UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE PERFORMER-AUDIENCE CONNECTION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF DRAG QUEENS IN OKLAHOMA CITY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

By

CASSANDRA R. NEGRON
Norman, Oklahoma
2016

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/44894

THE PERFORMER-AUDIENCE CONNECTION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF DRAG QUEENS IN OKLAHOMA CITY

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

BY

_____
Dr. Paula Conlon, Chair

_____
Dr. Marvin Lamb

_____
Dr. Dan Schwartz

© Copyright by CASSANDRA R. NEGRON 2016
All Rights Reserved.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to my thesis advisor, Dr. Paula Conlon. Her patience and expertise allowed me to express my ideas in a clear, genuine nature. Without her guidance, this thesis would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Dan Schwartz and Dr. Marvin Lamb, for their constant counsel and encouragement during my time at the University of Oklahoma. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Zoe Sherinian for her assistance in the early development of this thesis.

Additional thanks goes to my dear friends, Adam Hall and David Pendock, for their academic and emotional support. Both Adam and David have edited drafts of this thesis and offered insightful critique of my work. I would also like to thank my friend Joshua Patterson for his fantastic work designing the map of "The Strip." His talents have been able to capture the setting more realistically than I could have on my own.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the drag performers and audience members for their many formal and informal interviews. Their experiences and stories are the heart of my thesis.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv

Table of Contents v

List of Figures vii

Abstract viii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1.1 Defining Terminology 1

1.2 Statement of Purpose 11

1.3 Field Methods 12

1.4 My Story 16

Chapter 2: Performer-Audience Connection 19

2.1. Musicking 19

2.2 Frequently Performed Songs at OKC Drag Shows 25

2.3 “You Don’t Own Me” 29

2.4 “Bitch Better Have My Money” 32

Chapter 3: Community and Empowerment 43

3.1 Subculture as Community 43

3.2 Empowerment 45

Chapter 4: Conclusion 50

4.1 Final Thoughts 50

4.2 Musings on the Future 51

Bibliography 55

Appendix I: Venue Information 59

"The Famous OKC Strip" 59

The Boom 61

The Copa 64

Tramps 65

The Phoenix Rising 66

The Wreck Room 67

Angles 68

Other Local Drag Venues 68

Appendix II: Institutional Review Board 70

IRB Approval 70

IRB Closure 71

List of Figures

Figure 1: Frequently Performed Songs 27

Abstract

This thesis explores the potential for empowerment that drag performance has on the lives of drag performers and their audience members. I have attended over one hundred drag performances in Oklahoma City from January 2015 to May 2016 with the goal of discerning how power (self-esteem, economic, social, and political) is expressed in drag performances through the performers' choices regarding musical sound, lyrics, gesture, audience interaction, props, and costume. By interviewing drag performers and audience members, I have used drag performances in Oklahoma City as a case study to test the research results of Elizabeth Kaminski and Verta Taylor in which they argue that a "collective identity" is created between audience members and drag performers irrespective of their sexual identity.[1] Specifically, this thesis examines the process by which audience members emotionally react to drag performances in a way which gives the audience members the opportunity to embody the performative power of the drag queen.

[1] Elizabeth Kaminski and Verta Taylor, "'We're Not Just Lip-synching Up Here': Music and Collective Identity in Drag Performances," in *Identity Work and Social* Movements, eds. Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers, and Rachel L. Einwohner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 47.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Defining Terminology

Drag performance is categorized by sociologist Daniel Harris as "screaming vulgarity, the overstated look of the balloon-breasted tramp in the leopard-skin micro-mini skirt who strives to be loud, tawdry, and cheap."[2] This definition is in line with most colloquial understandings of drag performance. However, as gender studies scholar Katie Horowitz suggests, drag performances cannot be singularly defined because they often take shape as one of many sub-genres of gender performance within the art.[3]

For example, many drag queen performances highlight hyper-feminine dance and gesture, but others purposefully reject the gender binary of masculine-feminine in favor of "extremely (de)(re)reformed representations of masculinity and femininity alongside multi-gendered, nongendered, or even nonhuman signs, without privileging any one category of being."[4] Th is practice, often called "genderfuck," can take the form of a bearded drag

---

[2] Daniel Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," *Salmagundi* 108 (1995): 63, accessed September 9, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40548841.

[3] Katie R. Horowitz, "The Trouble with 'Queerness': Drag and the Making of Two Cultures," *Signs* 8, no. 2 (2013): 304-314, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/667199.

[4] Sarah Hankins, "I'm a Cross between a Clown, a Stripper, and a Streetwalker': Drag Tipping, Sex Work, and a Queer Sociosexual Economy," *Signs* 40, no. 2 (2014): 448, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/678149.

queen, or a drag queen purposefully destroying the "illusion of femininity" with a penis joke. Further, some performers do not fit into the category of biological males dressing in "feminine" clothing (if all these elaborate costumes can even be considered feminine!). In fact, performer Misty Snatch, a self-proclaimed faux queen at a drag show, was biologically female but dressed as a drag queen for performance. When asked to elaborate on her performance genre, she stated, "I like faux queen, but some girls say bio-queen. I'm a caricature of a drag queen. I'm a caricature of a female impersonator, so I like faux."[5]

In addition to faux queen performances, many "drag shows" in Oklahoma City include a variety of queer performance genres. The different numbers at the performance nights I have attended overwhelmingly featured drag queens (over 90%), although there are occasionally faux queens, drag kings, and male entertainers on open talent nights. Oklahoma City drag performer Syren also performs as a male entertainer. In our interview, (s)he shared that (s)he is much more successful as Syren than Adonnis[6] because "they [the audience] prefer drag queens in The Bible Belt."[7] My research for this thesis focuses specifically on drag queen

[5] Misty Snatch, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, April 9, 2015.

[6] Syren also performs as a male entertainer; Adonnis is his performance name as a male entertainer.

[7] Syren, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, February 10, 2016.

performances, as the performance nuances of male entertainers and drag kings are very different than those of drag queens.

The different genres within drag queen performances I have come across are: fishy queen, comedy queen, show girl, faux queen, pageant queen, and genderfuck. These subcategories of drag performance have the ability to stand alone, or combine with others styles to create a more nuanced individual style.

When asked about the importance of fishiness to the success of hit television show, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, host RuPaul states, "Looking like a woman – that was never the criteria for me. It was always to do drag. And drag is not gender-specific. Drag is just drag. It's exaggeration."[8] When further prompted by interviewer E. Alex Jung about the role of gender in drag, RuPaul stated that drag teases gender by refusing to take it seriously:

> Oh, it's poking fun at gender. It's mocking gender is what it's doing. But taking it seriously? No. Because that's what "fishy" alludes to. Fishiness alludes to the look and feel of "real." For most drag queens, that's not the criteria, because the look and feel of real is boring.[9]

The interview continues the theme of "mocking gender" with a discussion of the transgender community and its relationship

[8] E. Alex Jung, "RuPaul on How Straight People Steal From Gay Culture and Why Educating the Youth is a Waste of Time," Vulture, accessed April 10, 2016, http://www.vulture.com/2016/03/rupaul-drag-race-interview.html.

[9] Ibid.

with drag. RuPaul argues that although drag and the transgender community may seem similar, they are actually very different:

> It's [transgender] so topical, but they're [transgender and drag] complete opposites. We mock identity. They [transgender] take identity very seriously. So it's the complete opposite ends of the scale. To a layperson it seems very similar, but it's really not.[10]

The dichotomy presented by RuPaul, claiming that drag and transgender are "complete opposites," makes sense with her very straight-forward explanation of drag as mocking identity, especially as she later states that drag's function is to "remind culture to not take itself seriously."[11] However, my experiences in Oklahoma City, and even watching RuPaul's show, suggest that not only do transgender individuals consider themselves drag queens, they are largely accepted as drag performers. In my interview with transgender performer Foxxi Chanel Paige, she refers to herself as a drag queen and show girl simultaneously, though she did not seem particularly concerned with the choice of terminology used.[12] Foxxi Chanel Paige appeared more concerned with what she's actually doing in the performance, rather than boxing herself into a subgenre of performance:

---

[10] Yung, "RuPaul."

[11] Ibid.

[12] Foxxi Chanel Paige, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, February 4, 2016.

> Me, I can give it to you all. I can do glitzy glam, I can give you that show girl, that pageant girl. But I can just give you me, which is me. I love to dance.[13]

Similar to Foxxi Chanel Paige, drag performer Roxie Hart enjoys drag performance because of the versatility in different numbers. Roxie Hart references performing "slap stick, raunchy comedy," as well as emotional songs with which many individuals identify.[14]

In contrast to Foxxi Chanel Paige and Roxie Hart, transgender performer Sara De La Hoya very quickly identified herself as a pageant queen: "I'm a pageant queen. I like high energy and dancing and I love my costumes, rhinestones, hair, jewelry – I love it all."[15]

Notably, Sara De La Hoya and Foxxi Chanel Paige are alike in that drag performance was a way for them to become more knowledgeable and accepting of their transgender identities. Sara De La Hoya stated:

> Whenever I first started drag, I didn't know anything about being transgender. I didn't know anything about anything except for, "I know what gay is." And through performing, I started realizing as a person that drag wasn't enough for me anymore… I don't want to take this off. I don't want to take the make-up off. I feel like I'm supposed to be a woman.[16]

---

[13] Foxxi interview.

[14] Roxie Hart, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, February 13, 2016.

[15] Sara De La Hoya, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, January 18, 2016.

[16] Ibid.

