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**How drag performers challenge and disrupt our understandings of gender: a case study
of the Slovenian drag community**

Diploma Thesis

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Declaration on Honour

“I declare that I wrote the thesis independently using the sources dutifully cited and listed in the bibliography. The thesis was not used to obtain a different or the same title.”

“I agree the diploma thesis will be published in the electronic library of the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University and can be used as a study text.”

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Abstract

The common perception of drag is that of imitating the “opposite” gender. Drag has, however, been evolving, and its implications for gender are explored in this Master Thesis. Feminist circles are usually divided between regarding drag as proliferating gender hierarchies and stereotypes or drag as a tool for subversion and new possibilities. I have conducted my research on the case study of the Slovenian drag community in order to reach results through doing interviews and participant observation. My results pointed to drag influencing the perception of gender via offering the space for experimentation and questioning. For both the drag performers, who were my interview participants, and for the audience of drag shows, drag loosened their strict perceptions of gender and the rigid gender binary, and showcased gender as a complex concept, which offers possibilities for gender play, can be fluid, as well as changeable. Gender hierarchies, are, however, to an extent still present when it comes to doing drag and drag communities.

Keywords

Drag, drag culture, gender, drag queen, drag king, drag thing, drag community, audience, Slovenia

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Chapter 1 Context

1.1 Introduction

Men in dresses and heels, women with moustaches and beards. This is the typical association people have when it comes to the topic of drag. In recent decades, drag has developed and evolved from mere imitation, which sparked my interest into researching it, particularly what this means for its connection to gender. It has also been a debated subject in the feminist circles regarding drag's relationship to gender. The debate usually centres around drag as either proliferation of gender stereotypes and hierarchies or drag as subversion. In this Master thesis, I will be looking at and exploring the connections and relationships between drag and gender, building on existing feminist perspectives on gender, and on gender and drag. I will be doing it through the case study of the drag community in Ljubljana.

In order to guide my research, I have posed the following research questions in an attempt to answer them through the progression of my thesis: How does the evolution of drag challenge the gender binary system, and move beyond just uncovering the performativity of gender? Could it potentially contribute to a different, disruptive understanding of gender? I applied the research questions on the case study of the drag community in Slovenia in order to yield findings on the topic and reach new conclusions.

The Master Thesis will firstly put forward a context to the topic of drag. Definitions will be addressed in order to prevent confusion as to who are drag performers. This will be followed up with history of drag so as to paint a picture of its development and evolution through the years. Then a concrete history of drag in Slovenia will be presented. The literature review will contain firstly, feminist perspectives on gender, and then secondly, feminist debates surrounding drag in order to provide a base for analysis. Following suit are my own positionality and methodology, of which I employed interviews and participant observation. Finally, the analysis will hold conclusions through tying together the context, literature review and answers obtained from interviews and observation.

1.2 Definitions

Before I dive into explaining the history of drag culture in general and in Slovenia, it is important to elaborate definitions of a drag queen, drag king and drag thing. Firstly, starting off with drag queens, who are often confused or confounded with terms such as cross-dressers, female impersonators, transvestites, or transgendered individuals. The most popular and common definition of a drag queen is as Schacht and Underwood define it in *The Drag Queen Anthology: The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators (2004)*, that being an “individual publicly performing femininity and being a woman is also simultaneously acknowledged to be a man and not a woman” (Schacht and Underwood, 2004, p. 4). Furthermore, significant characteristics of drag queens also include the fact that they are performing in front of an audience, they need an audience who understands that they are actually men underneath and they are putting on a performance of femininity, an exaggeration, a parody (Schacht and Underwood, 2004, xv-xvi).

Drag queens, although they technically do cross-dress, differ from cross-dressers and transvestites because drag queens do it publicly in front of an audience, while cross-dressers and transvestites¹ do so in private, sometimes for erotic purposes, and not with the intention to perform or parody (Rupp and Taylor, 2004, p. 114). They are also not to be mistaken with transgender individuals, although transgender individuals can be drag queens as well, but it is not a prerequisite (ibidem). The term female impersonator is also used for drag queens, which is not entirely incorrect because drag queens developed from female impersonators, as will be presented later on (Baker, 1994). As Halberstam notes about the difference between drag kings and male impersonators, the inverted description also stands true for the difference between female impersonators and drag queens. Female impersonators stem from a tradition in theatre and aim to create a believable performance of womanhood, while the aim of the drag queen is to perform femininity in an exaggerated, parodic and often theatrical manner (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232). The pool of who “can” be a drag queen is, however, expanding from it being reduced to only men, drag queens can also be trans women, cis women, non-binary individuals etc.

¹ Derogatory term, but it is used in this section for the purposes of explanation.

Similarly, to the drag queen, a drag king is, as Halberstam puts it, “a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232). Male impersonation is also rooted in theatre, but Halberstam points out that drag kings came about much later, and do not have such a long track record (ibidem). This will be elaborated more later on . Just as in the case of female impersonators, male impersonators also strive towards creating a believable performance of manhood, while the drag king, in an exaggerated and parodic manner, performs masculinity, revealing its theatricality (ibidem). Male impersonators and drag kings are sometimes confused and confounded with butches, women who are more masculine in demeanour and dress in masculine clothing every day (ibidem). They don’t perform it in front of an audience, it is their day-to-day presentation, and sometimes their aim is also to “pass”, but not always (ibidem). Butches also identify as lesbians, while male impersonators and drag kings are not necessarily lesbians, but they can be (ibidem). Drag kings comprise of persons assigned female at birth and women doing masculinity, transgender persons doing masculinity and/or femininity, and women doing femininity, the so-called bio-queens (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 276)

Drag things are the newest phenomenon on the scene which is why it is difficult to find a definition since not much is written on them in general, and nothing is written on them academically yet. Essentially, they are doing non-binary drag, and with it they are challenging the limits of gender as well as the limits of drag or what we know as drag (Knecht, 2020). Drag things are more open to any kind and type of expression of gender (ibidem).

1.3 History of drag culture

1.3.1 Drag queens

Roger Baker in his landmark book *History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (1994) traces the history of drag queens all the way to ancient Greece and the invention of drama, where female impersonators were present, and drag evolved out of female impersonation (Baker, 1994, p. 24). He explains that actors were wearing masks and portraying Clytemnestra and Hecuba (ibidem). Baker also briefly mentions that female impersonators were also present in China and Japan in their classical theatres (ibidem). He puts more emphasis on the origins of drag queens in the West, in England to be exact and in theatre, dating back to the 13th century (ibidem). The inception of theatre took place with the formal drama issued by the

church, because the church wanted to make its liturgy more accessible to the people, who were mostly illiterate (Baker, 1994, p. 25). Therefore, it started dramatizing the most prominent stories of mass and scripture in order to spread to the people, which has its beginnings in 1100 (Baker, 1994, pp. 25-26). Due to women not being allowed to assume prominent roles in the Church, they were also denied from acting in these plays, so the female characters were all played by men (Baker, 1994, p. 26). As the theatre was progressing more and more, it also separated from the Church, but the rule that women were not allowed to be actresses on stage was still in effect, because the Church still had a big grip on society (ibidem).

With the progression of theatre, the actors and their costumes were improving more and more, and it happened sometimes that the audience was unable to detect that the person on-stage was not actually a woman (Baker, 1994, pp. 27-31). Plays came to be very popular in the 16th century, which is also evident in the first permanent theatre being erected in London in 1576 (ibidem). Baker explains that female impersonation bloomed in theatre because it provided a space where creativity was encouraged in any way possible and rules, which were presiding over society, could be shattered and reworked (Baker, 1994, p. 34). Female impersonation was considered theatre's common practice, and boys were "schooled" on how to act, talk, behave and walk like women, and some female impersonators even attained stardom (Baker, 1994, p. 113). The word "drag" supposedly originates from the Elizabethan and Jacobean era when it was used as a colloquialism (Ashburn, 2015, p. 1), due to female impersonators wearing long dresses which would "drag" on the floor as they moved on-stage (Nasr, 2021). Female impersonation saw its demise, however, in the 17th century with the new king, Charles II (Baker, 1994, p. 82). The king permitted women to become actresses, and that resulted in drag and female impersonation retiring from main stages (ibidem).

Female impersonation was reduced to comedy in theatres, and used to poke fun at women (Baker, 1994, pp. 27-31). It was being used as comedic relief, and stayed in comedy for a long while (ibidem). The characters which emerged and were significant were the characters of an older dame and a nun for the purposes of comedic relief (Baker, 1994, pp. 79-112). Female impersonation and drag spread and grew in the early 18th century, it also became more prevalent to meet up in designated spaces, among them "Molly Houses", where the higher social class members could dress up as women, turn into whoever they desired, and perform as well on a stage (ibidem). Molly houses were exclusively meant for gay men as they were hiding from prosecution, due to homosexuality being illegal during that time (Norton, 2016).

Female impersonation moved to performing burlesque, the so-called “low comedy”, at the end of the 19th century, therefore, staying in the comedic realm going in to the 20th century (Baker, 1994, pp. 82, 159). This was also the case in the United States, where female impersonation also entered burlesque and vaudeville at the end of the 19th century, comedy and satire were its essential elements as well as being very sexual (Chauncey, 1994, p. 295). During the end of the 19th century, besides female impersonation being part of burlesque, it was also part of the so called “concert parties”, which consisted of a diversity of performers traveling around England and putting on shows (Baker, 1994, 180-205). Their popularity grew after World War I, and they continued until the 1950s (ibidem). There were plenty of different female impersonation acts, especially dames, which incorporated a lot of usage of camp and satire, and it eventually shaped into glamour drag (ibidem). Towards their end, concert parties were essentially putting on drag shows (ibidem).

Baker emphasizes a boost in female impersonation in and since World War I in general, not just concert parties (Baker, 1994, p. 171). This was followed by the Prohibition period (1920-1933) in America, which forced the queer scene into hiding (Nasr, 2021). Thus, gay clubs began to develop, which were refuges for both men and women, as they did not discriminate on the basis of gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity (ibidem). There, the art of drag developed freely to the point where it became more popular and well-known, which in turn triggered a crackdown on such events by the police (ibidem). Florence Tamagne in her *Cultural History of Sexuality in the Modern Age* (2010) also notes that female impersonation done by soldiers was seen as morale boosting and very common in the army, but in between the world wars the attitude shifted (Tamagne, 2010, p. 61). Female impersonation became more and more connected to homosexuality, and by the end of World War II, it started to be seen in a disapproving manner in society in general and could lead to expulsion from the army as well due to the connection to homosexuality (ibidem).

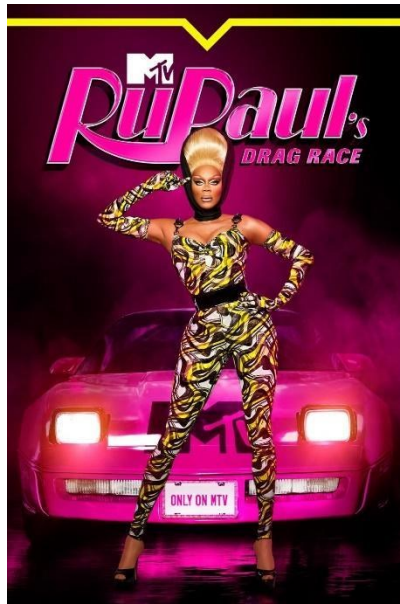
Simultaneously, however, since the 1960s, in England and United States, there was an expansion of gay clubs, and with them drag queens could shine, because they did not have to do the character of dames anymore (Baker, 1994, 200-210). Before this time, drag queens attained popularity and success only by doing comedic characters, but now they could create and do whatever they desired to do (ibidem). This type of performance was gaining popularity and the performances were also being imbued with variety, diversity and creativity (ibidem).

Newton notes in her work *Mother Camp* that the complete term “drag queen” originates from the 60s as part of both the expansion of the contemporary drag queens or at least closer to drag queens as we know them today, and the simultaneous bad attitude towards them (Newton, 1972). The attitude toward the whole LGBT+ community was unfavourable, but drag queens in particular were viewed as “degenerates”, furthering stereotypes about homosexuals being feminine (ibidem).

Drag began to experience its heyday again in the 1970s (Nasr, 2021). With the appearance of the so-called drag balls in the United States, where impersonators presented themselves in their most luxurious costumes and dresses (ibidem). The queens walked like this on the catwalk, where they were judged by the judges (ibidem). As a result, the terms “drag mother” and “drag house” also developed (ibidem). A drag mom was the person who usually took young performers under her wing, trained them and acted as the matriarch of the group (ibidem). These groups are also called drag houses or chosen families, because many homosexuals were rejected by their birth families because of their identity (ibidem). “Children” in these families often took on surnames and were named by the mother's side of the house (ibidem). Drag queens were also becoming more political and involved in politics of the gay and lesbian liberation movement (ibidem). They were in the forefront of the Stonewall riot of 1969 due to the police continuing with frequent raids of gay clubs (ibidem). A well-known drag queen who protested against police oppression in the 1970s was Marsha P. Johnson, who was also in the forefront of the Stonewall riot, leading to the creation of the Gay liberation front (ibidem).

In the 1990s, RuPaul, one of today's most famous drag queens on the global level, can be seen in the Image below, started making his appearances (ibidem). In 2009, he began producing the show “RuPaul's Drag Race”, which quickly gained popularity in both the queer community and society in general (ibidem). With this show, the drag scene experienced its greatest boom and penetration into the wider society and in the mainstream (ibidem). Today, it already has fifteen seasons and several "spin off" series in different countries around the world (ibidem).

Figure 1 Drag queen RuPaul appearing on a promotional poster for RuPaul’s Drag Race



(Source: IMDB, n. d.)

1.3.2 Drag kings

Drag kings have a much shorter history than the previously presented drag queens, Halberstam points out in his *Female Masculinity* (1998). As drag queens, drag kings, too, have evolved from male impersonation. It has its roots in theatre, just as female impersonation, but it started much later, that being in the restoration period in England with king Charles II, who, as was mentioned before in the description of the history of drag queens, allowed women to perform on-stage (Halberstam, 1998, p. 233). Until the 1860s, women could be playing so-called “breeches roles” or “trouser roles”, where they would dress up in trousers, a traditionally male clothing during that time, but it wasn’t perceived as imitating men or masculinity, instead it was meant to highlight femininity (ibidem). After the 1860s, both in England and United States, it shaped into male impersonation because their presentations as men were so believable (ibidem). A lot of 19th century male impersonation was comprised of women, who looked “boyish”, playing a role of a boy, meaning they were portraying a man, who was not mature (ibidem). It was not so welcomed that women would be impersonating a believable mature masculinity (ibidem).

From the 19th into the 20th century, Halberstam notes that it represented an intriguing occurrence due to the fact that actresses who were cross dressing on-stage but also off-stage were gaining a big female fan base (ibidem). Those were, for example, Annie Hindle, as the first male impersonator who was very popular, and Radclyffe Hall (ibidem). They started to expose the artificiality of male masculinity, and portrayed female masculinity, in a politicized manner and

also eroticized (ibidem). As they were cross-dressing also off-stage, for them it wasn't only theatre (ibidem). But the male impersonation connected to theatre thrived also in the first 20 years of the 20th century, however, it saw a decrease after that (Halberstam, 1998, p. 234). In the year 1933, there was a code passed in the United States, which prohibited any "sexually perverted" performances, as they called them, and so male impersonation faded out of mainstream theatre (ibidem). There were a few male impersonators who persevered, for example Storme DeLaverie, therefore, it did live on in a small way from the 30s to the 60s within the drag community subculture of gay men (ibidem).

