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*, "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition," (Lorde, 292). These feminists have helped develop this idea of different identities within each person and across groups.

These very same ideas have been applied to drag! Leila J. Rupp, Verta Taylor, and Eve Ilana Shapiro write about the oppression faced by different drag community members varying based on their gender identities in their journal article *Drag Queens and Drag Kings: The Difference Gender Makes*. These authors describe the

importance of considering drag performers' gender and sexual identities, focusing especially on "gay male drag queens and female-bodied and transgender drag kings and bio queens," (Rupp et. al, 278). Each individual, drag performer, feminist, or otherwise, has a unique identity and faces unique oppression. These differences are vital to getting a more well-rounded understanding of oppression towards and within the drag community.

A lot of my introductory knowledge about feminism came from social media and what I heard from others in passing, which I'm sure is a pretty common experience for much of Gen Z. However, to supply y'all with a more substantial understanding of feminist theory I will introduce you to two feminist theoretical frameworks: radical-cultural feminism and radical-libertarian feminism. These frameworks are just two of many, and in no way define feminism as a whole. However, they should help give you a lens to think through when I discuss feminist conversations surrounding drag later on. I will provide a simple understanding of said frameworks by parsing through their primary characteristics with an emphasis on their differing opinions on "correct" gender expression.

Before I get into the specific types of radical feminism, let me give you a quick, general overview of what radical feminism is and what pillars it consists of. The following information about radical-feminist frameworks comes from Dr. Heidi R. Lewis' lecture *Feminist Theory: The Frameworks #1*. Radical feminists believe that within the patriarchy, true sex and gender equality is impossible; change and liberation are only possible through a "radical reordering of society." Radical feminism splits

off into two camps, however, when it comes to gender expression, views on the heterosexual partnership, pornography, prostitution, and motherhood/reproduction.

Radical-libertarian feminists typically believe that women should use pornography as they please, women should have the choice to be sex workers (including prostitution), dismiss the "glorification of motherhood" while advocating for artificial reproduction, and accept that many women would still want men as sexual partners. Radical-cultural feminists, however, claim pornography is "patriarchal propaganda," prostitution is just a live version of that same propaganda, argue that artificial forms of reproduction appropriate power from women, and assert that a "truly sexually liberated woman" would not want to have sexual relations with a man: suggesting the practice of political lesbianism—where a woman tries her best to feel sexually attracted to other women despite her true feelings. As you can tell, these two feminisms differ on quite a few central ideas despite being labeled under the same radical umbrella; a good reminder of how unique each feminist framework and feminist are.

Arguably, however, the biggest difference between these frameworks lies in opinions surrounding femininity and gender expression/identity. Radical-libertarian feminists believe that a strictly feminine gender identity is limiting for a woman, and encourage women to adopt androgyny as a rejection of those "oppressive" feminine narratives. Radical-cultural feminists, on the other end, critique androgyny and endorse embracing one's "femaleness." Essentially, radical-cultural feminists embrace the dominant narratives about femininity, while

radical-libertarian feminists tend not to. By incorporating these radical feminist frameworks, I hope to give a taste of feminist theory while providing some ideas to ponder through the following section about feminist conversations surrounding drag.

Kevin Nixon, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Waterloo, has written all about differing feminist opinions on drag in his thesis titled, *Are Drag Queens Sexist? Female Impersonation and the Sociocultural Construction of Normative Femininity*. Throughout his thorough exploration of the topic, he covers a lot of ground but made a few main points. The first idea is that drag holds no love for “women of the womanly.” Nixon cites feminist author Marilyn Frye in his discussion, quoting her opinion of drag as “a casual and cynical mockery of women, for whom femininity is the trappings of oppression,” (Nixon, 38). Nixon, in his use of this quote, demonstrates Frye and other feminists’ view of drag as mocking femininity, and thus mocking women’s oppression. Nixon also converses with the idea of “female appropriation” describing some feminists’ view that drag queens appropriate femininity from women; and that they even use that appropriation to use their male privilege to establish superiority over “biological women” (Nixon, 80). These examples demonstrate the opinions of some feminists, however, as I hope we’re all coming to learn, there is always another side to the story in feminism.