In my interview with Foxxi Chanel Paige, she reminisced about her childhood experiences with sexuality and gender. Just like Sara De La Hoya, drag helped her realize that she was transgender:

> When I was younger, I told my mother, "I want to be a girl"… I was like 6 or 7. She just laughed at me. As I got older, I knew I liked boys and I was trying to deal with that. And then when I turned 21, I came out and I felt so free. But what was so terrible about it was… I was mistaken as a girl because I'm so feminine looking. But I was like, "I'm not a girl, I'm not a girl, I'm not a girl, I'm a boy." But that was me suppressing who I really was. Because once I started doing drag, I felt even more comfortable… Three years into drag, I was like, "I want to be a woman. I want to be a lady."[17]

Jinkx Monsoon, season five winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, posted about the transgender drag experience on her Tumblr on April 7, 2016. Jinkx Monsoon discusses how many individuals, similar to Foxxi Chanel Paige and Sara De La Hoya, find their way into their transition through drag. Jinkx Monsoon also speaks on how individuals continue to perform in drag after their transition, and how select drag queens actually make major body transformations to improve their drag performance – individuals who chose to transition to improve their drag:

> The act of doing drag, in itself, is an act of transcending gender. Even if one identifies as cis[gendered], the fact that they make the conscious choice to transcend their gender and choose a career that puts them outside of the gender binary, means

[17] Foxxi interview.

> that they are included in the overall trans conversation.
>
> I see many people insist that drag is in fact an anti-trans art form, but this is extremely unfair to the trans individuals who participate in the art form and have used drag to find themselves.
>
> Does that mean that all drag artists are open-minded and sensitive to trans[gender] issues? Absolutely not. But one ignorant individual does not speak for a whole community of artists.[18]

Jinkx Monsoon's statement on the transgender performance of drag enlightens individuals to consider a potentially new concept of drag. While RuPaul, arguably the most famous drag queen ever, insists that drag is solely about mocking identity, Jinkx Monsoon offers an inclusive definition, which accounts for all – an art form that, like the rest of society, is transforming. My experiences of drag performances in Oklahoma City have been more in line with Jinkx Monsoon's descriptions of drag. While RuPaul presents mocking identity as drag's purpose, from my experiences it appears the definition and purpose of drag is largely personal and varies from performer to performer.

Oklahoma City performer, Miley Tucker, explains drag as being many different things:

> There's a lot of different aspects of it [drag]. It's an art form. So there's no wrong or right way to do it. That's how I see it. Some other people have different

[18] Jinkx Monsoon, Tumblr, April 7, 2016, accessed April 12, 2016, http://jinkxmonsoon.tumblr.com/post/142439842961/i-think-we-should-accept-drag-its-not-a-cis.

> opinions. But for me, I fit into the category of "fishy" or some people say female impersonator instead of drag queen…. But uhm, Jakay, that is camp drag – kind of a mixture of androgyny as well. I fit into the "fishy"; I'm kind of trying to look as feminine as possible. I want to be pretty. I want to be mistaken as a woman.[19]

While Miley Tucker labels herself as "fishy," and thus trying to "look as feminine as possible," she also brings up the popular aesthetic of camp and drag.

Miley Tucker describes camp as being "over the top."[20] While this definition makes camp appear as simple exaggeration, some scholars argue that camp is solely a gay phenomenon.

Sociologists Elizabeth Kaminski and Verta Taylor argue that camp is a "gay culture practice that uses humor and dialogue to parody the social conventions that exclude gay men and lesbians."[21] Jack Babuscio offers a slightly broader definition in his chapter, "The Cinema of Camp (*aka* Camp and the Gay Sensibility)," in which he argues that camp is a strategy of resistance and survival used by those not accepted into the mainstream.[22] Moe Meyer dedicates a large portion of his book, *An Archaeology of Posing: Essays on Camp, Drag and Sexuality* to

---

[19] Miley Tucker, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, January 31, 2016.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Kaminski and Taylor, "'We're Not Just Lip-synching Up Here,'" 51.

[22] Jack Babuscio, "The Cinema of Camp (*aka* Camp and the Gay Sensibility)," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 132.

explaining how the term "camp" has shifted from its supposed original definition, focusing on camp as inseparable from gay identity.[23] Meyer largely blames writer and activist Susan Sontag and her 1964 essay, *Notes on Camp,* for the downplayed role of the homosexual and the overgeneralized use of the term "camp."[24] Further, he argues that Sontag's version of camp is the "ungay appropriation of gay culture."[25] Meyer states that most camp scholars agree on the following:

> 1.) Camp was originally gay discourse and has now been applied to other discourses.
> 2.) Camp cannot be defined.
> 3.) Camp, as a word, is changing/ transforming over time.[26]

In my opinion, Meyer offers his best explanation of camp as "the total body of performative practices used to enact gay identify with enactment defined as the production of social visibility."[27] Meyer's definition is reflected in Sontag's definition, in which she states,

> Indeed the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And camp is esoteric – something of a private code, a badge of identity even among small urban cliques.[28]

---

[23] Moe Meyer, *An Archaeology of Posing: Essays on Camp, Drag and Sexuality* (Madison, WI: Macater Press, 2010), 40.
[24] Ibid., 36.
[25] Ibid., 41.
[26] Ibid., 51.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Susan Sontag, "Notes On 'Camp'," 1964, accessed January 8, 2016, http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html.

Sontag's writing goes on to explain, "All camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in nature can be campy," adding, "rural camp is still man-made, and most campy objects are urban."

The academic disagreement over the meaning of camp could go on for the length of this thesis; however, I prefer to stick with Miley Tucker's definition of camp as being "over the top," because that is how the performers I am writing about and their audiences understand the term.

Camp is a phenomenon associated widely with many drag performances; however, it is possibly most prominent in performances presented by "comedy queens." Drag queen Syren expressed an interest in watching funny drag shows, "I like camp drag; I like when it's funny and when it makes you think."[29]

Although Carmen Deveraux refers to herself as a "chameleon," stating that she likes to keep the audience guessing on what type of number she'll do next,[30] she is probably one of the closest things to a comedy queen in Oklahoma City. She has an extensive repertoire of mixes she has created, with the intention of making the audience laugh:

> I have these big mash ups with fucked up Cinderella, Little Mermaid, and there's like a cow mix. Where I'm

[29] Syren interview.

[30] Carmen Deveraux, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, January 18, 2016.

> like this cow. It's really stupid, but you know, it's funny. It makes people laugh. Comedy's important. There are a lot of queens who don't do comedy, or who are like… afraid to be funny and make fun of themselves. I mean, really you have to… It's fun to be glamorous, it's fun to be you – you know, oh so beautiful and, you know, stunning. But it's also fun to just go on stage with some butt cheeks and pig tails, and lookin' like a mess.[31]

In addition to Camren Deveraux's "cow mix," I have been lucky enough to witness her "Annie mix," "Cinderella mix," "Nun mix," and "Pussy mix," all of which capture the audience's eye with their campy creativity. How often do people get to witness a man, dressed as a woman, dressed as a cow, twerking to "Milkshake" by Kelis?

While Carmen Deveraux can deliver a comedic performance, her "chameleon" description of herself is very accurate. I've seen her perform a wide range of genres, and she's also Miss Gay Oklahoma 2015, so wouldn't that also make her a pageant queen?

1.2 Statement of Purpose

Terminology and definition of drag are often determined by performance and individual. Despite the previously examined wide ranging identities and backgrounds and overwhelmingly broad performance themes, similarities in performance messages arise. Across performance genres, many drag acts feature a performance

[31] Carmen interview.

of power – the agency to shape self-esteem, society, emotions, finances, or politics. This thesis focuses on performances in which music directly expresses a narrative of feminism, equality, or self-worth.

Through an analysis of text, timbre, instrumentation, gesture, costume and genre within a performance of Grace and G-Eazy's "You Don't Own Me" and Rihanna's "Bitch Better Have My Money," I argue that drag performances have the potential to empower both performers and audiences. This performance proposes a pseudo-Utopian (an "almost perfect" world) view of power relations in society that may cross into everyday interactions of queer or otherwise marginalized audience members. Drawing on ethnomusicological fieldwork, literature about drag performance, ethnomusicological theory, and feminist performance, this thesis explores the possible meanings of empowerment that drag performance lends itself to.

1.3 Field Methods

Upon moving to Oklahoma for my master's degree, I began attending drag performances at one of Oklahoma City's most popular gay venues, The Boom. Upon deciding on my thesis topic, I began exploring alternate drag performance venues in the area, and I have been using The Boom, The Copa, Tramps, Angles, and

The Phoenix Rising as primary field sites for my research. Appendix II presents details on each of these venues.

Throughout the Spring 2016 semester, I attended drag performances between two and five times a week. In addition to my attendance at events, I recorded performances with my iPad (with permission) so as to not draw attention away from the performance. As per the request of the venue management, the camera angle remained focused on the stage, though the entertainer often continued their performance into the crowd while collecting tips. At the venues mentioned, I participated in many casual conversations with audience members about drag performances, and I was able to formally interview three audience members outside of the venue.

I am very appreciative that I was able to formally interview eight drag performers from various venues in Oklahoma City (Carmen Deveraux, Sara De La Hoya, Miley Tucker, Riley Moore, Foxxi Chanel Paige, Syren, Renee Hilton, and Roxie Hart). I found that most of the performers were excited to share their experiences with me, and that I had much to learn from their unique stories. This fieldwork resulted in some true friendships, and I am happy to say that I am still learning about drag culture when we meet outside of a show and communicate through social media. From

my interviews, I can honestly say that each performer has their own idea of what a drag performance should be, and each performer has their own process for creating a drag performance. The drag culture in Oklahoma City is hard to define, as it is made up of many different individuals on many different paths. Regardless of their differences, the drag queen community in Oklahoma City is truly a tight-knit family, of which I am appreciative to have been given a glimpse. Carmen Deveraux, Miss Gay Oklahoma 2015, explains the familial relationship between the drag queens:

> You know, when you get kicked out of your house, or your boyfriend breaks up with you, and you gotta travel around with all of your drag, like a little drag nomad… And it's kind of sad really… But you rely on your sisters, and I think that the drag community is like a very strong community, just within ourselves. You know, we have to stick up for each other and we have to travel in packs, which is kind of sad, especially in our area – you have to not walk alone. It gets kind of shady at night and shit happens. And you know, it's hard sometimes, and sometimes you feel like there's not really anyone else to reach out to except for your sisters who know what it's like to be doing five shows a week and be trying to date somebody but he dumps you. Or, you find out you have HIV- you just never know. There's always something going on and people need to turn to each other. We might mess with each other and fuck with each other on stage, and backstage it may even be bitch fest all the time, but you can really see the love.[32]

[32] Carmen interview.