There is a common consensus, though, that a proper culture of drag kings was not established within the bar culture of lesbians to make up for the gap that was left after male impersonators going extinct from theatre (ibidem). After a long hiatus, drag king culture emerged in the 90s and shaped into a subcultural sensation (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232). Drag king performances were appearing in queer clubs (ibidem). Specifically drag king clubs started operating in New York, London and San Francisco, and it included drag king performances, lap dancing and stripping (ibidem). The clubs also started holding drag king competitions (ibidem). The characteristics of the drag king performances moved from male impersonation into gender bending, gender "confusion" and gender "deviance" (ibidem).

Halberstam highlights, though, drag king acts and performances were becoming more popular, it is not an indication that they will become mainstream in the near future, especially not in the extent that drag queens entered the mainstream (Halberstam, 1998, p. 233). It still holds true today, drag kings are much less widely known than drag queens, and the mainstream society is not always aware that they exist. RuPaul's Drag Race, as the most known mainstream drag show, only features drag queens, and does not particularly mention or allow drag kings on the show. Therefore, there exists nothing similar in scale for drag kings, but they have created during the escalation of COVID in 2020 a digital drag king show, called "Kings of the World" on the American streaming platform Twitch (Drag King History, n. d.). It existed only for four months, but it made an impression as the first global, monthly, digital show showcasing the variety and diversity of drag kings (ibidem). Drag kings appeared on TV, however, as part of shows which feature a variety of drag artists, such as "The Boulet Brothers' Dragula" and "Call Me Mother", which are both competitions similar to RuPaul's Drag Race except they include different drag artists not merely drag queens (Duncan, 2023). Perhaps the most known drag

king is Landon Cider due to winning Dragula in 2019 and also being on Call Me Mother, and can be viewed in the image below (ibidem).

Figure 2 Landon Cider



(Source: IMDB, n.d.)

1.3.3 Drag things

Drag things are a very recent phenomenon, therefore, not much is written about them and their history is hard to track down. The origins of the term drag thing were also not possible to track down. The only sources on drag things are interviews with the most known drag thing, Rose Butch (Knegt, 2020), who is described on their IMDB page, as the first drag thing (IMDB, n. d.). Rose explicitly mentions in the interview that they go by the identifier “drag thing”, and not drag queen or drag king (ibidem). They have been a drag thing for 6 years until the point of the interview, therefore, the origins can, based on this source, be traced to 2014 in relation to the term drag thing (ibidem). Rose Butch made drag things visible in the media by appearing on “Canada’s a Drag”, which is a documentary series produced by CBC Arts and it portrays various drag performers from Canada (ibidem).

Figure 3 Rose Butch



(Source: IMDB, n. d.)

1.4 Drag History in Slovenia

When drag was reaching its second heyday on the American scene, we can start to see mentions of it in the media in Slovenia. The beginnings of the drag scene in Slovenia can be traced back to the 80s when consensual homosexual relationships were decriminalized in 1976 (Velikonja, 2004, p. 7). Like the entire Slovenian queer scene, the drag scene also stands and exists in Slovenia thanks to two clubs in Ljubljana, which have common beginnings and people who are responsible for their creation and existence. They emerged from gay and lesbian movements that fought against discrimination, equal rights and a safe space from which to operate (Velikonja, 2004). The club where even today queer activities and gatherings take place during the week and parties on the weekends is club “Tiffany” in Ljubljana, which is the only gay club in Slovenia. Tiffany officially started under the name Magnus-Monokel in 1993 (Velikonja, 2004, p. 44; Kulturni center Q, n. d.). Over the next five years, it underwent many innovations and changes until 1998, when the club split into the gay club Tiffany and the lesbian club “Monokel”, in this form they still operate today (Velikonja, 2004, pp. 44-50; Kulturni center Q, n. d.). Once a month, Tiffany hosts drag events called “Saturday Divas”, which usually feature three local drag artists per night (Kulturni center Q, n. d.).

Another club where the Slovenian drag scene began to develop is K4. It first appeared in the early 80s, at a time when the Yugoslav government² was becoming more liberal, but it officially

² Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia as a socialist republic until 1991, when it gained its independence.

opened its doors in 1989 (Velikonja, 2004, pp. 9, 11, 21). Under its auspices, it hosted many different types of alternative and underground parties, but especially important for the queer scene were the so-called “Roza” parties, translated as pink parties, which took place once a week on Saturday and every Sunday of the month (Velikonja, 2004, p. 21). Today, K4 still hosts pink parties, but only on a couple of Saturdays per year, where Slovenian and foreign drag artists can perform.

Over the years, many drag queens and some drag kings appeared on the Slovenian scene, however, due to the short time of them being active, only selected ones are known to the general public. One of the first and most recognizable queens is Salome. She often attended parties in K4, and in 1989 at the age of 21 she performed for the first time at what was then known as “Transvestite night” (Velikonja, 2004, p. 21). Numerous performances followed, as well as activities in other areas of the Slovenian scene. She was also the host of two high-profile Slovenian queer events, namely “Rozavizija” and “Slovenia’s Next Best Drag” competition, both took place in the K4 club (Velikonja, 2004, p. 21). Slovenia’s Next Best Drag competition first took place in 2007, then it continued in 2008, had a break until it resumed in 2014, and the last one took place in 2016 (Narobe, n. d.). Salome is still active in the community today, you can meet her at the Tiffany club at “Tea parties with Salome”, where she hosts interesting guests and interlocutors and talks about various topics concerning the queer community.

The year 2002 is also important for the Slovenian drag scene, when the group “Sestre”, composed of three drag queens by the names of Daphne, Marlenna and Emperatrizz, won the selection to represent Slovenia at the Eurovision Song Contest with the song "Samo ljubezen", translated as only love (Velikonja, 2004, p. 69). All of them had been performing at pink parties at K4 and in Tiffany up until that point (ibidem). They placed fourteenth in the Eurovision Song Contest. Their performance was particularly important because they were one of the first artists to highlight the existence of the drag scene to the Slovenian public, which also triggered outbursts against the queer community (ibidem). Over the next 20 years, many performances, events and competitions took place (Velikonja, 2004). Many drag queens and kings appeared, but they are not known to the general public due to the fear of the still present stigma against the queer community, and consequently only a rare appearance in the media. Between 2016 and 2018, the Slovenian drag scene almost did not exist. Unofficially, we classify a new wave of the Slovenian drag scene after the year 2018 when new drag queens started making appearances, and it is deemed as the new wave of drag in Slovenia.

The drag community has grown from a handful to more than fifteen active drag artists in recent years during the new wave era. This is mainly due to the members of the community themselves, as they often organize the performances themselves without external support. In the last five years, various drag performances have taken place in Slovenia, currently the most famous are the performances in the form of “Dragoslavia”, which is a digital drag show composed of various drag artists from Slovenia and the Balkans, and the “Queen of May” competition, which has been running for four years. As mentioned before, drag shows are also organized every month at club Tiffany, and sporadically at K4. More and more drag shows are also being organized outside of these two venues and also outside of Ljubljana³, which has been the hub of drag culture for most of Slovenia’s drag history. Drag shows as special events are now sometimes being performed in various cities and towns across Slovenia as well. The appearance of drag queen Jenna Dick on the show “Slovenia has talent” also played an important role because the drag community has not been so visible in the mainstream for many years due to the backlash received in the past. The reception was mixed, although more positive than years before, Jenna received great points in the show, but there was some backlash.

Despite mixed receptions, the drag community has been developing lively and diversely since 2018, currently comprising of around 25 drag performers. They are of a diversity of gender identifications outside of drag and in drag, and are not limited to performing the “opposite” gender, as is the traditional understanding of drag. This will be expanded on later in the analysis portion of the thesis.

³ Some examples of shows and events outside of the two Ljubljana club spaces and Ljubljana in general are: drag shows as independent events in Ljubljana, drag shows at university parties in Ljubljana, drag shows at quiz nights in Ljubljana, drag performances at pride parades and drag shows in Maribor, Koroška and Velenje, drag shows in Koper, drag shows in Ptuj etc.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Drag performers and doing drag has been subject to debates in the sphere of feminism, bringing about somewhat polarizing views with regard to its relationship to gender and the gender binary. The main streams of argumentation surrounding the topic can be divided into three bigger blocks; one being composed of feminists arguing that doing drag perpetuates gender stereotypes and performs femininity or masculinity in a way that reinforces the gender binary, and not challenges it. The other block is composed of feminists who argue that drag performers uncover the performativity and social construction of gender, femininity and masculinity, and therefore exposes the gender binary as an unnatural, artificially created societal order which poses a threat to said established binary. And the third one comprises of feminists seeing possibilities of drag beyond uncovering the performativity of gender. In the literature review, I will firstly be presenting feminists' perspectives on gender in general, and then their arguments surrounding drag in more detail in order to be able to comprehend the full picture of academic discussions surrounding the relationship between gender and drag culture.

2.1 Feminist perspectives on gender

Simone de Beauvoir in her fundamental book titled *The Second Sex* (originally from 1949), poses the question of what even is a woman (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 3), and then famously answers that “One is not born but becomes a woman” (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 295). Beauvoir alludes to the distinction between sex and gender, with sex based in biology and gender based on social and cultural norms, which is later cemented by Gayle Rubin, who is presented next. Therefore, as Beauvoir continues, culture and society creates women, and they are characterized in relation to men (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 6). The man and masculinity are taken as the default, as humanity, and his experiences are viewed as applicable to humanity universally (ibidem). On the other hand, the woman and femininity are considered as the “Other”, she is characterized in relation to the man, not characterized on her own-she is the in-between (Beauvoir, 2009, pp. 5-6). The man is the subject, masculinity is active, dominant, based in reason, and the woman is the object, femininity is passive, submissive, based in emotions-therefore, what it means to be a woman and femininity are defined by men (Beauvoir, 2009, pp. 5-6, 46, 63, 114). Therefore, as Beauvoir points that it is not innate to women, femininity is constructed culturally and socially, and the femininity already starts evolving from a young age, or rather it is enforced upon her

via society's perception of femininity, it is not due to her biology (Beauvoir, 2009, pp. 5-6; Beauvoir, 1997, p. 307). It is done so in order to subjugate women and reduce them to an existence in relation to men which yields submissiveness and servitude on the part of women towards men (ibidem). Femininity is thus seen as negative and as a downfall for women, as a by-product of masculinity.

Building on Beauvoir's allusion on the distinction between sex and gender, Gayle Rubin in her ground breaking work *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex* (1975) laid an important foundation for studying gender in theorizing a sex/gender system, where gender is separate and different from the biological sex (Rubin, 1975, p. 159). They are not innately and "naturally" connected, where biology would immediately presuppose a certain type of behaviour. Rubin argues that sex, by which she means different genitalia of women and men, different chromosomal structure etc, differs from gender, which is a range of cultural and social meanings, norms and behaviours attributed to the different sexes based on their biological differences (ibidem). The sex/gender system that Rubin uses is considered the root of women's oppression, and she argues that gender is a division of the sexes which is culturally and socially forced upon them (Rubin, 1975, p. 159, 179). Rubin argues that although differences based on sex are fixed, differences based on gender are the consequence of interventions of social nature, which tell men and women how they should act, and are oppressive to women (Rubin, 159, p. 204).

Expanding on Rubin's conclusions are radical feminists which further claim that gender is an institution, which is heteropatriarchal and oppressive towards women, as it is attributed to biological sex and functions to establish the superiority of men and the subordination of women (MacKinnon, 2001). Femininity is viewed as detrimental to women, it is viewed as one of the many ways in which men dominate women in the patriarchal society (ibidem). In their view, a woman who comes to terms and articulates her femininity is hurting herself, and the way out for women is to renounce femininity and embrace more masculine or androgynous way of presenting herself (ibidem).

The thus far presented perspectives on gender by liberal and radical feminists of the second wave of feminism view gender, man and woman, femininity and masculinity as stable and fixed categories, which poststructuralist theorist of the third wave of feminism, Judith Butler, challenges in their theory of gender performativity. Butler states that gender is a category, which

is not based in stability, coherence or fixity (Butler, 1990). Various texts or books of Judith Butler will be utilized, those being *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) and *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* (1996). Butler argues that the nature of gender is that it is performative, indicating, therefore, that it exists only to the degree that it is performed (Butler, *Performative Acts*⁴, 1988, p, 278). Butler postulates that we are born into a sexed body, but gender is not bound by the physical body, it is a construction of social nature, and is thus susceptible to alterations and to be contested and debated (Butler, *Performative Acts*, 1988, p. 273). Instead of constituting the inner essence of the sexed body, gender is of performative nature (ibidem). As gender does not signal an inner “essence”, it is constituted through acts, and if there are no acts, which are being performed, gender is non-existent (ibidem). Therefore, gender is constantly being generated and repeated in interaction (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 25). Origin of gender is, thus, not tied to a body, but lies in its performativity (Butler, *Performative Acts*, 1988, p. 274).

Butler differentiates between “performance” and “performativity”, whereas performativity is implemented via performance, meaning via the repetition of societal and cultural norms, which disguises the performative core of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 145). People repeat these norms not by choice, therefore, developing into a “woman” or “man” is enforced upon us (ibidem). Butler denies the existence of a pre-linguistic or pre-discursive subject carrying out gender norms and acts, because subjects are performatively made through them, thus subjects are consequences of language (ibidem). Butler continues that carrying out gender norms and acts begins at birth by announcing that the baby is either a boy or a girl, and that unleashes the process of “girling”, where the girl is required to repeat the gender acts and norms in order to be considered a graspable and fathomable subject (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 232). Femininity, Butler argues, is, therefore, not chosen, but is inflicted, and femininity is historically inseparable from control, penalty, restraint (ibidem).

The material body develops into its gender via a range of actions that are being repeated and strengthened as the time passes (ibidem). Therefore, by constantly repeating and performing norms attached to each of the genders, bodies transform themselves into gendered bodies

⁴ Shortened versions of Judith Butler’s titles are added to in text citations so the reader is able to follow easier and deduce faster from which text an argument is taken.

(Butler, *Imitation*, 1996, p. 376). Butler further argues that there is no inner male essence or inner female essence, which would predate the performed gender (*ibidem*). Meaning that a particular gender is not automatically the property of a particular sex (Butler, *Imitation*, 1996, p. 378). Femininity and masculinity as identity features, as they put it, are made by the heterosexual order of society, and are illusions (*ibidem*). Therefore, as there is no inner essence of gender, it is a fantasy installed and imprinted on our bodies (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 136). Gender is “the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 140).