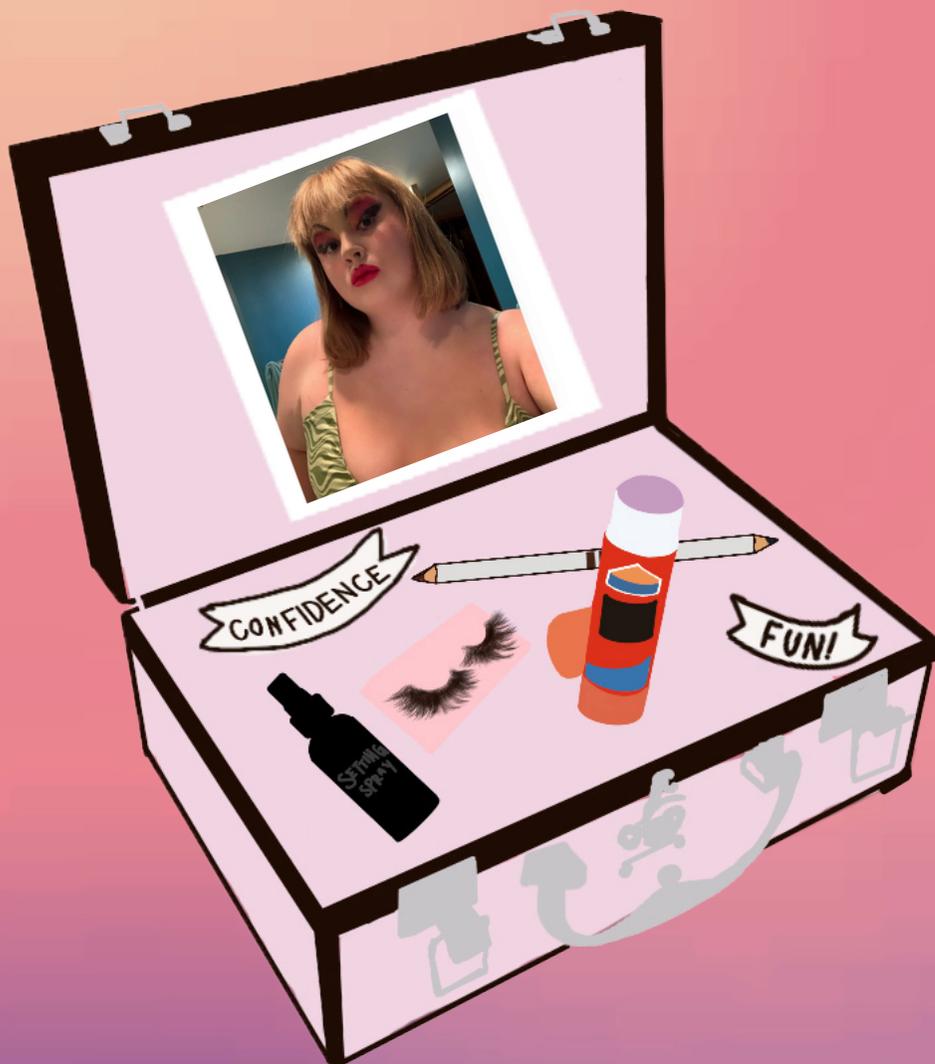
In the same piece of writing, Nixon critiques these opinions on drag by saying they disregard the identity and perspective of the drag “participant.” As well as the points Nixon brings up in feminist opposition to drag, Judith Butler fosters a different conversation altogether

in their book *Gender Trouble*. Butler describes drag as more of a “parody” of gender while describing gender itself as “imitative” and “falsely naturalized” (Butler, 442). To break this down, Butler is claiming that drag and its participants call out absurdity within the gender expression binary and poke fun at it. They also discuss a bit about who did the “false naturalization” of gender created expectations of what it means to be a woman, pointing fingers at society’s heterosexism. In Butler’s *Gender Trouble* they defend drag (in response to claims similar to those in the last section) because of its deconstruction of the gender expression binary.

To wrap up, this article has walked through identity and feminists’ expressions of its importance (in feminism as well as drag!), radical-cultural vs radical-libertarian feminist frameworks, and different feminist conversations surrounding drag. Again, remember that these sections represent only two of many feminist opinions on drag. Both feminism and drag are complex, experiences differing based on identity, experiences, etc, making it impossible to do it all justice in one article. If this interests you, however, there are tons of resources out there for you to keep exploring the topic!



DRAG STARTER KIT



ADVICE FROM ANGELIQUE ON STARTING DRAG

all i can say is that if you wanna do drag just have fun with it and start! Its all about feeling yourself and just having fun. drag is for anyone!



PLAYLIST
minnie's getting ready playlist
paigekahle • 1 like • 16 songs, 1 hr 4 min

#	TITLE	ALBUM	Duration
1	Vogue Madonna	Celebration (double disc)	5:17
2	I Wanna Dance with Somebody... Whitney Houston	Whitney	5:51
3	Promiscuous Nelly Furtado, Timbaland	The Way I Feel About You	4:05
4	Its Raining Men Party Girls	Party Hits	3:52
5	Poker Face Lady Gaga	The Fame	3:37
6	Material Girl Madonna	Celebration (double disc)	4:05
7	9 to 5 Dolly Parton	9 To 5 And All The Ways	3:02
8	Gimme More Britney Spears	Blackout	4:11
9	Circus Britney Spears	Circus (Deluxe Version)	3:12
10	Survivor Destiny's Child	Survivor	4:14
11	Fergalicious Fergie, will.i.am	The Dutchess	4:52
12	Marry The Night Lady Gaga	Born This Way (Special Edition)	4:25
13	Proud Mary Tina Turner	Tina!	5:27
14	Rain On Me (with Ariana Grande) Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande	Rain On Me (with Ariana Grande)	3:02
15	MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name) Lil Nas X	MONTERO	2:18
16	Get Into It (Yuh) Doja Cat	Planet Her	2:18

GENDER BENDER MIRRORS

Ever wished you could imagine yourself with a different gender presentation and see it for yourself without doing any actual work? We present to you gender bender mirrors – like those fun house mirrors that distort your body, ours just distort your gender presentation!



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**THANK YOU
FOR READING!**