While many performers have spoken about what it is like to be a part of the "drag family," they have also spoken about their experiences within the community, and the creation of a space where everyone belongs. This inclusive attitude is supported by local drag queen celebrity, Renee Hilton, who concluded her welcome speech at The Boom by declaring, "Whether you're gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, or whatever, we are family! Now support us like we support you!"[33]

This thesis specifically looks at how drag performances create an inclusive space for all people. Drawing on my own experiences, and the experiences of performers and audience members, the goal of this research is to discover which elements of the performance contribute to the inclusiveness of the environment.

My interviews were initially highly structured with specific questions, but I quickly realized that using the interview questions as a guideline rather than a strict plan was more conducive for my final goal. In the beginning, I was extremely nervous about the interview process, though the drag queens quickly put me at ease and conversation was able to flow freely between us. Many of the performers spent nearly as much time asking me questions about

[33] Renee Hilton, performance at The Boom, Oklahoma City, OK, January 22, 2016.

my life and interest in drag culture as they spent answering my questions – even as an interviewee they exuded power. It was largely the performers' questions to me that encouraged me to put so many of my personal thoughts and identity into this thesis. They (the performer/drag queen/interviewee) wanted to know how my interest in drag culture began, so why wouldn't my reader want to know?

1.4 My Story

I was a freshman in college, walking across campus to my new friend's apartment. Always the perfectionist, I had arrived at his apartment ten minutes early. Knocking on the door, I heard shuffling on the other side, water running, and his voice telling me to hold on. When the door finally opened, my friend's face was red and he seemed frazzled. We began doing our homework, though there was an awkward silence in the air. Eventually, he confessed to me that he was taking off his face when I arrived, and that he was debating whether or not to tell me, because he didn't think that I would understand. He was right; I didn't understand. I like to think that I hid my initial discomfort well, but I'm sure he could see through me. I was uncomfortable. Until my move to college, my primary group of friends consisted mostly of conservative Christians, and I had never encountered someone who so openly

embraced a gender or sexuality other than the cisgendered heterosexuality that my church had told me was acceptable.

I wish that I could say that after my friend so intimately confided in me (wearing his golden pumps) that I was instantly changed forever, and that I became the open-minded person I am today. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Many people are exposed to new ideas during their undergraduate studies and experience immense personal growth, and I was no exception to this change. I spent many days, and many hours in my undergraduate years thinking about who I was, and who I wanted to be. Slowly, I transitioned into a new, more accepting, happier version of myself.

Soon after turning twenty-one, I attended my first drag show. I was entranced by the beauty, confidence, and power the performers exuded, while simultaneously feeling embarrassed and shocked at the vulgarity of the performance. I held out my first dollar to my favorite performer, and let out a squeal of surprise when she grabbed my boobs while miming a kiss to my cheek. Though I was initially embarrassed, I was also intrigued by the freedom and command the performer had. In a recent interview with audience member Justin Conkling, he told me, “awareness

kills bigotry,"[34] and my personal experience was no exception to his statement. As I attended more shows, I slowly became more comfortable and more aware of non-hegemonic gender performance and sexuality. Through attending these performances and listening to what different people had to say, I was able to become more open-minded.

Largely, it is these events that encouraged me to write this thesis. Somehow, this combination of events resulted in a self-actualized version of me. The raw power and dominance of the drag queens' performance combined with their sexual openness created an environment where I felt like I could (for the first time) truly be myself. Kaminski and Taylor explore this inclusiveness in the chapter "'We're Not Just Lip-synching Up Here': Music and Collective Identity and Drag Performances," in which they discuss a "collective identity" created between audience members and drag performers irrespective of their sexual identity.[35] My intention in writing this thesis is to reinforce their theory, while further exploring how the entertainers perform power and inclusiveness, and how the act of performing empowers both the audience members and performers.

---

[34] Justin Conkling, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, February 8, 2016.

[35] Kaminski and Taylor, "'We're Not Just Lip-synching Up Here,'" 54.

Chapter 2: Performer-Audience Connection

2.1. Musicking

The relationship between the performer and audience member varies from performance venue to performance venue. Musicologist Christopher Small suggests using the term "musicking" as a way to inclusively analyze what is "really going on" in a performance:[36]

> The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world, and even perhaps the supernatural world. These are important matters, perhaps the most important in human life, and how we learn about them through musicking is what this book is about.[37]

"Musicking," as defined by Small, is an important concept for this thesis as it focuses on the relationships between all members involved in the performance. Who is involved in a drag performance? Obviously you have the drag queens as performers,

---

[36] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 10.

[37] Ibid., 13.

and the audience members. But, there are also DJs in control of sound and light technicians running stage lights. On a deeper level, you could even include managers, bartending staff, and bouncers, who are contributing to the performances in their own ways. Managers will have control over who is performing, and to an extent, on what is being performed. Bouncers have the ability to kick out individuals who are too rowdy (though it is notable that I have only seen something like this happen twice in my one hundred plus drag shows). The performers are always very courteous to the staff at the various venues, genuinely thanking them multiple times during every show. The relationship between the performers and the audience members is continuously one of respect and amicability, though they often poke fun at each other. Performers at The Boom typically call upon bartenders to bring shots to the stage for themselves and select audience members, and will at times even make the staff members part of the shows. On a very distant level, there is also a one-sided relationship between the song artist the drag queen is lip-synching and the drag queen.

In *Musicking,* Small prompts researchers to not only consider what is happening, but to consider what is not happening.[38] With so many of my own performance experiences being in an art-music

[38] Small, *Musicking*, 28.

venue, I think a comparison between an art-music performance and a drag performance can help to explain the unique happenings at a drag show. In a typical classical performance, the stage creates a barrier between the audience member and the performer that is rarely crossed. Performers stay on the stage, and audience members stay in the crowd. At typical art-music performances, the most interaction is found in a festive sing-a-long (which is arguably more of a "Pops Concert") or verbal program notes, although there are instances in new music where performer-audience interaction is encouraged. In contrast, drag performances rely on the breaking of the "fourth wall."[39] Drag performers typically begin on stage, and continue their performance into the crowd to collect tip money. While most, if not all, drag performers leave the stage to dance and lip-sync in the crowd, many drag performers take the interaction one step further and use audience members as props in their performance.

When explaining what makes a drag show fun and a good time, Roxie Hart puts special emphasis on the EmCeeing and communication/interaction with the audience:

> When you go – you have a great time. It's fun. It's not just the show itself. It's the EmCeeing – the communicating with the audience. We bring them up

[39] The "Fourth Wall" is a term often used in the dramatic arts. It imagines that there is a wall where the stage meets the audience. This creates a barrier between the performers and the audience, though at times the "fourth wall" is broken for comedic relief.

> on stage and sometimes they're actually a part of the show. They're a big part of the show… Whether you're straight, gay, bisexual, you know- we have a lot, at the Boom, we have a lot of straight couples come in. And I can see the men at first being a little hesitant, but I guarantee you at the end of the night they've had the best time.[40]

While a comparison between art music and drag performance portrays contrasting relationship roles, the variance in performer-audience exchange can also be seen in other types of Western music. Many "popular music" concerts have interactions between the audience and performer – through the exchange of enthusiastic singing, clapping, or yelling – though the interaction is not one that seems to build relationships in quite the same way that a drag show does. My goal in comparing these different performance styles is not to say that drag performance is necessarily better, but to highlight the unique way drag performers and their audience members build relationships with one another. In my interview with Riley Moore, she explained the importance of the audience to her performance:

> I like audience participation… I want to do something where people are singing along. They're dancing. They're having a great time. And they're with their friends. And yes, I am performing, but they're having a great time. So that's what I enjoy; I enjoy the art of participation in my number.[41]

[40] Roxie interview.
[41] Riley interview.

Foxxi Chanel Paige has a slightly different outlook on the audience's role in her performance. She discusses how her friends, who are members in the audience, give her performance suggestions, and how that is her way of including the audience in the expressive process:

> They're [my friends] like, "Watching you, I feel like I'm living through you a little bit." Because, my friends also give me ideas. They give me suggestions on songs. It also helps them express themselves a little bit, too.[42]

Notably, Foxxi Chanel Paige states that her favorite performances are the ones with enthusiastic energy from the crowd, where the crowd is "going ape-shit crazy."[43]

Syren explains that an essential part of a good performance is the "connection with your audience."[44] And while individual performers have different ways of making connections with their audience members, the focus on audience connection is a common trend. Syren adds that she connects with her audience by "always being courteous when someone tips you," and by "leaning in" or "kissing them" to "acknowledge that they gave you a dollar."[45] In similar fashion, Miley Tucker discusses "playing to the audience":

> I try to play to the audience all the time. I try to interact with the audience – like when people hold

[42] Foxxi interview.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Syren interview.
[45] Ibid.

> their hands out to me, I try to run my hands up their arm. I grab the money and maybe pull them on stage and give them a twirl. Maybe sit on their lap – that's what I think makes a better performance.[46]

The most intriguing and similar comparison to drag performance I have come across thus far is found in exotic dancing. In her book, *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society,*[47] anthropologist Judith Hanna writes about aspects of human communication and raw power through dance:[48]

> The moving human body usually captivates an observer's consciousness. Through perceptions of the multisensory stimulation of sight, sound, movement, touch, and smell, the dancing body excites emotions. Dancing arouses feelings via its associations with basic life functions, pleasures, pain, and guilt. Birth, life and death are bodily, and the human body is the vessel and the vehicle of dance. The potency of dance to persuade and to move people to social action has been recognized in many eras and places, from the antiquity of Aristotle and Plato to contemporary authorities in Africa. For example, in order to avoid ethnic rivalries in a country with about sixty ethnic groups, the Ivory Coast government banned all public gatherings involving traditional music and dance during an election campaign. The government recognized that the arts provoke and intensify heated sentiments… Motion, a powerful source of human motivation, is a medium and a message. A subjectively experienced state of feeling, emotion constrains us and inspires us as we create culture forms and meaning and as we relate to each other.[49]

---

[46] Miley interview.