Moving from understanding performativity of gender on the basis of structure to active gender subjectivity on the individual level, Hausman and her work *Do Boys Have to Be Boys? Gender, Narrativity, and the John/Joan Case* (2000) is employed. Hausman postulates that gender is an instrument of self-representation, it is one of the processes in which we can construct and develop our own identities (Hausman, 2000, p. 116). In this manner, gender is being actively made and constructed by people (*ibidem*). Gender is considered a narrative, and narratives express information about people (*ibidem*). Hausman continues that by understanding gender as narrative, gender turns into a “dynamic category of subjectivity” instead of being a static category (Hausman, 2000, p. 117). She thinks that sex and gender should be taken more as ideas and less so as facts (Hausman, 2000, p. 118). Society influences our gender narratives due to us living in the gender system, which is binary, but Hausman argues that by acknowledging gender as narrative, we reclaim more power and control over our self-representation (*ibidem*).

2.2 Feminist debates around drag culture

2.2.1 Drag culture as reaffirmation of the gender binary and proliferation of gender stereotypes

In the work of S. P. Schacht, *Turnabout: Gay Drag Queens and the Masculine Embodiment of the Feminine* (2002a), the argument is set on drag queens specifically, and it is argued that they do not appreciate femininity and women, but that it is instead a display of the superiority of men (Schacht, 2002a, p. 167). Schacht further argues that drag performers do not represent a counteract to the established gender binary and gender norms, but that they mirror femininity as it is conceived in stereotypical terms within society, and that is usually a degrading image and being viewed as an object (*ibidem*). In Schacht’s view, drag queens do not bring forward

femininity in actuality but a parody of femininity performed through masculinity, and thus drag queens are able to reap the benefits of the two genders simultaneously (Schacht, 2002b, p. 175). Drag queens use and abuse femininity in order to gain dominance and superiority in the gay community, they gain more power, status, idolization and admiration in the community at the expense of women and femininity (Schacht, 2002a, p. 167). The sort of embodiment of the feminine by the masculine includes clear and direct portrayals of stereotypes connected to women and femininity, and thus cementing these stereotyped views and gender norms connected to them, as well as the gender binary and the gender hierarchy subsequently (ibidem). Instead of being subversive, Schacht argues drag queens are perpetuating stereotypes, and are thus harmful to femininity and women.

Janice Raymond in her book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1994) comments on drag queens in a similar direction, but it is important to note that she considers drag queens to be transgender (Raymond, 1994, p. 25). The term transgender is taken as an umbrella term to encompass “preoperative and postoperative transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, cross dressers, gays and lesbians, bisexuals, and straights who exhibit any kind of dress and/or behaviour interpreted as “transgressing” gender roles” (Raymond, 1994, p. 25). Raymond disagrees with drag queens posing a transgression and disruption to gender norms, she argues that a majority of transgender individuals, therefore also encompassing drag queens, are male and their aim is not to subvert (ibidem). She argues that drag queens are not activists but that they centre femininity yet again as a construction made by men, meaning drag queens are not dismantling the patriarchal system and the gender binary but they are in fact keeping sex differences, and with it the established social order (Raymond, 1994, p. 27).

Raymond states drag queens (men impersonating and dressing as women) are often compared to women wearing pants (ibidem). She posits that this is not comparable since women wearing clothes traditionally associated with men, for example pants, business suits, blazers etc., it is not to try to appear as men, by doing so they are not trying to make a profit off of mirroring the behaviour and clothes stereotypically associated with men (ibidem). What women are trying to do by that, Raymond claims, is to be comfortable, lower the likelihood of harassment, and to symbolically “wear” the power, to have the status afforded to men in society (Raymond, 1994, p. 28). Raymond continues that when it is the other way around, meaning when men wear clothes typically associated with women, they are parodying (ibidem).

Furthermore, she says that through the reactions of the audience members of drag shows, which she claims are mainly men, who are shouting, whistling and howling at the drag queens, we can deduce more about how women are still received and regarded in society as objects, and less about dismantling gender norms and boundaries (ibidem). Raymond argues that drag queens theatrically parade in women's clothing but at the end of the day they are still men, and get to enjoy privileges that come with that (ibidem). By imitating women's behaviour and look, they may obtain some fame and earnings, but they do not counter the all-encompassing political power and dominance of the male class of which they are still a part of (ibidem). Raymond concludes that drag culture is merely another way of "male self-expression and exhibitionism" (Raymond, 1994, p. 28), and it does not dig into the societal power dynamics and into the essence of masculinity, which revolves around power.

Marilyn Frye in her book *Politics of Reality - Essays in Feminist Theory* (1983) goes even further in her argument by saying drag done by men is not only a parody but a hate for women (Frye, 1983, p. 138). Frye posits that impersonating femininity and wearing feminine clothes does not equate to loving women or to identifying with them or identifying with that which is considered feminine (Frye, 1983, p. 137). Similarly, to Raymond, Frye highlights the theatricalization connected to expressing femininity via doing drag, and that it is essentially either joking at the expense of women, who are already oppressed by femininity, or playing a game with something so taboo as expressing femininity as a man (ibidem). She compares man impersonating women to a sort of sport, where men express dominance and power over femininity just like how they express power and dominance in sports over physical elements (ibidem). Frye continues that gay men may come to excel in expressing femininity, which can bring them praise and respect, even idolization from others (ibidem). For Frye, however, gaining command of the feminine, becoming a sort of a virtuoso of the feminine, is not in itself feminine, it remains masculine, therefore not an expression of a love for women, but that of hate for them (ibidem).

Interestingly so, Frye emphasizes that gay men are typically perceived and regarded as more feminine or "womanly" in our society, which is considered an insult in the patriarchal society that values men and masculinity, and is subsequently geared towards hating women-those are its two pillars (Frye, 1983, p. 136). She makes a comparison saying "he is subject to being pegged at the level of sexual status, personal authority and civil rights which are presumptive for women" (Frye, 1983, p. 137). In her point of view, this is not a fair claim because gay men

are still wholly men as other men, she claims that homosexuality is not incompatible with being committed to masculinity and being committed to hating women (ibidem). Frye argues that the very aspects which fuel confusion in heterosexual people of the masculinity and manhood of gay men, are the aspects which confirm it (ibidem).

Doing drag and dressing up in feminine clothes or having a more feminine style in general also out of drag is usually connected to gay men, but it is not an expression of love for women by gay men (ibidem). Frye states that gay men who have gained command of impersonating women and mastered it have “the very first claim to manhood” (Frye, 1983, p. 138). She explains this statement by acknowledging that homophobia is oftentimes connected to men who are less secure or insecure with their masculinity (ibidem). Therefore, a man who does not shy away from putting on women’s clothes and re-enacting their behaviour is mocking heterosexual men who are scared of femininity and avoid it (ibidem). In this vein, heterosexual men are then actually inferior to gay men and their masculinity, because gay men are secure enough in their masculinity to perform femininity, which is the bottom of the barrel of our society (ibidem). It is not about women or the love and appreciation for women, but it is about men, manhood and their hate for women, which all men have in common, Frye claims (ibidem).

In her book of essays *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), bell hooks also addresses how doing drag is not subversive and presents it through an intersectional lens of gender, race and class. bell hooks acknowledges, however, that drag culture has developed out of wanting to question, protest and subvert society’s gender norms, and it has developed out of the perception that identity is constructed (hooks, 1992, p. 145). She makes a similar point to Janice Raymond when she reminisces on how she used to like to dress as a man, and that it was connected to power (ibidem). It was a way to symbolically step from a powerless position to a position of power or privilege (ibidem). hooks goes on to make a comparison, and argues that men impersonating the way women dress is viewed as a step in the opposite direction, from power to powerlessness in our patriarchal, capitalist, white supremacist society (hooks, 1992, p. 146). For black men the situation is different due to them already occupying a more powerless position in comparison to white men in our society, and the powerless position is perceived as feminine, and thus emasculating (hooks, 1992, p. 147). In order to compensate for their lack of “phallic power”, they have to pronounce it in the form of masculinity, which is openly misogynistic, and therefore grounded in hate for women (ibidem).

She gives the example of black heterosexual male comedians appearing in drag in order to impersonate black women (ibidem). Due to them having the “guts” to appear as women in public and ridicule them, they in this way establish their phallic power (ibidem). In this context, the impersonated black woman is presented as the target of mockery and hate, the black woman is considered the feminine the society permits and encourages to ridicule and hate (hooks, 1992, p. 146). Through mocking women and the feminine, and particularly through mocking black women, the black heterosexual man establishes his phallic power at the expense of a group more powerless than himself (ibidem). By performing a stereotyped portrayal of a black woman, sexist and racist gender norms are being reinforced rather than subverted.

hooks goes on to address drag performers, who do not partake in drag for comedic purposes but are rather serious about doing drag. She states that these black men, both homosexual and heterosexual, who are serious drag performers aim to counter these representations of black manhood, which are heterosexist (hooks, 1992, p. 147). They have been critiquing this misogynistic show of phallic power and its accompanying form of masculinity by gender blending and bending (ibidem). However, hooks points out, their drag does not end up being subversive. That is because they centre the construction of their femininity around white womanhood, particularly upper-class white womanhood (ibidem). In this way, the drag performers are upholding and reinforcing classist and white supremacist perceptions of womanhood and of beauty when formulating gender and beauty instead of subverting and challenging them (ibidem).

Another aspect of drag culture and particularly drag queens upholding and perpetuating the patriarchal system and the established gender binary and gender order is reflected in Berbary and Johnson in their article *En/Activist Drag: Kings Reflect on Queerness, Queens, and Questionable Masculinities* (2017), where they explored the dynamics within the drag community between drag kings and drag queens by interviewing drag kings. They expressed that they’ve encountered some discrimination on the part of drag queens directed towards them (Berbary and Johnson, 2017, p. 8). Drag kings reflected that many of the drag queens looked down on them, and perceived drag kings as less due to “androcentrism, phallocentrism, and their inability to access hegemonic masculinity” (Berbary and Johnson, 2017, p. 8). The drag queens, therefore, do not allocate the same amount of validity, prominence, esteem and status to drag kings as they experience themselves and recognize in fellow drag queens (ibidem). Furthermore, Berbary and Johnson write that drag kings also articulated another problematic

aspect of drag queens, which pertained to them anticipating the “advantages” that accompany femininity (for example getting told you’re pretty or beautiful, having your style admired, people using the pronouns she/her for them etc.). But at the same time anticipating and keeping the “advantages” that accompany masculinity (for example taking up space, using misogyny, sexism, dominance and coercion to hog stages, using their economic, social capital and building more of it etc.) (ibidem).

2.2.2 Drag culture as subversion and challenge to the gender binary

Esther Newton in her book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972) conducted an anthropological study of drag queens in three American cities, and the book is considered one of the principal pieces of writing which challenges the “natural” connection between sex and gender (Newton, 1972). Newton argued that the key takeaway from drag culture is its ability to cast doubt on the system of sex roles, as she calls it, which appears as natural (Newton, 1972, p. 103). She goes on to say that if a particular behaviour and attitude, which is attributed to a particular sex in our society (in the traditional sense meaning either male or female), can be emulated and attained by the sex connected to a different set of behaviours, such as a man dressing up as a woman for the purpose of doing drag, then that means the behaviour attached to a certain sex is not naturally given but is attained (ibidem). By doing drag, the behaviour connected to sex roles is exposed as being an appearance, it is, what she characterizes, as the “outside”, and that can be changed whenever (ibidem).

Newton emphasizing that drag queens were disrupting the “natural” relationship between sex and gender by performing a version of femininity, anchored in society (Newton, 1972, p. 101), presents a base upon which Butler builds with their theory of gender performativity. The femininity, which drag queens perform, ranges from physical modifications, such as breastplates, hip pads, heavy makeup, wigs, wearing clothes typically deemed feminine, such as high heels, dresses, accessories, to altering their language, voice, gestures, body language, facial expressions (Newton, 1972, p. 101). The femininity that they express is, however, “camp”, meaning it is done in an exaggerated, humorous, parodical manner through the lens of a gay man, but it points to the artificiality of femininity as it can be recreated by men (Newton, 1972, p. 103). She claimed that doing drag points to the difference between the outer (visible on the outside) and the inner, instead of automatically assuming that the inner and the outer are naturally linked, they can be modified (Newton, 1972, p. 100). Newton explains this by saying

that for drag queens, being of male sex didn't naturally and automatically guide them to convey masculinity and the male gender role, they express femininity and the female gender role although their inner self is a man (ibidem).

She also observed in her anthropological study that although drag queens are praised and idolised by the audience during performances, and in this way hold a privileged position in comparison to it, the situation off-stage is much different (Newton, 1972, p. 6). Drag queens face a lot of discrimination, stigmatization and are perceived with fear and anxiety both in the LGBT+ community and outside of it (Newton, 1972, pp. 6-7). Newton stipulated that this was due to them expressing femininity and the female gender role, which is in itself stigmatized and discriminated against in our patriarchal society, therefore, drag queens also received repercussions for expressing it (ibidem). This counteracts Janice Raymond's, Marilyn Frye's and bell hooks' arguments that men just gain power and prestige via impersonating women. In general, Newton's arguments about there being no natural connection between gender and sex, and that gender is constructed by society and its norms influenced poststructuralist theories on gender, that being also Butler's theory of gender performativity.

As elaborated previously in the subsection Feminist Perspectives on Gender, Judith Butler argues that gender is a performance and performative by nature (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990). They are mentioned again in this section due to them explicitly using the example of drag and drag performers to demonstrate the theory they coined on the performativity of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990). When we add drag queens and drag kings into the equation, suddenly the "natural" connection between sex and gender is directly put under question and the performativity of gender is sprung to the surface via "imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself as well as its contingency" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 175). Gender categories appear naturalized in the heterosexual order of our society, but Butler explains that drag performances and drag performers affirm their argument that gender identities, which are "natural" or "true", do not exist, but they are instead learnt and sustained through performing them continuously (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 180). Drag by repeating the "original" in a parodic way shows us that the original is "nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 31). Doing drag does not mean imitating the "true" gender of another faction of the population because an innate depiction of gender does not exist and no gender automatically fits a particular sex, femininity doesn't automatically and naturally pertain to women, and masculinity not to men

(Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 312). For Butler, doing drag symbolizes doing gender—the appropriation of gender, and its theatricalization (Butler, *Imitation*, 1996, p. 378). Essentially concluding that impersonation pertains to gendering, it pertains to all gender identities (*ibidem*).

Further drawing on Butler's important work, they discuss how the connection between subversion and drag may be more complex and potentially may not exist, since drag can, when it comes to gender norms, be both denaturalizing and reidealising, but most likely it represents an area infused with ambivalence (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 125). The argument follows that even though drag culture could potentially not represent a challenge to the gender binary, it is an unveiling of the order that contributes to the making and perpetuation of the gender binary and gender norms which bears significance (*ibidem*). Butler posits themselves on the opposite end to the feminists arguing that drag is misogynist, particularly mentioning bell hooks, Marilyn Frye and Janice Raymond (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 126). In response to their critique of drag as merely an offensive imitation of women, which contains no subversion or respect, Butler points to the identification in itself (*ibidem*). They argue that ambivalence is always at the core of identification, and that man and woman are not stable categories (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 127). It opens up possibilities for enacting ambivalence in embodying gender (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 348). Furthermore, Butler understands all expressions of gender as a sort of drag, not only drag performances directly, but also every one of us performing our gender every day (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990). Therefore, the potential for subversion when it comes to drag queens is then not necessarily bending the confines of gender but them bringing to light the category of gender and denaturalizing it, as well as the category of race and class (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 125).