[47] Inspiration for the title of my thesis.

[48] Judith Lynne Hanna, *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983), 3.

[49] Ibid., 4.

Hanna states, “The common denominator of the dancer audience relation (and others, such as teacher-student, therapist-client, and politician-constituent) is power.”[50] In her book chapter, “Empowerment: The Art of Seduction in Adult Entertainment Exotic Dance,” Hanna argues against the common feminist idea that exotic dancers are exploited, instead asserting that the dancers can gain self-esteem and “power through the art of seduction.”

2.2 Frequently Performed Songs at OKC Drag Shows

On the April 9th, 2015 *Trashy Thursday* performance,[51] the song “I’m Coming Out” by Diana Ross served a dual purpose. Firstly, it was a play on words as Renee Hilton was able to “come out” from back stage to make a grand entrance.[52] Secondly, the text of this song can be relatable to anyone with experience “coming out” of the closet. This song carries a positive message about honestly living with self-confidence.

Aside from “I’m Coming Out,” many of the songs performed at The Boom represent various forms of power. Figure 1 lists various, and frequently performed songs at drag performances in Oklahoma City. The songs have been placed into categories of

---

[50] Hanna, *The Performer-Audience Connection*, 8.

[51] Note that Renee Hilton hosted *Trashy Thursday* during this time.

[52] It is noteworthy that on May 6, 2016, Maria Isabel opened her *South of the Border* show with “I’m Coming Out.”

types of power represented, based solely on musical and textual analysis. Common power symbols represented at these drag shows are: self-esteem, economic, social, emotional, and political power.

Songs, with self-esteem as a power, focus on bringing oneself up; for example, “Don’t Be So Hard on Yourself,” by Jess Glynne focuses on letting yourself mess up, and carrying on. “Bitch Better Have My Money,” by Rhianna focuses on making sure that people who owe a person money pay up; therefore the text portrays the character as making their own money, not to mention that audience members are tipping the drag queens during all of these songs. Social power is connected with themes centering on relationships and friendships; for example, “We Are Family,” by Sister Sledge focuses on the power to bring groups of people together. Emotional power is focused on the ability to freely express oneself; songs such as “Emotions,” by Destiny’s Child would fit into this category. Lastly, political power is represented by songs which carry a prominent political message to the listener. “Fuck You,” by Lily Allen would fit into this category, as it has a narrative against conservative politics. It is worth mentioning that while I have assigned these different songs their own “Power Symbol,” many of these songs can arguably fit into none, or multiple, of these categories.

Figure 1: Frequently Performed Songs

Song Title	**Artist**	**Power Symbol**
"You Are Not Alone"	Diana Ross	Social
"Missing You"	Diana Ross	Emotional
"Amazing"	Hi Fashion	Self-Esteem
"Anaconda"	Nicki Minaj	Self-Esteem
"Baila Es Cumbia"	Selena	Social
"Birthday"	Katy Pery	Social
"Bitch Better Have My Money"	Rhianna	Economic
"Burnin' Up"	Jessi J. Ft. 2 Chainz	Emotional
"California Girls"	Katy Pery	Self-Esteem
"Call Me Maybe"	Carly Rae Jepson	Self-Esteem
"Chandelier"	Sia	Self-Esteem
"Cold Shoulder"	Adele	Emotional
"Dear Future Husband"	Meghan Trainor	Self-Esteem
"Don't Be So Hard on Yourself"	Jess Glynne	Self-Esteem
"Electric Youth"	Debbie Gibson	Political
"Emotion"	Destiny's Chil	Emotional
"Emotions"	Mariah Carey	Emotional
"E.T."	Katy Perry	Emotional
"Fancy"	Iggy Azalea Ft. Charli XCX	Self-Esteem
"Feeling Myself"	Nicki Minaja Ft. Beyonce	Self-Esteem
"Freak of Nature"	Anastacia	Self-Esteem
“Fuck You”	Lily Allen	Political
"Glamorous"	Fergie Ft. Ludacris	Economic
"Hit Me With Your Best Shot"	Kelly Clarkson	Self-Esteem
"Hold On, We're Going Home/Love Me Again"	Ella Henderson	Emotional
"Hey Big Spender"	Shirley Bassey	Self-Esteem
"Holding Out For a Hero"	Bonnie Tyler	Self-Esteem
"I Don't Care, I Love It"	Icona Pop	Social
"I'm Coming Out"	Diana Ross	Political
"We Are Family"	Sister Sledge	Social
"I Just Wanna Dance"	Alison Jiear	Self-Esteem
"I Will Survive"	Gloria Gaynor	Self-Esteem
"Just Fine"	Mary J. Blige	Self-Esteem
"Let's Get Loud"	Jennifer Lopez	Emotional
"Living For Love"	Madonna	Self-Esteem

Song Title	Artist	Power Symbol
"Mama Mia"	Meryl Streep and cast in *Mama Mia*	Emotional
Me & U	Cassie	Self-Esteem
"My Strongest Suit"	Sherie Rene Scott and cast in *Aida*	Self-Esteem
"Neither One Of Us"	Gladys Knight	Emotional
"Nobody Love	Tori Kelly	Emotional
"Not Myself Tonight"	Christina Aguilera	Emotional
"Poker Face"	Lady Gaga	Self-Esteem
"Pu$$y"	Iggy Azalea	Self-Esteem
"Pyromania"	Cascada	Emotional
"Somebody"	Natalie La Rose	Social
"The Glamorous Life"	Sheila E.	Self-Esteem
"The Life of the Party"	Idina Menzel in *Wild Party*	Emotional
"This Is My Life"	Shirley Bassey	Self-Esteem
"Wonderful"	Ella Fitgerald	Emotional
"You Don't Own Me"	Grace Ft. G-Eazy	Self-Esteem

As represented in Figure 1, many of the frequently performed works each portray a different type of power. Renee Hilton discusses how her main platform is to promote equality and entertainment:

> Just to be yourself and have fun… Coming out to the bars is an outlet for people to get away from their daily lives… So in our daily lives, we're putting everything aside when we come out here because we're supposed to have fun. We want to have fun… Be yourself. We're not gonna criticize you out there. Because we're judged everyday on that stage. We're judged every day in the real world.[53]

[53] Renee interview.

While Renee Hilton describes drag performances as a "get away" [from] daily life" and an opportunity to let loose and have fun, Figure 1 shows examples of textual messages of power within the performances. Additionally, the following analyses of "You Don't Own Me," by Grace and G-Eazy and "Bitch Better Have My Money" by Rhianna present an in-depth description of how the drag performer represents power while simultaneously creating a fun getaway for the crowd.

2.3 "You Don't Own Me"

"You Don't Own Me," by Grace featuring G-Eazy is a remake of a feminist song by Lesley Gore in the 1960s. This newly covered song has a few changes from the original version, such as the addition of rapped verses and a male performer. The Grace and G-Eazy version of this song maintains G as the tonal center, but it transitions between the verses and choruses from a minor to a major key. The song begins in G minor with Grace repeating, "You Don't Own Me," with an eerie chanting female chorus behind her. The song then enters into a rap, in which the male character discusses how he can always get what he wants, and how he would love to flaunt his woman around. But because she has her own money, he cannot own her. The song then leads into a second verse, in which Grace sings, "You don't own me; I'm not just one of your many toys," in a low, raspy, vocal range with sassy snaps on

every second beat. After this verse, there is an increase in rhythmic motion, leading into the refrain where there is a switch to G major. At this point, Grace sings the loudest and in the highest range she has so far:

> And don't tell me what to do
> And don't tell me what to say
> Please when I go out with you
> Don't put me on display

The change in modality, timbre, rhythmic intensity, volume, and tessitura at this point in the song creates heightened emotions. Perhaps this emotive change could be intentional, to go along with the text changing from declarative to imperative. Instead of making simple statements, Grace is demanding this man to stop ordering her around.

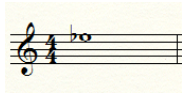
Notably, the refrain ends with, "Don't put me on display." In drag queen Jewel's performance of this song, she posed like a hanging marionette hanging while the rap took place. G-Eazy interrupts the chorus by stuttering the beginning of "really." Whenever G-Eazy rapped, Jewel stopped lip-syncing, and struck a still pose or collected tip money.

The lyrics of the rapping sections in this song are both contrary and supportive of Grace's sung parts. They imply that G-Eazy is looking for a woman who he can show off. G-Eazy then discusses how he gets "bored of basic bitches." He goes on to discuss how he asks Grace to send him pictures, and she says no

and to come over and see it for himself. This implies that G-Eazy thinks there is something special about independent women; however, he doesn't seem to have made any large changes in character. He says, "she ain't for the shelf," so maybe he won't put her on display, but there is a lack of genuine feminist views from his character. This static character trait is shown at the end of the song when G-Eazy says, "Okay… Bitches know, you've never met someone like me before though… Eazy." This final statement undermines all of the positive things he's said about Grace. G-Eazy conveys that regardless of how independent a woman is, he will get what he wants from her anyway. During this section, Grace repeatedly belts the word "No," reaching as high as an Eb5.[54] Grace also gets the last word in when she states once again, "You Don't Own Me." At this point in the performance, Jewel's makeup was smeared all over her face, and she was crouched on the floor gasping for breath.

Although this song on its own has the ability to empower the listener, Jewel's performance enhances the feminist message of the song. For this performance, Jewel performed *sans* wig, and with her male hair dyed a red color which matched her stilettos. She wore dramatic marionette-like makeup. Her outfit was all black,

---

54 

with fishnet black nylons, short shorts, and a corset that showed off her muscular arms and lack of breasts – examples of genderfuck. Jewel's performance was impactful, as it mixed aspects of different sexes and sent a larger message about being who you are and loving it. Outside of Jewel's marionette poses, her performance was high energy with thrashing around and angular motions. While all drag queens lip-sync, Jewel's lip-sync was passionate and seemed to get at the very core of the message of feminism. At the end of this song, the refrain changes, saying,

> I don't tell you what to say
> I don't tell you what to do
> So just let me be myself
> That's all I ask of you
> I'm young and I love to be young
> I'm free and I love to be free
> To live my life the way I want
> To say and do whatever I please

At this point in the performance, Jewel looked the crowd straight in the eyes, and I as a listener felt like I could do whatever I wanted.

2.4 "Bitch Better Have My Money"

Though slightly less feminist in nature, Rihanna's hit song "Bitch Better Have My Money" was performed by drag queen Dejoria McQueen. The song features an offset clave ostinato throughout 3-2-3 rhythm (except during the metrically ambiguous

bridge, after which the ostinato returns for the outro).[55] The song is similar to a standard pop tune form with an introduction, verse 1, pre-chorus, chorus, verse 2, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, and outro. The melody, sung by Rihanna, presents a hard voice in a low register, with *marcato* treatment of the lyrics. Synthetic instruments lend the song a "retro" feeling. The song features only two main key areas: E minor and B minor. Further accentuating these keys, the melody often leaps from tonic to dominant (a jump of a perfect fifth). Taken as a whole, these facets point to a rap/hip-hop subgenre called "trap."

As a subgenre of rap (particularly Emcee-style rap), trap is often distinguished by the use of the TR-808 kick drum (rhythm composer machine), synthesizers, a high number of pulse divisions (metric divisions), and the previously mentioned fifth oscillations in the melody. Though trap is an historical subgenre, it has recently resurfaced in EDM (electronic dance music) and dubstep scenes.[56] The primary use for trap styling is the "retro" sonic effect that the outdated drum machine offers. Historically, Emcee rap has been a very male domain in which women are the subjects of lyrics, instead of those producing them. By contrast, Rihanna flips typical sex/gender roles and becomes the Emcee.

---

[55] Outro: The instrumental section of a song that ends the piece.

[56] Dubstep is a genre of electronic dance music which emphasizes a syncopated percussion line with a sub-bass line.

Another feature, from old-school Emcee tracks in Rihanna's "Bitch Better Have My Money," is the lyric trope *braggadacio*. African American Studies scholar Adam Bradley calls *braggadacio* the opposite of dissing, stating, "*braggadacio* consists of Emcee's verbal elevation of themselves above all others."[57] In other words, *braggadacio* is when a rapper brags about their wealth, deeds, power, or status. When Rihanna incorporates this lyric trope into her song, she asserts her own power and reifies her wealth.

For example, Rihanna buys a round of Louis XIII, a fine champagne cognac that typically sells for $2,500 a bottle. She claims to be a bigger "baller" than LeBron, who is notorious for his extravagant lifestyle. Further, she reminds the listener that their wife is in her "brand new foreign car." Accentuating the aggressive marcato vocal performance, Rihanna adds passive threats of gun violence by saying "I call the shots, shots, shots, like *brrap, brrap, brrap."* This onomatopoeic reference exemplifies the social power she holds. Not only is her will frequently enacted (by calling the shots), she also ensures that her income is steady by threatening to shoot the party in question. In a Marxian sense, Rhianna is socially powerful because she controls the capital of those who

[57] Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York: Basic*Civitas*, 2009), 187.

work beneath her. Rihanna asserts her claim to the money she is owed.

In a similar fashion, drag performances can be seen as demanding payment for services provided. In this rendition at The Boom, Dejoria McQueen entered the stage wearing a black and white herringbone romper, a wide black belt with highly bedazzled belt buckle, fishnet stockings, tall white high-heeled shoes, a large rhinestone necklace, a loose-fitting jacket (worn mostly around the wrists), and wide hoop earrings. Her large dark blonde wig, worn down, became a prop when she whipped her head as part of the dance moves. These dance moves predominantly featured wide swinging gestures with her arms, reminiscent of 1990's hip-hop dance moves. During the chorus, however, her dance moves shifted to wide circular hip motions, as she addressed the spectators with an outstretched hand, "Bitch better have my money."

2.5 Performative Power

From the song chart in Figure 1, you will see that many songs performed at drag shows can arguably hold some sort of power. But how do we define power? If only it were as simple as memorizing physics equations:

$$P = \frac{F \times D}{T}$$

While many drag queens represent physical power in their performances with their dance routines and endurance, the type of power I observe at in these performances is less clear. In the article, "Relationship between Leadership Personality Types and Source of Power and Leadership Styles among Managers," psychologist Noordin Yahaya (et al) defines power as the ability to influence:

> Power is define[d] as the ability to get someone to do something you want done or the ability to make things happen in the way you want them to. In addition, power is the force to make things happen in an intended way; influence is what you have when you exercise power, and it is expressed by others' behavioral response to your exercise of power.[58]

According to French and Raven (1959), there are five sources of power: coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, expert power, and referent power.[59] Coercive power is the expectation of punishment for failure to conform to an influence attempt. Reward power focuses on positive valences and reducing or removing negative valences. Legitimate power dictates that there is a legitimate right to influence and an obligation to accept this

---

[58] Noordin Yahaya, Mohammad Asian B. Mohammad Taib, Jasmi Ismail, Zainudin Shariff, Azizi Yahaya, Usof Boon, and Sharin Hashim, "Relationship Between Leadership Personality Types and Source of Power and Leadership Styles Among Managers," *African Journal of Business Management* 5, no. 22 (September 2011): 9640, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.academicjournals.org/AJBM.

[59] John R. P. French, Jr. and Bertram Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in *Studies in Social Power*, ed. D. Cartwright (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 259-269.

influence. Expert power occurs when followers perceive a leader as having specialty or "expert" proficiency in a relevant task. Referent power is a feeling of oneness or a desire for such an identity that occurs when followers believe that their leader possesses admirable qualities, qualities they themselves would like to possess, a thought process in line with the old phrase, "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

In his article, "Sound Structure as Social Structure," Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld suggests that musical structure directly reflects societal structures.[60] In the case of drag performances of power, however, the inverse is true: those who perform power through music are those without power in social structures. In other words, the drag queens performing power on stage typically come from relatively oppressed gender/sex/sexuality identity groups that may face discrimination in their communities. If Feld's argument held true, one might expect to see drag queens being in positions of power outside of the performance context. Instead, the reality is more nuanced. The idea of a Utopia (a perfect world) is suggested by the performance of power. At a drag performance, the drag queens perform an idea of what the world should be like – a world in which

[60] Stephen Feld, "Sound Structure as Social Structure," *Ethnomusicology* 28, no. 3 (1984): 383-409.

sex/gender/sexuality minorities can confidently live their lives as they choose without feeling repression. In other words, one might consider their relationship (or stance) to the music as one of empowerment.

Drawing upon *noetics* (metaphysical philosophies concerning consciousness), ethnomusicologist Harris M. Berger proposes the term, *stance*, to define various intellectual relationships between subject and performance object.[61] According to Berger, stance is "the valual qualities of the relationship that a person has to a text, performance, practice, or item of expressive culture."[62] The person in question (or subject) can be composer, performer, audience member, or any person involved in the production or reception of the expressive culture. Further, Berger does not limit his notion of expressive culture solely to music. Instead, it can include any performative display from "stand-up comedy, movie viewing, festive behavior, and everyday social interactions."[63]

This structure gives equal authority and interpretive power to each research subject: composer, performer, and audience member. In (stereotypical) Western art terms, the composer is the "genius," the performer is the "talent" that executes the composer's

---

[61] Harris M. Berger, *Stance: Ideas about Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 5.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Berger, *Stance*, xvii.

intent, and the audience member is the passive "receptor." The model of stance, however, elevates the performer and audience to be co-creators of meaning with the composer. Within the drag context, then, performers use popular songs (perhaps without regard for the original artist's intent) to forge new relationships between performer and audience, and between expressive culture (the song) and the audience. In this way, a display of power by the drag performer could create the possibility of embodied power in both the very same performer and the audience members who view the display of power. In other words, the drag performance has the potential to empower audience and performer by creating new *stance* relationships. This is not to say that stances are necessarily political or that expressive culture must convey deeper meanings. As Renee Hilton explained,

> Of course I'm going to say I support the democrats, but when politics aren't going on I stay away from it because – let's focus on the real things and enjoying the night - talk about problems in the daytime. Politics is a big problem in the daytime. I try to steer clear of that, and make fun of people instead. Not everybody wants to talk about politics, especially in a gay bar where equality is not all there. Gay marriage is not all there for everybody. Thankfully, we have gay marriage now in Oklahoma.[64]

Although Renee Hilton states that she tries to "steer clear" of politics, many acts (including Renee Hilton's) can be interpreted as

[64] Renee interview.

political. Black feminism specialist Hazel Carby argues that women's blues is an oral and musical representation of women's black culture that addresses feminism, sexuality and power. She states that Classic Blues addresses the "cultural and political struggle over sexual relations" that are focused on the objectification of female sexuality.[65] Carby references African-American writer Sherley Anne Williams' argument that blues singers helped to solidify community values and heighten community morale.[66] Williams describes the blues as a communal expression of black experience.[67] This idea is reflected also by John Coltrane, who states that the audience hears "we" even if the singer says "I".[68]

Is it possible that drag performance is the communal expression of gay experience? When Renee Hilton performs "I'm Coming Out," does the crowd hear "We're Coming Out"?" Does the audience hear "You Don't Own Me," as "You Don't Own Us"? I argue that audience members can develop an empathetic stance with the performance. Indeed, Kaminski and Taylor push the audience/performer relationship further by stating that, instead of

---

[65] Hazel Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 474.

[66] Sherley Anne Williams, "The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry," *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1977): 542-554.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

drag performance being a communal expression of gay experience, it is a negotiator, or translator between gay and heterosexual audience members:

> The drag queens' repertoire of numbers includes widely known popular songs and show tunes that tap into the experiences of heterosexual audience members and build bridges between the gay and heterosexual members of the audience.[69]

If drag performance both represents the gay community and acts as a bridge between the gay community and heterosexual community present, does the performance itself therefore have the ability to empower all of these individuals? How do these performances affect the lived experiences of performer and audience member alike?