Until this point, much has been discussed about drag queens in particular, but Jack Halberstam, on the other hand, delves into the phenomenon of drag kings in his book *Female Masculinity* (1998). Halberstam opens by stating that drag kings and female masculinity in general have been under-researched and less recognized in comparison to drag queens which receive much more public attention and spotlight (Halberstam, 1998, p. 231). He makes a distinction between a male impersonator and a drag king, whereas male impersonators have been around much longer as a theatrical genre and tradition, while drag kings are a newer occurrence (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232).

Halberstam attributes the much shorter tradition of drag kings to the perception of white male masculinity in our society as something that is natural, and can therefore not be performed or performative, while femininity is artificial, and can, therefore be performed (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 234-235). White drag kings performing the majority masculinity, that being white heterosexual male masculinity, needed to first make masculinity evident and theatrical via a range of roles and forms that this masculinity relies on and assumes, and then after making it visible, they were able to perform it (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 235, 239). In order to do so, drag kings often relied on conveying sexism in their performances due to the heavy reliance of the majority masculinity on sexism (Halberstam, 1998, p. 266). Minority masculinities, such as gay masculinities and masculinities of colour, differ from the presupposed non-performativity of the majority masculinity, due to already been made apparent and theatrical in relation to the majority masculinity (ibidem). The difference can also be seen in the performances of drag kings, who frequently parody the white male masculinity, but pay tribute to minority masculinities (ibidem).

Performing masculinity, for the reasons written above, thus requires a different brand of performance and humour (Halberstam, 1998, p. 238). Halberstam states that we cannot connect campiness to drag king performances, due to camp being connected specifically to the theatrical, exaggerated, humorous presentation of femininity by drag queens or other drag performers as well, and it is femininity portrayed via the lens of a gay male aesthetic (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 238, 239). Halberstam, therefore, proposes the term “kinging” for humorous presentations of masculinity by drag kings (ibidem). A part of what consists kinging is the opposite to the theatrical, loud, exaggerated camp, and that is the focus being placed more on reluctance, on restraint, on keeping back, on being “sincere” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 239). The performance of a drag king can revolve more around understatement, hyperbole and layering, allowing their femaleness to be seen through the male clothes or their butch masculinity just as drag queens sometimes allow their male bodies to be visible through female clothes (Halberstam, 1997, pp. 259-261). In this manner, both drag kings and queens are exposing their many ambiguities and the “permeable boundaries between acting and being” since they are all displaying their queerness and the unnaturalness of gender roles (Halberstam, 1997, p. 261).

Similar to how gay males are able to portray femininity via the usage of camp, Halberstam argues, masculinity also cannot be taken as solely created by men and solely belonging to them,

it has also been created by women, specifically lesbians, masculine women, gender deviants, producing a range of female masculinities (Halberstam, 1998, p. 241). When talking about drag kings we need to take into account various female masculinities in order to properly characterize the various forms of masculine performance in performances of drag kings (Halberstam, 1998, p. 245). Distinctions are being made between butch realness⁵, femme pretender⁶, male mimicry⁷, fag drag⁸ and denaturalized masculinity⁹-drag kings can be performing minority or hybrid versions of gender (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 246-255).

2.2.3 Drag culture as going beyond uncovering the performativity of gender

Marjorie Garber in her book *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (1992) echoes Butler's theory of gender performativity, and states that the attraction of cross-dressers¹⁰ lies in their ability to uncover that gender categories are culturally constructed (Garber, 1992, p. 9). She claims that cross-dressing holds the power to rattle, reveal and threaten the fixed or stable nature of the two gender categories-man and woman by adding the third option-transvestite (ibidem). Garber argues that many have tried to put the cross-dresser or the transvestite, which she uses interchangeably, into one of the two traditional boxes, either male or female in order to suppress or eliminate their potential for disruption (ibidem). However, they cannot fit into these two boxes because they fall in between, they cross and blur boundaries of gender (ibidem). She continues that the transvestite is not culture's by-product, it is a "mode of articulation", a "space for possibility" (Garber, 1992, p. 11). By having the third gender category of the transvestite it does not merely challenge the category of woman and man, but it challenges the gender category in itself, which is based on binary oppositions (Garber, 1992, p. 17). This pushes it into what Garber calls a "category crisis", and crisis shapes culture (Garber,

⁵ Butch realness in the drag king world means a biological female imitating masculinity, it is more based on authenticity, not performance (Halberstam, 1997, p. 246). In order for the act to be persuasive, the drag king needs to pass as a male or portray a distinct version of female masculinity (butch) (Halberstam, 1997, pp. 246-248). Mostly done by drag kings of colour imitating a minority non-white masculinity (ibidem).

⁶ Femme pretender is a drag king that bases their performance more around femininity than challenging masculinity (Halberstam, 1997, p. 250). The drag king dresses up as a male or butch and then strips to reveal her female body and the femininity underneath, the emphasis is on transformation, and it is louder, more parodical and theatrical than other drag king performances due to revolving around femininity and camp (Halberstam, 1997, pp. 248-249).

⁷ Male mimicry means the drag king assuming a type of male masculinity which can easily be identified and aims to recreate it, it can be with irony or not (Halberstam, 1997, p. 250).

⁸ Fag drag relates to drag kings performing the minority gay male masculinity (Halberstam, 1997, p. 253).

⁹ Denaturalized masculinity represents drag kings who put parody, hyperbole and theatricality in the centre of their performance, as well as venturing into alternative masculinities (Halberstam, 1997, pp. 253-255).

¹⁰ Marjorie Garber uses terms such as »cross-dresser« and »transvestite« to refer to drag queens. Though these terms are outdated, I will be using them when referring to the content of her work in this section.

1992, p. 16). The crisis which stems from the third gender category of transvestite opens up room for the negotiation of possibilities, and therefore of cultural change and reformulation (ibidem).

Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp move in a similar direction in discussing drag through their seminal work with drag queens at the 801 Cabaret in Florida titled *Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses: What It Means to Be a Drag Queen* (2004). They draw on queer theory, particularly they draw on Judith Butler and their theory of gender performativity, but they critique its approach centred too heavily on structures and too little on individuals and their subjective identities, and what part they play in reproducing and challenging gender and sexual norms (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 116). Therefore, they build on the knowledge of the performativity of gender and enlarge our conceptions of drag by adding how drag queens perceive their gender themselves, and how it influences and is in turn influenced by drag queen as a collective identity (ibidem). Taylor and Rupp highlighted that masculinity and femininity, as well as gay and straight were not stable categories (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 130).

They continue by saying that drag queen identity is connected to diverging from gender norms and from heteronormativity due to the influence effeminacy and homosexuality had on them growing up and on them later becoming drag queens (ibidem). All the drag queens in the study emphasized their “gender transgression” via dressing up in clothes deemed feminine or in their mother’s clothes growing up, putting on makeup, playing with dolls (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 119). Furthermore, Taylor and Rupp also note that becoming a drag queen was also born out of putting on extravagant and theatrical outfits as a “masquerade” which permitted the drag performers to showcase femininity and come to terms with the fluidity of gender through an identity which was separate from them, one they could perform and then go away from it (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, pp. 120, 124). Homosexual attraction and desire for men was highlighted by all the drag queens as playing a significant role in them becoming drag queens (ibidem).

Where Taylor and Rupp draw especially important conclusions is in their exploration of drag queens’ personal identities, which can be divided into two types (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 121). The first “group” is drag queens which explained that for them, being a drag queen means showing their “transgender identity” (ibidem). They specified it by saying that they fall somewhere between man and woman (ibidem). The drag queens expressed that that led them

to confusingly think at some point in their life or at some point of doing drag that they identified as women (ibidem). The rigid gender binary, and them already “looking” and “acting” like women when in drag, accompanied with their sexual attraction to men, made them think it would make more sense to identify as women (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, pp. 121-122). But they later came to the realization they were not a “woman wannabe”, as one drag queen put it, but a drag queen (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 122).

The second group of drag queens never considered themselves women or as between men and women, for them being a drag queen signifies adopting a “theatrical identity”, a separate persona, whatever they wish it to be, as was explained above with masquerading (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, pp. 122-124, 130). All of the above-mentioned comes together to form subjectivities of drag queens, who, as a collective identity, materialize as a gender category, either in-between or as a third one, and calls into question the naturalness of the gender binary (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 130). Taylor and Rupp postulate that people who fall in-between the gender binary, such as drag queens, generate authentic genders of their own, can be hybrid or minority genders, therefore, the goal is not to do away with gender categories but to extend options beyond the two, beyond the three even to a variety of possibilities in terms of identity, along with drag queen (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, pp. 130-131), therefore, expanding on Garber’s claims.

Eve Shapiro, on the other hand, took a closer look at drag kings in her article *Drag Kinging and the Transformation of Gender Identities* (2007), where she made a case study of a drag king troupe from California called Disposable Boy Toys (DBT). Furthermore, a comparison was made between drag queens (the 801 Cabaret) and drag kings (DBT) in relation to gender by Verta Taylor, Leila Rupp and Eve Shapiro in *Drag Queens and Drag Kings: The Difference Gender Makes* (2010). Shapiro posits that we cannot observe drag without comprehending that it is a process, which is gendered, and it has an effect on the drag performer (Shapiro, 2007, p. 251). The drag performance in itself frequently alters and changes the gender identity of the performer, either in the form of a new identity or in a changed perception of their current identity, which is what the DBT performers expressed (ibidem). It inspired them to explore their identity as adults (ibidem). For some it made them realize their transgender identity, for some it guided them towards new femininities, and for some it guided them towards identifying as gender outlaws or/and genderqueer, which they perceived as a political act and fight against gender norms (Shapiro, 2007, p. 258). Genderqueer identity was described by the drag

performers as occupying space beyond binaries female and male, masculine and feminine, it was understood as female, male and between (Shapiro, 2007, p. 257).

Drag performers said that their gender identity shifts were made possible because their drag troupe offered them space and opportunities to experiment with and act out various genders, as well as offered them knowledge on gender and queer theory (Shapiro, 2007, p. 263). Doing drag cultivated negotiations between identities they were living and those they were performing, which permitted them to personify and identify with a variety of gender identities, perhaps even at once, that can overlap, contradict, and flow in and out (Shapiro, 2007, p. 261). As the drag performers adopted gender identities, which were more nuanced, it was mirrored in a change of language, so instead of using female and male, it changed in favour of a continuum of femininity and masculinity (Shapiro, 2007, p. 258). Shapiro emphasizes that drag performers expressed complex and particular identities in lieu of traditional genders (*ibidem*). She points to examples for femininities, where the identifiers were “femme”, “radical femininity”, “gender-queer femme”, “de facto female”, “androgynous female” (*ibidem*). Similarly, the story also goes for masculinities, which were expressed as “masculine female”, “butch”, “female to male transsexual”, “ambiguous masculinity” for example (*ibidem*).

Some of the drag performers stated that doing drag allowed them to explore and venture into a range of femininities, and this expression of a variety of feminine genders was perceived by them as being able to counter misogyny and disrupt the traditional notion of femininity, and it in turn also affected their lived femininity (Shapiro, 2007, p. 263). Shapiro concludes that by performing femininities which were not normative it exposes that femininity is constructed (*ibidem*). By performing femininities as drag kings it also symbolizes a feminist choice and act due to opposing the privileged position of masculinity in our society, as well as an opportunity to empower and show a variety of femininities (Shapiro, 2007, p. 264). In relation to masculinities, as they expanded the traditional notion of masculinity into non-normative forms of masculinity, some of the performers still identified as women, which they perceived as a political act as well (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 284).

In Berbari and Johnson’s study, a lot of drag kings labelled themselves genderqueer, as was the case with Shapiro’s study, but some still labelled themselves or knew of drag performers who labelled themselves as per the gender binary, either male or female (Berbari and Johnson, 2017, p. 6). They talked specifically about there being a mixed degree of approval by drag

performers of drag queens and drag kings who are “bio kings and queens”, meaning they perform the gender which they also live (ibidem). Drag kings mentioned instances where the validity of the drag performer was interrogated due to getting gender reassignment surgery, performing the gender aligned with their sex/their body or performing the gender which they labelled themselves as in everyday life (ibidem). Their drag and their performance were perceived sometimes as an inferior type of performance because their gender identity and/or their body aligned with their performed gender in drag (ibidem). The drag kings emphasized that in several communities of drag kings it was not relevant how a person identified because gender was perceived as a performance in general (ibidem). Thus, the body of the performer and their day-to-day gender identity were not relevant because they comprehended all that was performed on the stage as gender performance, in the same vein as everyday gender can be comprehended as a performance as well (ibidem). Berbarry and Johnson concluded quoting Butler on understanding gender as drag (ibidem).

Rupp, Taylor and Shapiro make comparisons between drag kings and drag queens they studied and made conclusions based on their performances of gender and sexuality. Drag kings’ performances were more overtly political due to the troupe being more involved with feminist, gender and queer theory (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 285). Researchers also noted that they spoke of performativity of gender, both off- and on-stage gender was perceived as a performance (ibidem). The drag kings were also noted to perform a broad array of gender identities, sometimes slipping from one into the other, and in this way gender fluidity was eroticized as well as gender expressions which were not normative (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 286). Examples of that include some bio queens stripping and showing male underwear with an artificial bulge, some drag kings putting on traditionally female clothing mid set (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 285).

On the other hand, the drag queens in the study did not have prior knowledge of feminist, gender and queer theory, but they challenged the established gender binaries and sexuality as well (ibidem). The drag queens made it clear from the beginning that despite looking like women, they are indeed homosexual men underneath (ibidem). They also did not speak in higher pitched voices, but in their natural male voices, and they also made fun of their genitals vocally and openly (ibidem). The audience interactions that they displayed were also sexual in a very forward and aggressive manner, not feminine, but more masculine (ibidem). This aggression, traditionally connected with men, contributes to an additional coating to gender fluidity presented by drag queens and the consequent confusion with regards to gender that it invokes

(Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 894). Authors note that some drag queens did not shave or did not do a genital tuck, and some would strip to display their man chests and even genitals (ibidem). This showed dichotomies between their female attire and their male bodies, and showed gender performativity (ibidem).

Both drag queens and drag kings in the study by Rupp, Taylor and Shapiro incited sexual desires in their audience members, often intentionally (Rupp et al., 2010, pp. 286, 288). For some drag queens that involved touching and even fondling, but they account invoking sexual desires in the audience, also from straight men, straight women and lesbians, sometimes invoking confusion in them as a consequence of that (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 286). Drag kings often resorted to criticizing such interactions, but also seeing some promising aspects of such an approach to confuse and tear down gender and sexuality boundaries (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 288). They also accounted their experiences of gay male audience members being attracted and drawn to butches and drag kings on-stage, although they otherwise swore to only be attracted to masculine men (ibidem).