As shown with drag performances of Grace and G-Eazy's "You Don't Own Me" and Rihanna's "Bitch Better Have My Money," drag performance provides the potential for empowerment for both the performer and audience. These performances thus have the ability to transform the lived experiences by bolstering confidence and reinforcing self-worth. Though performers may not recognize the political nature of their performances, the transformative potential is not limited to the performer's perspective. Instead,

[69] Kaminski and Taylor, "'We're Not Just Lip-synching Up Here,'" 54.

meaning is created (or not created) by the individual on both sides of the stage.

Chapter 3: Community and Empowerment

3.1 Subculture as Community

Judith Halberstam,[70] director of The Center for Feminist Research and Professor of English at the University of South California, states that the term "community" refers to a "seemingly natural form of congregation."[71] Drawing on Sarah Thornton's research in *The Subcultures Reader*,[72] Halberstam suggests that while "community" implies a long-lasting population, whereas the term "subculture" suggests "transient, extrafamilial and oppositional modes of affiliation."[73] In her article "What's that Smell?," Halberstam challenges the concept of subculture as a temporary affiliation, by drawing on queers' permanent devotion to their own subcultures:

> Precisely because many queers refuse and resist the heteronormative imperative of home and family, they also prolong the period of their life devoted to subcultural participation. This challenge to the notion of the subculture as a youth formation could, on the one hand, expand the definition of subculture beyond its most banal significations of youth in crisis and on the other hand challenge our notion of adulthood as reproductive maturity.[74]

---

[70] Also known as Jack Halberstam.

[71] Judith Halberstam, "What's That Smell?: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 315.

[72] Sarah Thornton, "Introduction," in *The Subcultures Reader*, eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York, Routledge, 1997), 1-7.

[73] Halberstam, "What's That Smell?," 315.

[74] Ibid., 320-321.

Defining "subculture" as temporary did not work in Halberstam's research, and it does not work in this Oklahoma City case study. There are two possible solutions to this misrepresentation.

Firstly, it is possible that the definition of "subculture" considered is not the actual definition. This solution would consider "subculture" as solely a culture within a culture, rather than a temporary fixture. The second solution to consider is that "subculture," when experienced and practiced over a long period of time, has the potential to develop into a substantial community. While the previously mentioned definition of subculture facilitates the heteronormative, the devotion of queers to their own particular subculture requires a change in the definition, i.e. a definition where community and subculture are not exclusive. Cultural theorist Raymond Williams defines sub-culture as "the culture of a distinguishable smaller group";[75] Williams' definition of subculture is more in line with my understanding of the term.

Regardless of the specifics of definition, the drag queen subculture in Oklahoma City truly transcends and surpasses the definition of a subculture as temporary, and instead embraces the term "community" with all its permanent implications. Supporting

[75] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 92.

this idea of permanent relationships in the drag queen community, RuPaul famously states to Roxxxy Andrews on Season 5 of the American reality competition television series, *RuPaul's Drag Race*:

> We love you, you are so welcomed here. You know we, as gay people, we get to choose our family. We get to choose the people we're around. I am your family, we are family here. I love you.[76]

While there are numerous disagreements over the authenticity and scripting of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, many queer individuals can empathize with this televised moment, in which Roxxxy Andrews laments her childhood abandonment. RuPaul's response represents a very real phenomenon in the queer community. The frequently performed tune, "We Are Family", by Sister Sledge clearly has a meaning that resonates with both performers and audience members at drag venues.

3.2 Empowerment

In his article, "Rap Music and the Empowerment of Today's Youth: Evidence in Everday Music Listening, Music Therapy, and Commercial Rap Music," sociologist Raphael Travis Jr. defines "empowerment" as a "broad construct within which to privilege the framework dimensions of esteem, resilience, and growth (individual

[76] *RuPaul's Drag Race*, season 5, episode 7, "RuPaul Roast," aired March 11, 2013, on Logo TV.

empowerment), along with community and change (community empowerment)."[77] Travis considers "individual empowerment" and "community empowerment" as separate categories, with individual empowerment consisting of esteem, resilience, and growth.[78] Community empowerment is divided into the two ideas of a "better sense of belonging," and a "change for better conditions."[79] He defines empowerment as "the process by which adolescents develop the consciousness, skills, and power necessary to envision personal or collective well-being and understand their role within opportunities to transform social conditions to achieve that well-being."[80]

While Travis' research argues that empowerment is a process solely experienced by adolescence, it can be argued that empowerment can be experienced by any individual, regardless of age, race, or class. Empowerment describes the process by which new tools are given to individuals or communities to accomplish change. To be empowered is not necessarily to have power. Instead, it is the process of developing the esteem and resilience to be able to make changes for an individual life and/or a

---

[77] Raphael Travis, Jr., "Rap Music and the Empowerment of Today's Youth: Evidence in Everyday Music Listening, Music Therapy, and Commercial Rap Music," *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 30 (November 2012): 143.

[78] Travis, "Rap Music," 144.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

community. An empowered individual has the means to initiate and generate both individual and communal transformation.

If we are referring to individual empowerment as the process of developing esteem and resilience, drag performers are empowered through the performance process. Carmen Deveraux states that, by performing drag, she feels that she is more confident and brave: "I feel like they [drag queens] all have this sense of being invincible."[81]

Similarly, when asked about how performing drag has changed her life outside of the performance space, Foxxi Chanel Paige states, "It [drag] has really made me comfortable with myself… It made me feel comfortable being who I am with myself."[82] She continues, "If you don't feel comfortable in your daily life, drag is one way to release all inhibitions and all insecurities," jokingly adding, "You know, because makeup makes anyone look better."[83]

While numerous drag performers account for their gain in confidence to the art of drag, many of these same performers have utilized drag to benefit their LGBTQ+ community in a variety of ways. Further, giving back to their community through fundraisers and the donation of their time, drag performance thereby

[81] Carmen interview.
[82] Foxxi interview.
[83] Ibid.

empowers the LGBTQ+ community. Organizations such as Youth Empowerment Services, Other Options, The Gay Rodeo Association, Open Arms Youth Project, and Oklahoma City Pride often rely on drag performers to fundraise for their projects, volunteer at their events, and act as a spokesperson for their group.

Every drag queen I have spoken with comments on how drag queens give back to their community. Sara de la Hoya states, "We're the ones who aren't afraid to go out and basically act foolish to get seen and do what we need to do to raise awareness."[84] Carmen Deveraux refers to drag queens as "money-making machines,"[85] discussing how drag queens are often used in the LGBTQ+ community to attract other people to join their group.

While Roxie Hart agrees with the other queens about drag's ability to fundraise and give back to their community, she offers a different explanation for the function of drag in the LGBTQ+ community:

> When I used to perform as a ballet dancer,[86] I used to think, "What is the use of what you're doing in this world?" You're not a doctor. You're not a scientist. You're not…people that the world really needs. But then, you know, I look – the world needs beautiful art. They need escape. That's why we go to the movies. That's why we go to the opera. That's why

[84] Sara interview.
[85] Carmen interview.
[86] Roxie Hart currently serves as ballet master for the Oklahoma City Ballet.

> we go and see plays. That's why we go see a ballet – to escape for a couple of hours… They come out and see men in beautiful dresses and hair and jewelry – it's an escape. And that instant, especially being in a bar, because in a theatre you're very far, in a bar you're very close. So you get that instant gratification – and it's a mutual feeling when you perform.[87]

When asked about the importance of art music, or movies, it is easy to say "to have fun," or to quickly try and find a tangible purpose, such as "to fundraise." While fundraising holds significant, irreplaceable value, Roxie Hart explains the need for escape that people have, and how art fills that void. While, yes, drag queens fundraise, they are able to fundraise and draw a crowd because they are creating an escape from reality. Even more important than an escape from reality is that drag queens are creating an escape from reality where oppressed individuals can feel comfortable. They are creating an environment where, regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation, an individual can feel they belong. The combination of music and comedy creates an environment where the fears of offending each other are gone, and people can cohabitate happily and openly.

[87] Roxie interview.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1 Final Thoughts

This study set out to explore the performative power of drag queens, and how music enhances drag performance. My original intent was to examine how the music itself embodies ideas of power, and how these sonic ideas of power affect the lives of audience members outside of the performance space. It was not long into my fieldwork when I realized that while the music and sound play an irreplaceable role to drag performances, the music itself is not responsible for the empowerment of a community. Rather, the empowerment of the community is enabled by the safe space that drag queens created through their interactions with audience members.

Although Chapter 3, "The Performer-Audience Connection," explores concepts of power represented in musical texts, the in-depth musical and performance analyses of "You Don't Own Me," and "Bitch Better Have My Money," present concrete examples of how individual drag performers take a song with a powerful message and relate it to both themselves and the audience. It is through these powerful, performative interactions that individuals in the audience are able to potentially embody the power performed by the drag queen, and apply that message of power into their everyday lives.

While many of the drag queens I interviewed stated that there was no political agenda to their performances, I would respectfully disagree. Although the intention of the various performers is often to have fun or emote, the very presence and core of these performances has political clout, especially in conservative Oklahoma. The drag queens are sending a message of loving who you are and being yourself. While on the surface, these messages of self-love and self-confidence may not appear as political, these messages become political when they encourage, and potentially empower, an often discriminated against population to openly, and unapologetically be themselves. It is perhaps the unintentional nature of these political messages that makes them so affective.

4.2 Musings on the Future

The original completion of this draft, finished on June 11, 2016, argued that drag performances empower the LGBTQ+ community through the creation of a safe space, where individuals are encouraged to publically be their truest self. While individual experiences can vary, I have found that even jokes at the expense of an individual's race or sexuality tend to be met with love and laughter, rather than hatred and fear.