Justine Egner and Patricia Maloney in their article *It Has No Color, It Has No Gender, It's Gender Bending*: *Gender and Sexuality Fluidity and Subversiveness in Drag Performance* (2016) delve into gender self-perceptions of American drag performers just like Taylor, Rupp, Shapiro, Berbary and Johnson thus far, but they also delve also into their relationship with their audience, and the situatedness into local norms (Egner and Maloney, 2016). The drag performers who were interviewed identified with and expressed a wide range of gender and sexual identities when in drag and out of it (some expressed as feeling in between genders, some identified with neither, some with female and male genders simultaneously, some switch up their gender mid-show etc.) and perceived drag as an outlet for showing the fluidity of gender and playing with it (Egner and Maloney, 2016, pp. 892-893). Some performers expressed that due to the gender deviance when doing drag, they are sometimes perceived as inhuman (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 886). Drag performers revealed that doing drag made them re-evaluate their beliefs on gender (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 890). They said that due to identifying as queer or as LGBT, they were already on the outskirts of society, which permitted them to toy around with gender binaries and norms, revealing their artificiality and disrupting them in performances and day-to-day lives as well (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 894).

The link between the drag performers and their drag personas is very nuanced (ibidem). Plenty of the drag performers spoke of their drag personas in the third person, explaining their personality, pronouns, wishes, aspirations as if they were a separate person who is disconnected to them (ibidem). However, they would also express a complementary relationship between their persona and them because they embody the persona and turn into it (ibidem). Moreover, some participants also talked of their day-to-day self as a persona in a similar manner as they did when describing their drag persona, therefore expressing that both personas are linked to them, represent a part of them (Egner and Maloney, 2016, pp. 894-895). Gender fluidity does not lie only in drag performers being able to express many genders on and off-stage, but the fluidity could also be seen between their personas and their day-to-day identities as all parts of them (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 895). Although their day-to-day self may be more feminine, their drag persona could be more aggressive and masculine, or it could perhaps be an extension and hyper-feminine version of their day-to-day self (ibidem).

Egner and Maloney also argued that drag performers did not only challenge their own beliefs on gender, but aspired to challenge the beliefs of their audience as well, they wanted to be subversive (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 896). They continue by saying that drag needs an audience so it can be subversive, due to gender being embodied, there needs to be persons who “do” that gender, otherwise there is no subversion (ibidem). Drag performers vested a lot of importance into the audience and engaging with it, and it also influenced their performance and the gender fluidity (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 897). They stated that the way they disrupt gender and gender norms is connected to the audience (ibidem). The local context influences the way the drag performer engages with audiences, local norms of the audience play a part (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 876).

Geographic location is important as well because it sets the context for how gender is understood and perceived in that particular area, and therefore also influences how drag performers choose to counter those perceptions, and how far (ibidem). If the audience is made up of mainly queer individuals or LGBT individuals who are used to drag performances in the context of a queer space, performers said more needed to be done in order to be subversive, they went further in pushing the limits in order to make the audience question their perceptions of gender, they were more inclined to perform various forms of drag (ibidem). On the other hand, for another type of audience, which is not mainly comprised of such individuals or the individuals are not used to drag performers or the audience from a more conservative area,

simply appearing in drag was already subversive, and made them question gender norms (ibidem). Egner and Maloney conclude that the audience and the local context does not determine the performance and the fluidity in its entirety, but it is a factor.

Chapter 3 Positionality

Positionality refers to a person's view of the world, their values and the position they have in relation to the subject, which is being researched, and its context of socio-political nature (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). The view of the world of the researcher is dependent on their ontology and epistemology (ibidem). This is influenced by the values the researcher holds which are affected by their gender, geographical location, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class, political affiliation, abilities etc. (Holmes, 2020, p. 2).

My positionality as a researcher and writer of this Master thesis exploring the relationship between doing drag and gender, therefore, affects my relationship to the topic I am researching. It is relevant to point out that I am a 26-year-old queer woman who was born and raised in a small rural town in Slovenia named Ptuj. After finishing high school, I moved to Ljubljana to get my Bachelors degree in International Relations at the Faculty for Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. I lived in Ljubljana for 5 years, from 2016 to 2021. Because I was not born in the capital, but in a rural part of north-eastern Slovenia, and then moved to the capital, I am able to compare my lived experiences in both of these places and the differences in mentalities, I have encountered, which affect people's perceptions. I saw a personal shift in my own ontology with regard to gender when I moved from Ptuj to Ljubljana. My perception shifted from viewing gender strictly in the binary and attributed automatically to a particular sex, to viewing it as an artificial construction capable of fluidity.

That was largely possible because during my time in Ljubljana, I started discovering and frequenting queer spaces more. Particularly the most known and popular queer and alternative space called "Metelkova", an abandoned former military base turned into headquarters of many non-governmental organisations, among them also LGBTQ+ organisations, gay club Tiffany and lesbian club Monokel. With every passing year, I was visiting Metelkova more and more, and in 2019 I went to my first drag show in Tiffany, which I visited only once before. There

were three drag queens from the House of Dynasty competing in a competition for the title “The Queen of May”. I remember being mesmerized and impressed by their performances but also intimidated, nevertheless I wanted to meet and chat with them. From that time on, I started going to particularly Tiffany more and more with my friends from my home town. We mingled with fellow queer people, and started getting close with the drag performers who were performing at Tiffany. In 2021, two of my friends from Ptuj gave the initiative to start a house of our own, House of Kunt, which is how I started doing drag myself. The drag performers on the scene were, as I saw it, supportive and open to new drag queens, drag kings and drag things entering the scene. It was becoming more and more lively and diverse in terms of people of various gender identities performing various genders in drag which also contributed to my picking of my topic. My own perceptions of drag and gender were getting broadened by the happenings on the scene in Slovenia, and I wanted to learn and explore more in depth.

I perform as a drag queen with the stage name Suša Kunt. It is important to acknowledge that I personally also do drag and I perform in drag because it influences my connection to the subject. As I am very directly involved, I am unable to explore this topic from the outside, from an outsider’s perspective. My research is affected by insights from the inside, I can only give an insider’s perspective. This might put forward some limitations because I could potentially overlook or take some things for granted, which could be research worthy, due to being very familiar with and involved in the subject matter. That perspective does, however, allow me to present and connect the intricacies of having access to the “core” of the scene, seeing the dynamics within it, the backstage etc. to my research. Furthermore, I know almost all of the drag performers on the scene in Slovenia personally and have personal relationships with them, which also helped me get some of them to agree to being interview participants. Therefore, it is also important to acknowledge that I had built trust with them already beforehand. This influences the interview process. The interview participants are able to get more comfortable with the interview process quicker, and delve into topics more in-depth, more freely, more personally and more vulnerably. On the other hand, the personal connections between my interview participants and me could also pose limitations because they could have trouble viewing me as a researcher. This might affect their interaction with the subject matter and answers given due to perceiving the interview as a conversation with a friend and a fellow drag performer.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Qualitative research

For this thesis, qualitative research will be employed. The term qualitative research refers to research in which the basic experiential material collected in the research process consists of verbal descriptions or narratives and in which this material is also analysed verbally and without the use of measurement procedures that produce numbers (Mesec, 1998, p. 26). Qualitative research is characterized by an interpretative paradigm, which means that it emphasizes the study of the subjective experiences of the individual and the determination of the meaning that the individual attributes to individual events, while the subjective views of the researcher on the studied situation are also not neglected (Vogrinc, 2008, p. 14). Data is collected more in verbal and pictorial form than in numerical form (*ibidem*).

Qualitative empirical research focuses on the study of individual cases (*ibidem*). It is mostly conducted as a case study or a small number of cases, so the data collection techniques are also adapted for small-scale analysis, and the researcher gets to know the social world directly with them (*ibidem*). It tends to a holistic and in-depth understanding of phenomena, in the conditions as it occurs, as much as it is possible, and in the context of concrete circumstances, since the researcher is interested in the context in which the activities take place (*ibidem*). The context bears much significance because it puts into perspective the information the researcher gathered through using chosen methods, and is thus able to paint a broader, nuanced picture. Therefore, in order to research the relationship between gender and doing drag, the subjective perceptions of drag performers in regards to it as well as contextual clues, qualitative research methods are chosen, particularly semi-structured interviews and observation.

4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is the most common form of obtaining qualitative data (Kordeš and Smrdu, 2015, p. 40) and it will be employed in this Master thesis as the main method of research. The questions are open-ended, they can follow a certain preliminary framework and schedule, or they can be completely free (*ibidem*). With this type, we can explore a new field of research well, because we can discover where the problems are, how people look at them, how they talk about it, what their thoughts on a particular topic are (what terminology they use

in relation to it, at what level they understand the phenomenon) (ibidem). Such an interview is more flexible, we get closer with it to the affective and value levels, answers are more spontaneous, concrete, personal and based on self-discovery, and the researcher is able to deduce the participants' values and affects more (Kordeš and Smrdu, 2015, pp. 40-41). They create the basis of a person's outlook on life and by consequence, they hold much influence over the person's answers in interviews (ibidem). Due to the Master thesis exploring subjective perceptions of drag performers in regards to gender, and the relationship and connection between gender and doing drag, the semi-structured interview fits the research since it prepares a certain outline of topics and questions to be addressed about this particular topic, but leaves room and flexibility in order to capture the perceptions and reveal their context potentially.

I conducted 8 semi-structured interviews with different drag performers in Slovenia. Interviews were conducted via Zoom in English, except for one which was conducted in Slovenian, they ranged between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on the interviewee. I asked the interview participants beforehand in which language they would prefer to have the interview in, and 7 out of 8 drag performers answered that they would prefer it in English. The reasoning behind it was that they were more comfortable discussing the topics of gender and drag in English due to the lack of vocabulary and terminology in Slovenian. It was easier for them to speak on the subject in a more complex way if they had more words available to them. Furthermore, they expressed that speaking on the topic in English helped them gain some distance from which they could answer with more clarity. Speaking in Slovenian for them felt too personal and it clouded their views and ability to articulate their thoughts and feelings. For one interview participant, Glupa Pupa Kunt, the situation was reversed, she expressed more comfort in discussing the topic in Slovenian, and filled the missing vocabulary and terminology with English words, when necessary. Since the majority of interviews were conducted in English, this could affect the answers given because interview participants could have on occasions used words that didn't accurately or completely describe their thoughts and feelings just because they couldn't think of a corresponding English word in the moment. It could also have happened that they would have described some things differently in Slovenian.

Participants were sent questions in advance. It was done so because the questions required some pondering, and because I was asked to send them in advance by my interview participants. Particularly the questions regarding the connection and relationship between gender and drag could be challenging to answer on the spot since it is a complex topic that needs some thought.

The decision to send interview questions in advance could have an effect on the answers given because the participants were given more time to think about the questions and could potentially change or adjust their answers, and they could potentially differ from their initial thoughts on the matter. Though questions were sent in advance, they were merely used as a basis, the interviews were still conducted in a semi-structured way because I asked all of them additional questions, sub questions or opening additional topics depending on their particular answers.

The table below is showing the name of drag performers who have agreed to be interviewed alongside their age, gender, sexuality, how they identify when in drag, and how long they have been doing drag.

Figure 4 Drag performer interview participants

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Years of doing drag
Iza Kunt	25, woman, queer	Drag thing	1 year and a half
Glupa Pupa Kunt	24, trans woman	Drag queen	1
Trafika Čik Kunt	23, woman, queer	Drag queen	2
Mentalika	27, non-binary person	Drag queen	4
Vera Vulva	22, man, gay	Drag queen, drag thing	4
Dorijan Mavrični	27, trans man, asexual	Drag king	3
Eric Dagger	29, woman, queer	Drag king, drag queen, drag thing	4
Karmen Daš	22, non-binary person	Drag queen	5

4.1.2 Participation Observation

The method of observation will be used in this Master thesis as supporting material to the main method of semi-structured interviews. Observation as a method is more direct than giving verbal answers. It can become scientific when it serves a specific research purpose, when it is planned, when it is systematically monitored and when it can be subjected to validity and reliability control (Kordeš and Smrdu, 2015, p. 44). We can observe physical traces or we can observe people, their behavior, interpersonal interaction, relationships, non-verbal communication and also attitudes (ibidem). For the purposes of my research, I have done the latter by observing the drag performers in Slovenia. As mentioned above, I am also a drag queen and a part of the drag community and culture in Slovenia, where I was also born and raised, I have the so-called “emic” perspective, meaning I have an insider perspective, as opposed to the “etic” perspective, which is an outsider perspective (Morris et al, 1999, p. 781). Observation also depends on the role that the researcher has in relation to observed (Kordeš and Smrdu, 2015, p. 45), in this case that is participant observation. The advantages of participant observation are that we have greater access to personal events, attitudes, opinions and that the influence of the observer is smaller (ibidem). The disadvantage, however, is the conflict of roles that occurs (ibidem). As previously mentioned in my Positionality, since I am both a member of the drag community and a researcher, I anticipate a degree of clouded judgment due to both living and performing in the community as well as observing it.

I have conducted participant observation over the course of the summer of 2022 between the months of June and September. I have done so in drag performances in Ljubljana in clubs Tiffany and K4, as well as once outside of Ljubljana in the city of Koper. I was also involved during the preparation for the events. I also drew on my attendance of drag events and performances of these particular drag performers involved in this study prior to becoming a drag queen.

Chapter 5 Analysis

My analysis consists of analysing interviews with my interview participants (Dorijan Mavrični, Karmen Daš, Iza Kunt, Eric Dagger, Mentalika, Trafika Čik Kunt, Vera Vulva, Glupa Pupa Kunt)¹¹, my own observations¹² and my literature review and introduction content. It is structured in a similar manner to how I conducted my interviews, and it starts with the perception of gender in Slovenia, followed by the perception of gender by the participating drag performers, the perception of drag in Slovenia, and the perception of drag by the drag performers. Then analysis continues into the analysis of the connection and relationship between gender and drag, exploring the gendered dynamics within the drag community, and finished with the analysis of the effect on the audience.

5.1 Gender perception

5.1.1 Local Context: Gender Perception in Slovenia

In my interview questions, one of the questions to my interview participants related to how they think gender is perceived in Slovenia. Based on their answers, I have compiled an account of the local context with relation to gender based on their personal perceptions because it bears significance. As Egner and Maloney pointed out previously in the literature review, geographic location, and the local context of particular cities and areas within a country set the tone for the understanding of gender there and it influences drag performers' approach to challenging these perceptions and how far they go with it (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 876), therefore it is crucial and necessary to paint a picture of drag performers' geographical and local context as they see it.

All of my interview participants currently live in Slovenia, and all, except for one exception, and that is Mentalika, were born and raised in Slovenia. They were all in agreement that gender roles are still very strong and deeply rooted in Slovenian society, interview participants agreed on people overall perceiving gender in the binary sense, either you are male or female (all interview participants). The automatic association between biological sex and the

¹¹ In order to refer to specific interviews, I use the corresponding drag performer's name in parenthesis as an in-text reference. I use shortened versions of their names, those being Dorijan, Karmen, Iza, Eric, Mentalika, Trafika, Vera and Glupa.

¹² In order to refer to my own observations, I use the word "Observation" in parenthesis as an in-text reference.

accompanying gender is still very much naturalized and in place as well as expected, meaning a biological male dresses and behaves and is expected to dress and behave in a traditionally masculine manner and in line with traditional masculinity, and same goes for biological women expected to behave and dress feminine (ibidem).

With this binary perception, also comes the gender roles attached to each gender, which persevere, therefore, a woman is the caretaker of the household, the mom, the housewife, quiet, passive, and the man is the father, does not help out so much in terms of household work, breadwinner, loud, dominant (Dorijan, Karmen, Iza, Vera, Glupa). Separation by gender and gender roles is still in place (Dorijan). Mentalika, who was born and grew up in Serbia, and Vera Vulva made a comparison between Slovenia and the rest of the Balkan, and said that although gender roles and the binary perception of gender is still very strong in Slovenia, it is much more rigid in the rest of the Balkans, gender roles are even more pronounced and lived by, and changes are coming about much slower or not at all, as per their view, Slovenia is perceived to be more progressive and open in relation to the Balkan countries (Mentalika, Vera). Vera Vulva emphasized that the man is the “loud macho” of the family, but then also interestingly added that in Slovenia, it is sometimes the other way around with the man being the person that is the quieter breadwinner in the family, and the woman being the mother, who is more loud, forward and dominant (Vera). Dorijan Mavrični also argued that Slovenian men are often made fun of on the internet, that there is this perception that they are more feminine, although he himself did not fully agree with it (Dorijan). Vera Vulva went on to say that this reversal is merely accidental, it doesn't point to a more open-minded society, and the gender roles are still persistent, even if they seem reversed at first glance (Vera).

Due to the deep rootedness of the gender binary system, interview participants argue that it is hard or even impossible sometimes for people to comprehend anything outside of it, anything that would deviate from the binary. Glupa Pupa Kunt said that often people cannot grasp the concept of non-binary, cannot even fathom it or label any gender deviation as bizarre, as Mentalika argued (Mentalika, Glupa). Participants also highlighted differences in perception based on age, between younger and older generations. Iza Kunt, Vera Vulva and Mentalika argued that younger generations are becoming much more open and are becoming much less restricted by gender norms and gender roles, Vera particularly mentioned younger boys and seeing a difference in them, while the older generations are staying more stuck in their ways and abiding by gender norms and roles (Iza, Mentalika, Vera).

All participants noted, however, that there are big differences between the capital city of Ljubljana and the rest of the country, particularly the more rural areas. My interview participants all currently live in Ljubljana, but none of them were born and raised there, all of them moved there from smaller cities or rural areas. Drag performers emphasized that Ljubljana, as a more international, student, modern and metropolitan city, is more open and looser with regards to gender rules, allows for more differences, gender related issues are spoken about more, and provides more anonymity than smaller towns and rural areas outside of it, where traditional gender views persist and gender conversations are not being opened up as much (all interview participants). That is why queer people and people who are questioning or thinking about their gender or gender in general or are more invested in the topic tend to move there (Dorijan, Trafika). Interviewees highlighted that the queer circles, which tend to form in Ljubljana and of which they are also a part of, are very open minded and do not perceive gender as rigid, but as a free and fluid space for exploration, expression, and also knowledge (Karmen, Iza, Eric, Mentalika, Trafika).

5.1.2 Gender Perception of Drag Performers

Interview participants were also asked how they themselves perceive gender as this as well influences their drag performances and their potential challenging of the gender boundaries and understandings of gender. From their responses, it is evident that gender is a topic they have thought about and questioned. All of the interview participants were critical of the naturalized and automatic connection between sex and gender, and they were critical of rigid gender norms and gender roles connected to particular genders (all interview participants). Their perceptions were in line with baseline second wave feminist claims surrounding gender presented in the literature review, that being that biological sex does not immediately presuppose a set of behaviours, attitudes and norms, i. e. gender. It is socially and culturally invented, made up, and not an unquestioned, predetermined fact (Iza, Vera, Glupa).

They do not, however, perceive gender in fixed terms. Their perceptions move more towards third wave feminist understandings of gender, and categories of man and woman, as not coherent, stable or fixed, as theorized by Butler in the literature review (Butler, 1990). Though Vera Vulva has not read and is not familiar with Butler, she particularly mentioned that gender is a performance and that we perform every day, which is in line with Butler's claims

on the performativity of gender, and people “performing” gender in their everyday lives (Vera; Butler, 1990).

Gender was described as a spectrum and almost all of the drag performers agreed that gender was fluid, can change, or should be perceived as fluid, even if they themselves perceived their own gender as static (all interview participants). They emphasized that it depended on the person and it was different for different people (Dorijan, Trafika). Drag performers acknowledged personal agency with regard to gender, which posited them in line with Hausman and her theory of gender as narrative, as subjectivity, which is dynamic (Hausman, 2000, p. 117). Participants shared that gender could be how you feel in that particular moment in time, and that it can be whatever you wanted it to be (all interview participants). Therefore, drag performers recognize gender in its individual subjectivity and the active role that individuals play in constructing and expressing their own gender, paralleling Hausman’s claims (ibidem). Eric Dagger also specifically pointed out that individuals should have the possibility and space to experiment with their own gender (Eric).

5.2 Perception of Drag

5.2.1 Local Context: Perception of Drag in Slovenia

Interview participants were also asked about their thoughts on the reception of drag culture in Slovenia since it also represents an important axe of influence just as the perception of gender does. Perception sets the tone and context for the current drag scene and its potential further development. Drag performers pointed out that the Slovenian general society is mostly aware of the existence of drag queens, particularly due to the group “Sestre” representing Slovenia at the Eurovision Song Content in 2002, which were mentioned before in the introductory section of Drag History in Slovenia (Eric, Vera; Velikonja, 2004, p. 69). Not only was the society aware of drag queens, interview participants said the society was also quite receptive and excited to see a drag show, particularly if they were not so familiar with drag culture or were not so aware of the existence of a drag scene in Slovenia (Dorijan, Iza, Mentalika, Trafika, Vera).

Dorijan Mavrični, however, particularly emphasized the lack of awareness among the people that there is a lively and rapidly developing drag scene in Slovenia. Society might be aware of the existence of drag queens and drag shows in general, but they often perceive them as rare

occurrences, mostly away from the Slovenian mainstream media. Dorijan supported this with the example of the drag queen Jenna Dick performing on Slovenia's got Talent (also described in the section Drag History in Slovenia) (Dorijan). He stated that it generated a lot of surprise among the people and a lot of buzz in the mainstream media because the awareness of the existence of a whole drag community in Slovenia was low (ibidem). Eric Dagger also highlighted Jenna Dick's performance but then went on to say: "In mainstream Slovenia drag is perceived as comedic relief, we had things like Sestre in Eurovision, and of course representation matters, and it's great they went, but it, they, weren't perceived as artists, they were perceived more as comedic relief. And unfortunately, it's the same I feel, with newer, like Jenna Dick on Slovenia's got talent" (Eric). Historically, as was presented in the Introduction under the section Drag History, drag queens and earlier on female impersonators had to occupy comedic roles after women were allowed to become actresses in the theatre, and they persisted in comedic roles for many decades in order to be able to perform and persist (Baker, 1994, pp. 27-210). Eric alluded to these historical roots of drag queens, and claimed the Slovenian general society still perceived and reduced drag queens to this role, overlooking their other contributions. Eric also continued with a critique of the lack of awareness of the existence of drag kings in Slovenia, also within alternative circles, saying "I felt disrespected, for instance when the organization Ljubljana Pride said last year that there are no drag kings in Slovenia and they had to ask a drag king from London to perform" (Eric). This points to the disparity between drag queens and drag kings also elaborated in the introductions section of Drag History with drag kings having a much shorter history, less written on them and less mainstream recognition as drag queens (Halberstam, 1998).

Interview participants also pointed out that in Slovenia, drag is still mostly perceived as impersonation of the "opposite" gender (all interview participants). By drag, I am here referring to drag queens, which are more known to the general public. They said the view of drag is still stuck on "man in a dress" or rather "gay man in a dress", therefore, see drag queens still as female impersonators (ibidem). They did, however, point to differences between the general public in Ljubljana and outside of Ljubljana, which perceives drag often still as female impersonation, and the queer public in Ljubljana, which perceives drag closer to how they perceive it, though it happens that some still hold the view of drag as impersonation (ibidem).

Drag performers said that there was confusion and backlash in reactions of people to drag as well as excitement (Iza, Mentalika, Trafika, Vera). Although backlash and negative attitudes

also happened to drag performers in Ljubljana, they more talked about receiving backlash outside of Ljubljana, particularly in the form of online negative and hate comments from people who did not attend their drag shows, calling them disgusting, degenerate, perverted (Iza, Trafika, Glupa). But Trafika Čik Kunt said that drag performances were spreading more and more from Ljubljana also to other places and regions in Slovenia (Trafika). Many interview participants accounted positive reactions from the audiences outside of Ljubljana as well as from audiences in Ljubljana (Iza, Mentalika, Trafika, Glupa). Hate and backlash came more from people who did not attend their shows rather than from people who did, and according to Trafika, it more stems from ignorance, not knowing what drag is or what it is about, from never seeing or experiencing it (Trafika).

5.2.2 Perception of Drag by Drag Performers

Interviewed drag performers perceived doing drag as a performance or form of expression, first and foremost (Dorijan, Iza, Eric, Mentalika, Trafika, Vera, Glupa). Some specifically labelled drag as an art form or as performance art (Karmen, Eric, Trafika). They continued by saying it is a performance of a character, meaning their drag character or drag persona (Dorijan, Iza, Vera, Glupa). Vera Vulva highlighted that the creation of a character and doing gender play, is what distinguishes drag from other types of performances, particularly cosplay, which she elaborated: “Cosplay is specifically dressing up as a character, where it doesn’t matter what gender the character is, but it’s a fictional character of someone else. But drag is creating a character and it’s mostly a play on gender. It doesn’t have to be your own gender, it can be someone else’s, but it’s mostly a play on femininity or masculinity or the absence of them.” (Vera). Almost all of the other interview participants also pointed out the gendered lens employed in drag performances (Dorijan, Karmen, Iza, Eric, Trafika, Vera).

They emphasized, however, that it is not restricted to performing the opposite gender or the opposite sex, it applies a gendered lens, but essentially it can be whatever the performer wants it to be and it can express whatever the performer wishes to express, in whichever way they want to express it (Dorijan, Karmen, Iza, Eric, Mentalika, Trafika, Vera, Glupa). Dorijan Mavrični and Vera Vulva also indicated the parodic element of drag, whereas Dorijan described it as “gender caricature” and Vera described it as “a multi-layered creative experience, hobby or activity about basically mocking gender in a way. Not always, but most drag stems from that.” (Dorijan, Vera). In drag performers’ perceptions of drag, it could be detected that the

gender component of drag still bears significance, and it is what sets it aside from other performances and forms of expression. However, interestingly so, all of them firstly pointed out the performance component of drag, and after that they added the gender component.

Their definitions slightly differed from definitions stemming from academic literature in my Introduction. The definition of a drag queen and drag king firstly addressed the gender component, and then added the performance or theatricality of drag (Schacht and Underwood, 2004, p. 4; Halberstam, 1998, p. 232). The gender component was also more heavily reliant on the individual performing the opposite gender, often in a parodic manner, while my interview participants never explicitly mentioned that a person needs to perform the opposite gender necessarily. They agreed it was some version of a performance of gender, but it could be any gender (all interview participants). It could be the everyday gender of the performer, or a hyper exaggerated version of their everyday gender, it could be the opposite gender, it could be a mix of genders, it could change from performance to performance or mid-performance (ibidem). Essentially, the drag performers concluded that drag can be and can portray whatever the performer wants it to portray, there were no restrictions or rules, and they could portray gender however they wished to through drag (ibidem). This is in alignment with Butler arguing that drag demonstrates that all gender is a performance (Butler, 1990, p. 180).

Based off of the interview participants' perception of drag and of drag queens and drag kings, I propose altered versions of definitions put forward in the initial section of Definitions in order to better align with my specific case study. The definition of a drag queen from the beginning: "individual publicly performing femininity and being a woman is also simultaneously acknowledged to be a man and not a woman" (Schacht and Underwood, 2004, p. 4), to be potentially changed into: An individual publicly performing any version of femininity. While for a drag king, the definition was as follows: "a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 232), to be changed into: An individual publicly performing any version of masculinity. While the definition for a drag thing would stay the same as in the initial section. The adjusted definitions better account in my specific case for the evolution of drag, the diverse pool of people doing diverse variations of drag, and divorcing automatic connections between a person's gender identity outside of drag and their gender in drag, since all gender is a performance, not only when a person is performing the "opposite" gender.

5.3 Relationship between gender and drag

In this section of the analysis, I will be presenting an analysis of each drag performer's relationship between their gender identity and their drag persona, and exploring connections between their gender identities, perceptions of gender and their approach to doing drag and performing as their drag character. How drag affected their perceptions of gender and potentially their gender identities will also be explored and presented. After the separate analyses of drag performers' interview answers and my own observations, I will be putting forward common conclusions, which could be drawn from the separate analyses of interviews and observations, therefore moving from the individual level to a broader structural level.

5.3.1 Dorijan Mavrični

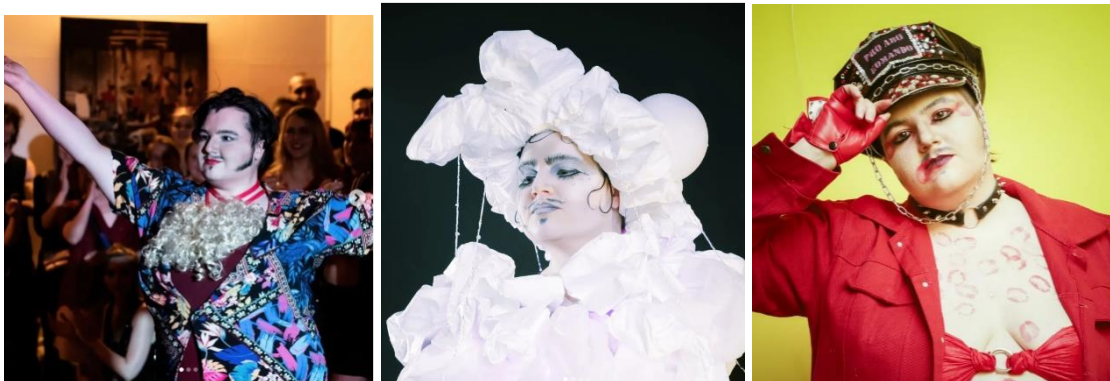
Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Doing drag (years)
Dorijan Mavrični	27, trans man, asexual	Drag king	3

Dorijan Mavrični is a drag king. Outside of drag, he identifies as mostly a man, and uses he/they pronouns, he explained it as “I like to say that I’m 80% man, and blank, as in the other 20% is void, the other 20% does not exist.” (Dorijan). He elaborated that he knew he was a trans man prior to doing drag, but he continued to point out that some people figured out they were trans through doing drag (ibidem). Dorijan’s perception of his transgender identity is somewhat similar or along similar lines as some of Taylor and Rupp’s participating drag queens’ perceptions (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 121). Some of the drag queens in the study were aware of their transgender identity before starting to do drag, but that it falls somewhere between woman and man, it is not completely one or the other (ibidem). Although, Dorijan’s perception diverges a bit, he also pointed to identifying “mostly” as a man, but not “completely”, and the rest is up for interpretation. Therefore, he also falls somewhere on the spectrum, not completely identifying as a man, but also not identifying as a woman.