"Where do we go from here?" The United States' federal government legalized same sex marriage in 2015, so it appears as

if the United States now has equal rights for same sex couples. Nevertheless, there are still many prejudiced people in this country: people who want same sex marriage abolished, and people who label same sex couples as being “perverts,” or “immoral.”

June 12, 2016 was a tragic day for Orlando, Florida, for the United States, and for LGBTQ+ communities everywhere. Around 2:00 a.m. on June 12th, 2016, coincidently just hours after I finished my original conclusion for this thesis, a man opened fire at Pulse Nightclub, taking hostages, and ultimately killing 49 people and injuring 53 others. Known as the largest massacre in modern US history, this tragedy has spurred debates over radical Islam, terrorism, gun reform, and LGBTQ+ morality/rights. My intention in concluding with this tragic news is not to force a left-winged agenda, but to consider the question, “What happens when our safe space is threatened?”

The goal of The Boom, Copa, Tramps, The Phoenix Rising, Pulse Nightclub, and other LGBTQ+ venues is to create a “safe space,” where two members of the same sex can feel comfortable openly being with each other. How do humans react when their safe space is threatened and/or invaded? This incident may have occurred in Orlando, Florida, but it could have easily occurred at

an Oklahoma City venue. Indeed, this catastrophe could have occurred anywhere, and that thought is terrifying.

In this time of tragedy, Oklahoma City has found a way to stand with Orlando, specifically Orlando's LGBTQ+ population. At 7:00 p.m. on the day of the massacre, the LGBTQ+ community of Oklahoma City came together for a candlelight vigil in honor of those who had lost their lives. Vigil attendees marched the route of the Oklahoma City Pride Parade at dusk, in remembrance of those lost, but also to show a united, supportive LGBTQ+ community.

With the Oklahoma City Pride celebration fast approaching on June 24-26th, 2016, Oklahoma City Pride president, Michael Clark, posted a statement with regards to the Orlando tragedy:

> Many have asked how this tragedy will affect the OKC Pride celebration on June 24-26 and the answer is that it only solidifies the need to come together in celebration of Pride and remembrance of both how far we have come and how far we have left to go.
>
> Pride was born of a need to stand up against oppression, discrimination, and to fight for equality. The LGBTQ community has a long history of enduring assaults and we come together today to make it clear that we will continue to move forward in our battle for equality. No individual, organization, or attack will drive us back into the shadows.[88]

[88] "Statement by Michael Clark, President, OKC Pride Inc.," OKC Pride, accessed June 13, 2016, http://okcpride.org.

This effort of Oklahoma City's LGBTQ+ community to come together, through the organization of a vigil and Clark's eloquent statement focusing on the importance of Pride in times of tragedy, leads me to believe that, although individuals may be afraid, many will continue to come together. While the "safe space" of Pulse Nightclub may have temporarily been unsafe, I have no doubt that the strong individuals of the LGBTQ+ community in Oklahoma City, Orlando, and nationwide will continue to bolster each other's confidence, and empower their LGBTQ+ community. In like fashion, the performative power of drag shows in Oklahoma City and the nation – indeed world-wide, will continue to support and empower their local LGBTQ+ communities through their masterful and empowering performer-audience connection.

Bibliography

Babuscio, Jack. “The Cinema of Camp (*aka* Camp and the Gay Sensibility).” In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, edited by Fabio Cleto, 117-135. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Bachhofer, Aaron Lee. “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1889-2005.” PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 2006.

Barnett, Joshua Trey and Corey W. Johnson, “We Are All Royalty: Narrative Comparison of a Drag Queen and King.” *Journal of Leisure Research* 45, no. 5 (2013): 677-718.

Bradley, Adam. *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop.* New York: Basic*Civitas*, 2009.

Burns, Lori. *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity, and Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Carby, Hazel. “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues.” In *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, edited by Robert G. O’Meally, 470-483. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Childs, Becky and Gerard Van Herk. "Work that --s!: Drag queens, gender, identity, and traditional Newfoundland English." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 18, no. 5 (2014): 634-657.

Feld, Stephen. “Sound Structure as Social Structure.” *Ethnomusicology* 28, no. 3 (1984): 383-409.

French, John R. P. and Bertram Raven. “The Bases of Social Power.” In *Studies in Social Power*, edited by D. Cartwright, 259-269. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1959.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998.

———. “What’s that Smell?: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 2003): 313-333.

Halperin, David. *How to Be Gay*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.

Hankins, Sarah. "Queer Relationships with Music and an Experiential Hermeneutics for Musical Meaning." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 18 (2014): 83-104.

———. "'I'm a Cross between a Clown, a Stripper, and a Streetwalker': Drag Tipping, Sex Work, and a Queer Sociosexual Economy." *Signs* 40, no. 2 (2015): 441-466.

Hanna, Judith Lynne. "Empowerment: The Art of Seduction in Adult Entertainment Exotic Dance." In *Music, Dance and the Art of Seduction,* edited by Frank Kouwenhoven and James Kippen, 197-218. Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2013.

———. *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

Harris, Daniel. *Diary of a Drag Queen.* New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005.

———. "The Aesthetic of Drag." In *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture,* 203-218. New York: Balentine Publishing Group, 1999.

Horowitz, Katie R. "The Trouble with 'Queerness': Drag and the Making of Two Cultures." *Signs* 38, no. 2 (2013): 303-326.

Jacob, John and Catherine Cerny. "Radical Drag Appearances and Identity: The Embodiment of Male Femininity and Social Critique." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 22, no. 3 (June 2004), 122-134.

Jung, E. Alex. "RuPaul on How Straight People Steal from Gay Culture and Why Educating the Youth is a Waste of Time." Vulture. Accessed April 10, 2016. http://www.vulture.com/2016/03/rupaul-drag-race-interview.html.

Kaminski, Elizabeth and Verta Taylor. "'We're Not Just Lip-synching Up Here': Music and Collective Identity in Drag Performances." In *Identity Work and Social Movements*, edited by Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 47-76. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Keyes, Cheryl L. "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance." In *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader,* edited by Jennifer C. Post, 97-108. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Merriam, Alan. "Synesthesia and Intersense Modalities." In *The Anthropology of Music,* 85-101. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

Meyer, Moe. *An Archaeology of Posing: Essays on Camp, Drag and Sexuality.* Madison, WI: Macater Press. 2010.

"Our History." The 39th Street District. Accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.39thdistrictokc.com/about.

Samek, Alyssa A. and Theresa A. Donorio. "'Academic Drag' and the Performance of the Critical Personae: An Exchange on Sexuality, Politics, and Identity in the Academy." *Women's Studies in Communication* 36 (2013): 28-55.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

Sontag, Susan, "Notes On 'Camp'." Accessed January 8, 2016. http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html.

Stone, Ruth M. *Theory for Ethnomusicology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008.

Tewksbury, Richard. "Gender Construction and the Female Impersonator: The Process of Transforming 'he' to 'she'." *Deviant Behavior* 15, no. 1 (1994): 27-43.

The Boom. Accessed February 24, 2016, www.thebomokc.com.

Thornton, Sarah. "Introduction." In *The Subcultures Reader*, edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, 1-7. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Travis, Jr., Raphael. "Rap Music and the Empowerment of Today's Youth: Evidence in Everyday Music Listening, Music Therapy, and Commercial Rap Music." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 30, no. 2 (November 2012): 139-167.

"Upcoming Shows." The Boom. Accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.theboomokc.com/Upcoming-Shows.html.

"Weekly Shows and Events at The Boom!" The Boom. Accessed February 24, 2016. http://www.theboomokc.com/Late-Night---The-Boom.html.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society.* Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Williams, Sherley Anne. "The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry." *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1977): 542-554.

Wong, Deborah. "*Taiko* and the Asian/American Body: Drums, *Rising Sun,* and the Question of Gender." In *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, edited by Jennifer C. Post, 87-95. New York: Routledge Press, 2006.

Yahaya, Noordin, Mohammad Aslan B. Mohammad Taib, Jasmi Ismail, Zainudin Shariff, Azizi Yahaya, Yusof Boon, and Sharin Hashim. "Relationship Between Leadership Personality Types and Source of Power and Leadership Styles Among Managers." *African Journal of Business Management* 5, no. 22 (September 2011): 9635-9648. Accessed June 13, 2016. http://www.academicjournals.org/AJBM.

Appendix I: Venue Information

"The Famous OKC Strip"

"The Famous OKC Strip" is located west of Pennsylvania Avenue on Northwest 39th Street, and is known as the gay district of Oklahoma City. This one-block area of northwest Oklahoma City is the center of my field research, and all of the performances I attended are within walking distance of one another. The 39th Street District website states that in the 1970s the block of 39th Street west of Pennsylvania became known as "The Strip," and the neighborhoods south of 39th Street were sometimes called the "gayborhood."[89] In his dissertation, "The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1889-2005," sociologist Aaron Bachhofer states that even though other queer venues were already open on Northwest 39th Street, the opening of the venue Angles in 1982 established the area as "The Strip," or "Glitter Alley."[9091] Angles facilitated large crowds, and the venue had an energy and extravagance unheard of in Oklahoma City, so perhaps its popularity resulted in The Strip's

---

[89] "Our History," The 39th Street District, accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.39thdistrictokc.com/about.

[90] Aaron Lee Bachhofer, "The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1889-2005" (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 2006), 284.

[91] Note I've never heard it called Glitter Alley; the dissertation is the only time I've heard this name. It doesn't mean it's not used, but that "The Strip" is more common.

notoriety.[92] As news of the gay club spread, Bachhofer notes that the police over-patrolled the area, wrote many false ordinances against the clubs, and were known to both mentally and physically abuse people in the area.[93]

Map of "The Famous Oklahoma City Strip"



[92] Bachhofer, "The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay," 284.
[93] Ibid.