The drag persona of Dorijan Mavrični or Dorian the Rainbow was described by him as “your favourite gay uncle from the Balkans. He’s a middle-aged man. He’s very masculine but in a

very “faggoty”¹³ way. Chest hair, facial hair, but also bright colours, rainbows, moving his hips a lot when he walks.” His look can also be visible in Figure 5. As per Halberstam’s classification of drag kings, Dorijan would fall into the category of fag drag which pertains to drag kings portraying and performing minority gay male masculinity (Halberstam, 1997, p. 253). Furthermore, Dorijan pointed out that he wanted to do this character of a gay Balkan uncle because he wanted to pay tribute to them, sort of like a love letter to them (Dorijan). This also goes hand in hand with what Halberstam pointed out about drag kings performing minority masculinities, of which gay masculinity is a part of, and that it is usually performed as a tribute to them, not to mock them (Halberstam, 1998, p. 266). Him portraying the image of a specifically Balkan uncle, an image frequently seen in the local cafes in Slovenia and the rest of the Balkans, also shows the inspiration and influence the local context poses in doing drag.

Figure 5 Dorijan Mavrični or Dorian the Rainbow



(Source: Dorijan Mavrični’s Instagram profile page)

Dorijan decided to start doing drag due to his love of performing and to be able to express his creativity and ideas. As was mentioned before, he knew he was a trans man before becoming a drag king by saying “I knew I was trans, but drawing on side burns and wearing wig as chest hair etc. that sort of masculinity just really affirmed it for me.” (Dorijan). Meaning that the process of doing drag helped him with his own gender identity, particularly by experimenting with and expressing a hyper exaggerated version of masculinity, which made him affirm his own masculinity outside of drag, therefore, confirming Shapiro’s argument that drag influences the drag performer in exploring their own gender identity and their perception of gender (Shapiro, 2007, p. 251). Performing hypermasculinity through the usage of prominent facial

¹³ Used by Dorijan Mavrični as a reclaimed slur.

hair and chest hair, for example, is also another characteristic of fag drag (Halberstam, 1997, p. 253).

He spoke of his drag persona as being separate from him, as having “a life of his own”, and he also referred to Dorijan in the third person throughout the interview (Dorijan). Dorijan pointed out that his drag persona or his character often strips as part of his performances and his “tits are out” as he said (*ibidem*). Stripping and layering are frequently part of his performances I have seen as well in my own observations, which is also what Halberstam and Rupp, Taylor and Shapiro pointed out as usual parts of drag king performances fostering gender confusion and questioning of gender and its naturalness (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 286; Halberstam, 199, 259-261). He interestingly continued by saying that “Usually I’m bothered by them, but not when I’m in drag. When I’m in drag it’s just a fun prop.” (Dorijan). Doing a character in drag, therefore, helped Dorijan with his gender dysphoria as he was able to separate Dorijan from himself out of drag to an extent, but at the same time doing the drag character helped him experiment and affirm his own masculinity outside of drag. There is both a degree of separation and connection between his gender identity and his drag persona. Dorijan also confirmed it through giving his reasoning for why he did not decide to opt to be a drag queen: This was early in my “transition” and I said that I didn’t want to be a drag queen because I didn’t want my dysphoria to be triggered any further. Because I knew even back then that I could have been a drag queen, but I wanted to be a drag king instead because I wanted to explore this masculinity.”

As drag assisted him with overcoming gender dysphoria when in drag and exploring his own masculinity, he also became more comfortable with exploring “feminine masculinity or just straight up femininity” (Dorijan). Dorijan said that after he became more secure in his identity, he started experimenting with a masculinity on-stage, which was more feminine (*ibidem*). Furthermore, he said he also started introducing a new character, Donna Bokner, which he now performs occasionally. “She’s a cis woman, she’s very feminine. I wouldn’t necessarily say she’s a “girly”, she’s more of a traditional drag queen character, she’s very sexually liberated, party girl, and she’s a hot mess.” he described her (Dorijan). Therefore, Dorijan started delving into femininity as well. He also stated layering the character of Donna on top of Dorijan (Dorijan), therefore, portraying multiple overlapping genders at once.

My own observations of Dorijan’s presentation also yielded the same conclusions. I have seen Dorijan’s performances 2019-2022, and the performances up until the summer of 2022 have consisted of a hypermasculine look with mandatory side burns, moustache and often chest hair (Observations). His look mostly consisted of “old-school” male clothes, such as vests, dress pants and often paired up with a top hat (ibidem). In the summer of 2022, I noticed a change in his appearance, where he started adding what is traditionally considered “feminine” attire (ibidem). That being he started using makeup aside from just drawing on side burns and a moustache, it created a feminine-masculine look (ibidem).

Furthermore, he stopped using wigs as chest hair as much, and started revealing his “biologically” female body more, as well as incorporating skirts and corsets into his sets sometimes (ibidem). The evolution of his presentation somewhat followed his journey of transitioning, and can also be seen on the three pictures in Figure 4. From the beginning, his hypermasculine look reflected his insecurity with his own gender identity and he was trying to portray what is more “traditionally” associated with men and masculinity in an attempt to “pass” as a man both in drag and outside of drag. As he gained more security in his own identity, he started experimenting more with masculinity, femininity and female masculinity, moving away from “passing” into portraying gender fluidity. He pointed it out himself by stating that gender “is a thing you take and you sculpt and you make to your own liking. It doesn’t have to be constricted.”, therefore creating his own gender narrative.

5.3.2 Karmen Daš

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Doing drag (years)
Karmen Daš	22, trans non-binary person, queer	Drag queen	5

Karmen Daš identifies as a drag queen. Outside of drag, she identifies as trans non-binary (Karmen). Karmen explained that she feels “some sort of fluidity in my gender going from masculine to feminine, not like it is this or that, it jumps between these two” (Karmen). From this account, we can also draw parallels to Taylor and Rupp, just like in the case of Dorijan Mavrični in terms of transgender identity (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, p. 121). Karmen expressed her transgender identity as between masculinity and femininity, and flowing from one to the

other, embracing fluidity, therefore, similarly existing on a spectrum pointed out by Taylor and Rupp for some of their drag queen participants identifying with a transgender identity.

The drag persona, Karmen Daš, uses she/her pronouns, and she is “someone fun, someone bubbly, sultry, also spicy” (Karmen). Karmen was born out of a sexual trauma healing journey and her own hyper sexualization of herself, which she wanted to express and work on via drag (ibidem). This is why at first the persona more resembled a “dominatrix, it was very rough and dangerous and strong” (ibidem). In this manner, she said, she was able to take back her power, regain it again (ibidem). As she gained more personal strength and power through drag, she gradually transformed her character into a more feminine one with characteristics mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph.

Karmen further explained the gender identity and presentation of the drag persona as follows:

being a woman without having to be feminine. One thing to also break those gender norms- sometimes I also have a hairy chest, sometimes I have hairy legs. I want to show that you don't have to shave to be very feminine. And you don't have to act a certain way to be feminine. I do a lot of things that people may not see at first sight but everything I do is very thought out. There are details that make sense to me. Why did I choose this colour? Why did I do this? Because everything for me has a message. And a lot of the time the message is feminism (Karmen).

There are two processes going on simultaneously from Karmen's description. On the one hand, Karmen's intention is to challenge gender norms by presenting femininity, which is not stereotypical or traditional, but is still a version of femininity nonetheless, even if it contains traits associated with manhood and masculinity, such as a hairy chest. At the same time, Karmen is breaking the “illusion” by showcasing a dichotomy between her biologically male body and the feminine attire through keeping a hairy chest, hairy legs, just as the drag queens from Taylor and Rupp's article were doing as well (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 285). From my own observations, Karmen also sometimes keeps facial hair, wears hip pads rarely, she wore them more so before the summer of 2022, but sometimes she does opt for wearing very large breasts, although that has also become more infrequent in the summer of 2022 (Observations). Her bare, hairy chest, facial hair, hairy legs and arms can also be visible in Figure 6, and their juxtaposition with bold makeup and wigs.

Figure 6 Karmen Daš



(Source: Karmen Daš's Instagram profile page)

By airing out these dichotomies, while also picking and choosing and mixing “male” and “female” traits, Karmen showcases the performativity of gender, but also its fluidity. Furthermore, she is portraying a non-normative femininity, therefore, concurrently exposing the artificiality and performativity of normative femininity, agreeing with what Shapiro pointed out also in her study of drag kings (Shapiro, 2007, p. 263), as well as displaying that femininity is not a unanimous, fixed category, but a spectrum, containing many versions and varieties, constructed by individuals in their own vision of femininity.

Karmen was also in agreement with Shapiro, when she said that this helped drag kings to challenge misogyny and contribute to feminism (ibidem), which is also what Karmen's intention was. From the quote above, it is visible that Karmen wanted to counter the rigidity of gender norms and rules pertaining to femininity by displaying her femininity in her own way, and thus aiming towards a feminist cause. She also said that performing a feminine character made her acquire some more experiential knowledge on how feminine presenting people and women were treated, which also contributed to her cause and further exploration (Karmen).

For Karmen, doing drag was also connected to expressing herself, “it is an artform that expresses who you are through a gendered lens” (Karmen). She further elaborated on this statement by saying:

if I compare me and my drag persona, we are similar, but not that much on the gender. I mean I do sometimes feel hyper feminine but I used to feel it before I did drag more. Now, drag is an open artistic platform for me to express this certain type of my gender, like a part of it. But it is not my gender identity. It is like this certain type that I have to put down or minimize in certain environments, like work and public spaces because of homophobia. And then I use my emotions and I use this one part

of my mosaic of gender to express it. But it is not my full gender identity, it is not connected to all that I am, it is just parts of me (Karmen).

Karmen alluded to the complexity of her gender, it not being made up of only one version of femininity or masculinity, but of a variety and number of versions, which all together comprise a person’s gender. And through drag, she gets to portray a part of her gender. But the person has agency over the construction, as she put it “You are portraying gender in your way” (Karmen), both in everyday life and in drag. This is in line with Hausman’s gender as narrative and a dynamic subjectivity.

The dynamic component could also be deduced from Karmen explaining the affect drag had on her gender identity. Shapiro’s study of drag kings yielded results, in which it was evident that the process of doing drag affected the drag king’s gender identity and/or their perception of gender (Shapiro, 2007, p. 251). Karmen also pointed out that doing drag changed her perception of gender and gender identity as a “way of just playing with different things” (Karmen). She continued by saying that doing drag gave her the confidence to “play” also out of drag, with for example make up (Karmen). “So, with that, with drag, with getting to know people who do drag and just experimenting drag and with drag has helped me get a better understanding of the gender that I feel for myself. And I feel like it does that for everyone. You get to know your gender more when you do drag”, she elaborated (Karmen).

5.3.3 Iza Kunt

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Doing drag (years)
Iza Kunt	25, cis woman, queer	Drag thing	1 year and a half

Iza Kunt identifies as a drag thing (Iza). Outside of drag, she identifies as a woman, but she argued that gender is of secondary importance to her, that it is outdated to segregate people by gender or sex, she perceived gender as fluid and did not like the concept of labels (Iza). Her aspiration in drag was also to remove gender labels or perhaps even gender altogether, but she said that she came to realize that “at the base of it, you are presenting some kind of gender, no matter where you go, no matter what you’re presenting, it’s still something, like you cannot remove it, I tried, you cannot remove the label of a specific gender, it’s something that is

engrained in every living human being, because you are that, even in drag you are a specific gender, not specific, you are a gender. It's connected" (Iza).

Iza's strive towards more gender fluidity and doing away with gender labels was also reflected in her explanation of a drag thing. "A "drag thing", it's more about performing a concept, rather than a gender, I guess, performing emotions, creatures, abstract things, nothing is very really set, also about the look, I don't think it's set to be a specific gender, in that direction, I think" (Iza). She further elaborated that "I definitely I portray a role that's feminine, but I don't want to put a gender label on it" (Iza). Iza's explanation is similar to Rose Butch's definition of a drag thing, specified in the section on Drag History, deeming them more as non-binary drag, therefore, not any specific gender, open to any kind and type of expression of gender (Knecht, 2020).

As drag things are more open to different types of gender expression, they are challenging both gender limits and limits of drag (Knecht, 2020), which is what Iza Kunt is doing as well. When she is in her drag persona, she goes by various pronouns, those being either she, they or even it (Iza). She said that people perceived her as inhuman in drag, and that was also her goal (ibidem). This is also reflected in her choosing of the aforementioned pronouns it/its, typically associated with inhuman beings or things. The perception of drag performers as inhuman by other people due to their gender deviance was also pointed out by Egner and Maloney (2016, p. 886), but the connotation was different. Their interviewed drag performers saw this characterization in a negative light, while Iza Kunt was reclaiming this type of perception and even striving towards it by performing various creatures, things and concepts. From my own observations, I remember that Iza only wanted to be referred to with it/its pronouns in the beginning of her drag, but then gradually opted for other pronouns as well (Observations). She said it reflected her before-mentioned journey of initially wanting to do away with gender altogether, but then realizing the inevitability of it and its deep rootedness in society.

Interestingly enough, though Iza doesn't mind being referred to by multiple different pronouns, and also doesn't mind being referred to as a drag queen due to her more feminine presentation, she does not want to be referred to with he/him pronouns (Iza), and does not want to be referred to as a drag king, as per my observations (Observations). Based on Halberstam's and Shapiro's outline of drag kings, so-called "bio-queens" are a part of the drag king spectrum (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 276; Halberstam 1998), but Iza does not want to be identified as such. This conclusion

is based on my own observations from the summer of 2022, when Iza was competing in the competition “Queen of May”, and one of the judges mistook her for a drag king, and posed a critique that she didn’t resemble one (Observations). Iza was visibly angry, and told me later that she was offended by this classification (ibidem), and she pointed out in the interview that she was offended as well by people using he/him pronouns for her (Iza).

When asked to elaborate why she felt offended, she replied “I don’t know, ‘coz I don’t think I’m presenting a masculine energy, like if I would, I would be fine with it but I generally am not and I feel if they do call me a he in drag, it’s based on my actual gender I am, so a female, and I feel like if they use a he, it would be derogatory” (Iza). Based on this quote, it is evident Iza wanted to move away from a “traditional” perception of women or feminine presenting people doing drag, which is performing masculinity or manhood. She specifically wanted to sever ties with identifiers such as drag king and he/him pronouns to renounce the immediate connection between drag performer’s gender identity and/or presentation out of drag with their drag persona, and to go beyond the traditional view of drag performers performing the “opposite gender”.