The Boom

The Boom advertises itself as "Oklahoma's Party Destination Location!"[94] It offers a variety of entertainment options throughout the week (karaoke, bingo, musical theatre, drag shows, trivia night, etc.). The venue is closed on Mondays, however every other day of the week is packed full of activities. Karaoke is hosted by drag queen Shantel Mandalay on Tuesday nights from 9 p.m. until midnight. In April of 2016, the Boom opened a new Wednesday night drag show, *Whiplash Wednesday,* hosted by Renee Hilton and either Stephanie DeBarge or Riley Moore. This show is unique because it offers a new performance time for younger performers at the Boom, outside of *Trashy Thursday.*[95]

Thursday nights at The Boom are dubbed, *Trashy Thursday,* an open talent night which was hosted by drag performers Foxxi Chanel Paige and Carmen Deveraux until April 2016.[96] The performers are mostly drag queens, though there are a few male entertainers and vocalists. According to previous host, Renee Hilton, *Trashy Thursday* gives performers and audience members a chance to "[come] out to the bars, drink and have fun. Get really drunk."[97]

---

[94] The Boom, accessed February 24, 2016 http://www.theboomokc.com.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Maria Isabel now hosts *Trashy Thursday.*

[97] Renee Hilton, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, April 9, 2015.

Friday and Saturday nights offer a variety of professional drag shows which change from week to week, though there is still a semi-set schedule. The first Friday of every month is *TGIF*, hosted by drag performer Ginger Lamar. Luxx Bentley hosts the second Friday of every month, with her *Bombshell Revue*. The third Friday of the month features drag performer Maria Isabel's *South of the Border Show*, and the month concludes with a *Glitzy Glam* show, hosted by Renee Hilton. Saturday nights are hosted by drag performer Kitty Bob Aimes or Ginger Lamar, with Maria Isabel, Renee Hilton, and a rotating guest. Sundays begin with two services of *Gospel Brunch*, featuring Kitty Bob Aimes and Norma Jean Goldenstein, and conclude with karaoke.

Every third Sunday of the month, The Boom hosts *Drag Bingo*, where the proceeds benefit Other Options and the Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association.[98] The Boom also organizes and directs full musicals and theatre performances, such as *I Love Lucy, Nunsense, and Forever Plaid.* Lastly, the Boom occasionally hosts burlesque strip tease events, which feature women as women and men as men, along with drag queens. [99]

---

[98] "Weekly Shows and Events at The Boom!" The Boom, accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.theboomokc.com/Late-Night---The-Boom.html.

[99] "Upcoming Shows," The Boom, accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.theboomokc.com/Upcoming-Shows.html.

The Boom's space is divided into two main sections that are open to the "21 and up" public. The right side of the building was used as a smoking bar until the establishment became smoke free on April 1, 2016. The left side is the main show room and bar. Most of my fieldwork took place in the main show room; however I did utilize the (at the time) smoking bar for interviews and casual conversations with performers and audience members. The main show has a formal stage, with a large red curtain drawn across the back of the stage. There are stairs that lead from the audience up to the stage in a circular fashion on each side of the stage, and stairs in the middle of the stage. There are tables placed around the room, in addition to bar-like seating that faces towards the stage. The performers almost always walk through the crowd collecting tip money while followed by a spotlight.

Typically, The Boom's evening shows are advertised as starting at 11:00 p.m. My first time attending a performance there, I showed up at 10:00 p.m. and found myself alone, with the exception of a few regulars drinking in the smoking bar. Typically, the crowd doesn't begin showing up until just after 11:00 p.m., and the shows regularly start around 11:15 p.m. Initially, I thought that the room was huge, but as the crowd began showing up, I realized that the room would soon feel small due to the number of people packed in like sardines. The audience at the

Boom is diverse in gender, sexuality, and age. Their evening performances mostly consist of the "30 and under" crowd, with a handful of people over 30, and a few over 50 attending the performances. There are more males than females present at the evening performances, and many different ethnicities are seen at the venue.

While waiting for the show to begin, the background music consists of recordings by various female performers, such as Robyn, Nicki Minaj, Beyonce, Katy Perry, and Lady Gaga. The background music is loud and bass heavy. To order anything from the bartender, even as the only customers in the room, can be a challenge. Each evening show begins with a pre-recorded visual and retro-sounding audio, concluding in a fanfare that introduces all of the "Boom Girls," not just the performers for that evening.

The Copa

The Copa is a gay club which hosts various drag shows throughout the week. Tuesday night features a strip contest, *Take it off Tuesday*, hosted by Carmen Deveraux. Similar to The Boom's *Trashy Thursday*, The Copa hosts an open talent night on Wednesdays, hosted by drag queens Kiki and Keosha. Drag queen Anastacia Fontaine hosts a Gentlemen's Night on Thursdays. On Friday and Saturday nights, The Copa embraces its "club" environment and it is a venue for dancing, with no formal drag

performances, though individuals can be seen walking around in drag in the audience. *Sinful Sunday* is a weekly drag show hosted by drag queen, Shantel Mandalay which features a rotating set of drag performers.[100]

The Copa is connected to the restaurant Gushers, gay bar the Finish Line, a sex shop, and the Habana Inn. It is a large open area, with two bars flanking each side of the dance floor. A few tables surround the dance floor, which is about a foot lower than the main level. There is also a raised stage area/dance floor (depending on the night) that is higher than the main floor. Drag performers, followed by a spotlight, utilize the raised floor, the lowered dance pit, and the audience area during their performances.

Tramps

Tramps, also known as, "Home of the Bigg Gurl Drink," is a gay bar that hosts drag shows (*The Tony Sinclair Revue)* on Sunday nights. Drag performer Raven Delray hosts this show with Roxie Hart as her co-host. The other drag performers vary depending on the night but are often Carmen Deveraux, Renee Hilton, Luxx Bentley, and Maria Isabel. Tramps is often considered a dive bar, and cigarette smoke can be sensed from some distances away.

---

[100] "The Copa," Facebook, accessed February 24, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/copaokc/?fref=ts.

The venue Tramps is long and narrow, with a bar, placed in the center, dividing the space in half. The far end of the space has pool tables, darts, and the bathrooms. The half of the room near to the entrance room has a stage area defined by a change in flooring, with tables and seats. The back wall of the stage area has a fluorescent "Tramps" sign, surrounded by a heart. The rest of the wall is covered with vertically falling shiny ribbons, that are sometimes used as a prop during performances. The sides of the stage area are lined with booths (which I think hold additional speakers, as you can feel vibrations during the performance from the music), and a few tables are placed in front of the stage. Tramps is the venue where the performers enter the audience the least. Due to the smaller performance space, patrons mostly come to the drag queen at the edge of the stage area with tips. When crowds are smaller, drag queens will adventure into the audience to stir up excitement.[101]

Notably, Tramps and The Phoenix Rising are the only venues without a spotlight during the performances.

The Phoenix Rising

The Phoenix Rising is a gay bar on The Strip with weekly drag shows on Friday and Saturday. The bar is dark and smoky, with televisions mounted along the outer walls, featuring pictures

[101] I have only seen this once, on February 28, 2016.

of naked men with close ups of their pensises. Additionally, there are large bowls near the entrance and at the bar, filled with free condoms. This venue is the most awkward for drag performances, as the stage is long and narrow, with limited seating in the center, and ample seating off to the sides. At The Phoenix Rising, I feel that it is the easiest to not pay attention to the performer, and the lack of good lighting makes the performance difficult to watch.

The Wreck Room

The Wreck Room was the only gay venue for individuals under 21 in Oklahoma City. This past January the venue closed down for an undetermined amount of time. The Wreck Room is owned by the same individual as The Phoenix Rising. The cause for The Wreck Room's closing is unknown by me; however the Wreck Room played an essential role to the beginnings of many drag queens' careers in Oklahoma City, and the space is still marked on 39th street, so I believe it deserves mentioning. Drag performer Riley Moore discussed the importance of the venue to her own career, as well as the careers of her friends:

> It [The Wreck Room] was such a great place for people to go that were underage – to get their LGBT lifestyle. But now, because how mainstream culture is, there are underage clubs that you can go to, because we're much more accepted now than we used to be. So it just kind of killed the business. So, it's really unfortunate… Like, it was work for us… And my first

time performing was at The Wreck Room.[102]

Angles

Although Angles seemed to be the heart and energy of Oklahoma City gay culture in the 1980s, it is now a gay bar that only opens to hold special events. For the drag community in Oklahoma City, Angles now serves as an essential space for different competitions, pageants, and fundraisers. The space is easily the largest of the venues on The Strip, as it has two floors and three separate bar areas. The venue Angles has a clearly defined performance space with a raised stage, surrounded by chairs, and cameras which project larger images of the performance around the venue. Further away from the stage, there are tables which facilitate performance watching and conversation. Additionally, the second floor has a glass wall, which makes it possible for additional audience members to see the performances.

Other Local Drag Venues

"Partners" and the "HiLo" are both LGBTQ+ clubs that feature drag shows. They are the most popular venue for drag kings, though they feature other queer performances, including drag queens. While I have visited both of these venues, my fieldwork was not focused on them. Neither of these venues are on The Strip. While the venues on The Strip have a lesbian presence,

[102] Riley Moore, interviewed by author, Oklahoma City, OK, February 4, 2016.

Partners and the HiLo both seemed to have a larger lesbian population in the audience than the venues on The Strip.

Appendix II: Institutional Review Board

IRB Approval

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: January 04, 2016

IRB#: 5846

Principal Investigator: Cassandra R Negron

Approval Date: 01/04/2016

Expiration Date: 12/31/2016

Study Title: Identity Creation and Empowerment in Drag Performance

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

IRB Closure



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Final Report – Inactivation

Date: June 22, 2016 **IRB#:** 5846

To: Cassandra R Negron **Inactivation Date:** 06/22/2016

Study Title: Identity Creation and Empowerment in Drag Performance

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the Final Report for the above-referenced research study. You have indicated that this study has been completed and should be inactivated. This letter is to confirm that the IRB has inactivated this research study as of the date indicated above.

Note that this action completely terminates all aspects and arms of this research study. Should you wish to reactivate this study, you will need to submit a new IRB application.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Fred Beard, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board