In Iza’s case, as per my observations, she performs as different made-up creatures, inhuman beings, like mushrooms, and things, like trains (Observations), which can also be observed in Figure 7. Moreover, she emphasized that her drag was always transforming, therefore, hard to describe because it was not set (Iza). She said that caused confusion in people’s reactions to her, which was also her objective (ibidem). Iza mentioned that sometimes she also opted for a “more feminine classic drag look”, but that wasn’t her main objective (ibidem). She emphasized that she wanted to cause chaos, confusion and provoke thought in people: “I want people to think about what they’re looking at and try to figure out what’s going on” (Iza). Due to this, she argued, people frequently want to put a label on her, on her outfit, in an attempt to resolve their own confusion (Iza). Furthermore, she said, they are frequently confused not only about her drag persona and its gender, but also about her gender out of drag (ibidem). Her performances leave people with a lot of questions about both drag and gender.

Figure 7 Iza Kunt



(Source: Iza Kunt’s Instagram Profile Page)

Iza elaborated how she understood connections between her gender and her drag:

To me drag is a form of expression, it’s like, I kind of go against the traditional grain of drag as portraying a gender, I think drag is more of a hyped-up version of myself, something I cannot do in real life, but I can portray through drag. Because like it would be too much if I did something in everyday life, but if I do it as my drag character, it’s definitely seen as funny, it’s seen as camp, people live for it and you don’t get judged as much for expressing yourself (Iza).

Through this quote, we can see that her own gender was the base for her drag character, but she felt like she couldn’t express her gender fully in her everyday life. Therefore, drag presented an extension of her everyday gender in the form of a hyper exaggeration, which together resulted in her being able to express her “full” gender. It was in drag that she could fully construct it and express it as she wanted to, therefore, drag enabled her gender narrative. Furthermore, Iza emphasized that doing drag affected her perception of gender, again paralleling Shapiro’s argument (Shapiro, 2007, p. 251). She said that she used to perceive gender more in traditional, rigid terms, and had internalized societal expectations from her gender role as a woman (Iza). Doing drag and portraying her drag character made her loosen her perception of gender, and encouraged her to play with it, experiment, have fun, place less importance and rigidity to it, embrace fluidity, also in her day-to-day life more (ibidem).

5.3.4 Eric Dagger

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Years of doing drag
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Eric Dagger	28, cis woman, bisexual	Drag king, drag queen, drag thing	4
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Eric Dagger identifies as all of the identifiers, they explained it as “I use they/them pronouns and I mostly use the whole terminology, drag king, drag queen, drag thing, I would love to be like a mashup and will sometimes call myself “drag queeng/drag quing” (Eric). They further elaborated their statement by saying:

Because my drag persona is at the same time masc and femme presenting, I like to not differentiate in terminology. Just because I’m a king doesn’t mean I will go full on masculine manly man persona, and also just because I’m a drag queen I won’t automatically just turn into this feminine, female, femme persona. I like to be more gender non-binary, sometimes masc presenting, sometimes femme presenting, but never fully that, mostly based in androgyny. (Eric).

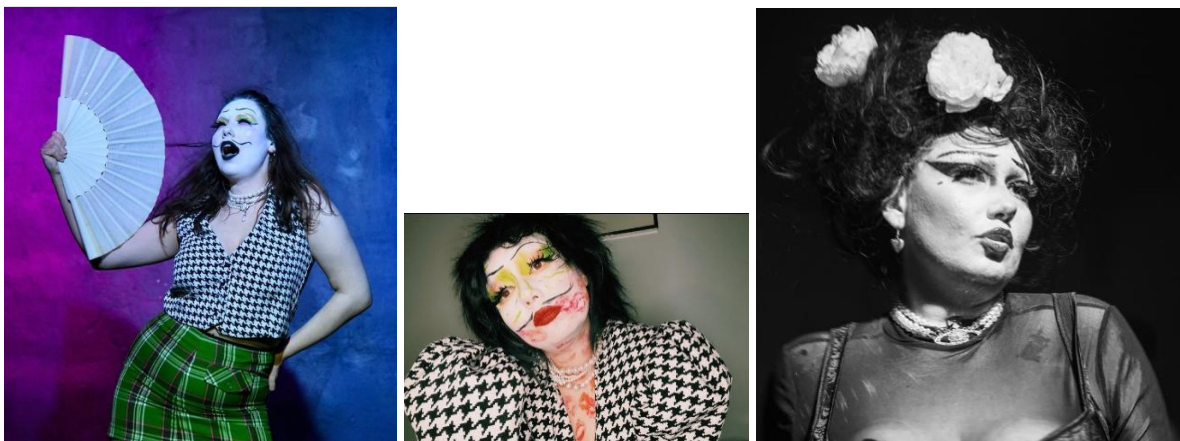
Eric’s explanation relates to the previously mentioned explanation of drag things put forward by Rose Butch, pertaining to it being non-binary drag (Knegt, 2020), which is also what Eric is trying to portray. “Drag thing, depends on the person, of course, can be neither king or queen because for them terms queen and king are still very gender binary. They can be a drag thing to be really out of the binary. That’s how I define it” (Eric). Eric emphasized the crucial element was going out and beyond the gender binary with gender expression as well as with drag classifications. Furthermore, they put forward a clarification on the mashup term drag queeng/quing: “It is also playing with the binary and it also goes beyond it. But for me, it is mostly to distinguish to the audience that I am both a king and a queen, that one does not overlap the other” (Eric), representing a play on the gender spectrum and simultaneous presentations of multiple genders at one.

Outside of drag, Eric identifies as a woman most of the days, but “Some days I can feel a bit more non-binary than other days. Depends on the day.” (Eric). Eric expressed a more complex gender identity (Shapiro, 2007, p. 258), made up of various different parts. They also express their gender differently depending on the day and identify differently depending on the day, therefore, showcasing yet again Hausman’s dynamic subjectivity of gender and constructing own gender narratives depending on what we want to portray to the world at that particular time (Hausman, 2000, p. 117).

Their drag persona, Eric Dagger, as mentioned before is a “mesh of genders” (Eric), but at the same time Eric took inspiration from the gothic subculture, which they explained is oftentimes “very androgynous and genderless, and also dark and because I love horror movies and a lot of things macabre, and it was a very important part of me, that’s why I love to always wear black, I love to paint my face white” (Eric). Eric’s goth inspired aesthetic with darker colors, and white face paint can also be viewed in Figure 8, as well as their meshing of femininity and masculinity.

As per my own observations, Eric alternates between a more feminine look and a more masculine or androgynous look, sometimes wearing drawn on moustaches and using their own hair, and sometimes opting for black or white wigs, but always wearing “feminine” makeup as well (Observations). In their performances, they also frequently include layering and stripping (ibidem, Rupp et al., 2010, p. 286; Halberstam, 199, 259-261), which showcases the performativity of gender and Eric’s gender fluidity, as they flow from a perhaps more masculine or androgynous top layer to a more feminine underneath and then further to expose their female body, which would be one of the examples of their performances from my observations (ibidem). They are also always consistently portraying their goth and/or witch inspired aesthetic (ibidem). As is evident from the account of their aesthetic and their performances, Eric is engaging in the portrayal of non-normative femininities and masculinities in their drag performances.

Figure 8 Eric Dagger



(Source: Eric Dagger’s Instagram profile page)

Their consistent and clear portrayals are due to, as they pointed out: “I don’t know about the others, but I try to package Eric Dagger as something that can be interpreted very easily, because

when we start to complicate things, we tend to lose the audience and we don't want that" (Eric). Eric, oppositely from Iza Kunt, didn't want to cause confusion and chaos, but wanted to get their point across clearly and directly. Their message revolves around, as previously mentioned, playing with the gender binary and going beyond it, but also to present and show "safe representations of masculinity and femininity" (Eric).

Eric said that they had been subjected to a lot of toxic masculinity and toxic femininity, and that they were very prevalent in society in general (Eric). As they identify as a bisexual woman outside of drag, who also has attraction towards men, they felt like when these men became toxic, they "failed as a queer woman, as a woman in general, and failed as a feminist and all these spectrums that make up me, I feel like I failed by being attracted to someone who turned out to be toxic" (Eric). These personal experiences led them to wanting to paint a different picture: "That's why when I say like, positive, safe masculinity I really needed like, a lot of different examples of men to see, like "oh, we can have cuddly men, we can have soft men, we can have these mysterious bad boys, that are also charming, and can be protective of you, not like possessive or demanding, but that they put your wellbeing first" (Eric), which is what they wanted to display. Eric wanted the audience to see a different, safer version of masculinity, which could still be a "sexy and charming representation of men or a masculine type" (Eric).

With regard to toxic femininity, they recounted it as a consequence of generational trauma from war time, but also Eric wanted to do away with stereotypes connected to queer women and bisexual women in particular (Eric). Those being connected to bisexual women being more promiscuous and hyper sexual in general (ibidem). Eric wished to exhibit the following "I can also be Dagger and be all sexy and lusty, sultry and voluptuous on stage, and they can't touch me, and they can't hassle me for it, and then off stage, when they try to be like "ooh, mmm", I'm just like this cute, adorable little person who's just like "hi, how are you?", that's the illusion I really love to break" (Eric). They wanted to show that a person could be many, at first glance, contradictory things at once, they could express their sexuality, while still having many other layers and traits to them.

Eric also highlighted that doing drag for them was a form of art through which they could express themselves and discuss their masculinity, their femininity, and their ideas not connected to gender specifically (Eric). Therefore, drag was a tool for them to express their gender identity, and it being made up of different parts, meaning femininity, masculinity, non-binary

together in a complex gender make-up. It is also reflected in their drag persona, which embodies all these parts through being a drag queen, king and thing. Their presentation varies depending on which part of the gender identity they wish to display that day. Shapiro’s statement on the process of doing drag affecting the gender identity or gender perception of the drag performer (Shapiro, 2007, p. 251) holds true also for Eric Dagger. They said that prior to doing drag, they perceived gender only in the binary, and had specific deeply ingrained ideas for how women and men should behave and look like (Eric). But after doing drag, Eric realized “gender doesn’t have to be so binary, gender can very much be whatever you want, and you can experiment with it any way you know how” (Eric), therefore, again awarding agency at an individual level for construction and expression of one’s gender narrative.

5.3.5 Mentalika

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Years of doing drag
Mentalika	27, non-binary person, gay	Drag queen	4

Mentalika identifies as a drag queen. Outside of drag, she identifies as a non-binary person, and she described as “I just really felt stuck with feeling like I have to be a man or a woman, and when I heard the term non-binary I was kinda like, yeah, that’s what I feel, that’s neither here nor there, both at the same time” (Mentalika). Mentalika’s non-binary identification is in some ways similar to the identifier genderqueer, with which some drag kings identified with in Shapiro’s study, and they explained it as occupying space beyond binaries female and male, masculine and feminine, it was understood as female, male and between (Shapiro, 2007, p. 257), which approximates Mentalika’s description.

She further explained that she perceived her gender as fluid: “because some days I will feel more like masculine role, and feeling maybe more masculine emotions, and then other days, I will tap more into my feminine side, where I would feel maybe more feminine emotions, and take more of a feminine role and, but that kind of changes all the time” (Mentalika). Therefore, similar to Eric Dagger, for Mentalika her gender comprised of a complex identity make-up, as Shapiro’s drag kings expressed as well, it depended on the day, and it was ever-changing.

The drag persona of Mentalika was described as a non-binary performer, which could technically be in agreement with the definition of drag things in place in this thesis, and that being that it is non-binary drag (Knecht, 2020). Mentalika, however, identifies as a drag queen and uses she/her pronouns, and she elaborated her choice of both by saying: “out of drag I present very masculine, so in a way, Mentalika is a way for me to live out the non-binarity to the fullest /.../ I’m referred to as he, he/him pronouns out in the world, and I guess in drag, my she/her gets to live her part” (Mentalika). Paired with Mentalika’s view of drag as a medium to express herself and her identity (Mentalika), drag permits her to portray a part of her gender, which she is not able or doesn’t want to do in everyday life. Her gender fluidity cannot only be seen through her gender being a spectrum and ever-changing, but the gender fluidity can also be seen between her everyday masculine gender expression and her expression of gender in drag, which together comprise her “full” gender.

Mentalika described her look as:

I have a signature face, which is usually, I do kinda an inner face, like a drawn on mask, and I frame my face white on the inside and then I have tone of the flesh on the outside frame, or the mask or whatever, and then I like to use strong unconventional colours, like hot pink, hot purple, red, just to kind of draw attention to, like, this is a feminine presenting person, but she’s not female looking at all. I also have a very prominent hairy chest, I don’t really tuck (Mentalika).

Her signature look can also be visible in the Figure 9. From my own observations, Mentalika’s signature developed as her drag journey progressed (Observations). In 2019, when I first saw Mentalika perform, she was going by the name Petra HD, and her look was closer to a “traditional” drag queen look than it is today (ibidem). Meaning it was more classically feminine in terms of make-up and clothing, and she was not exposing her “male” body, for example her hairy chest and not tucked (ibidem). She never, however, wore fake breasts or hip pads in order emulate a “female” body (ibidem). Her look now presents her version of femininity, a version that is non-normative, which is reflected in her saying that Mentalika was feminine presenting, but not female looking. Mentalika’s femininity is also partnered with her display of her body and “male” features, which again shows gender fluidity and permeability, as well as poses a challenge to gender boundaries and the artificial gender binary, since it is a place of gender confusion, ambiguity and deviance, as Halberstam also argued (Halberstam, 1997, p. 261). The gender confusion and ambiguity are also intentional, because Mentalika said in the interview that she wanted to incite questioning from people, she wanted people to ask themselves “Who is she?” (Mentalika).

Figure 9 Mentalika



(Source: Mentalika’s Instagram Profile Page)

For Mentalika, she said, the process of doing drag did not affect her gender identity (Mentalika). She argued it “it just reaffirmed what was already there” (Mentalika), similar to Dorijan Mavrični and the affirmation of his masculinity and his identity. Although, it was an affirmation of identity for Mentalika, it was still the process of doing drag, experimenting with her expression and the evolution of it, that helped her realize her identity. Therefore, it is still in line with Shapiro’s claims about drag influencing drag performer’s gender identity, it helped foster realizations. Mentalika also pointed out “for example, with trans people, they kind of, a lot of them begin with drag. They start doing drag and then drag resonates so much, on such a deep and intricate level, that they realize like “oh wait, actually...” (Mentalika), therefore, further affirming the view of drag aiding the gender process of the drag performer.

5.3.6 Trafika Čik Kunt

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Years of doing drag
Trafika Čik Kunt	23, cis woman, pansexual	Drag queen	2

Trafika Čik Kunt identifies as a drag queen. Outside of drag, she is a cis woman and uses she/her pronouns (Trafika). She went on to say:

I think I am living the binary because I never really questioned my own gender identity. I think it should be allowed to be fluid, though. That's how I view it with other people. I accept other people's lived experiences. I perceive people's gender as how they perceive it. For me personally, I am within the binary, I would say. But I don't the binary should be the standard. I think generally I would say that it is fluid but right now the perception is more binary for a lot of people (Trafika).

From her account, we can observe that her perception of gender as a category is fluid, and she affords personal agency to people with regards to their gender, therefore, embracing Hausman's gender as personal narrative. Trafika would be categorized as a "bio-queen" due to being a cis woman performing femininity, which would, based on Taylor and Rupp's classification, classify her under the scope of drag kings, but she identifies herself as a drag queen, and not a drag king. From my own observations, from the beginning of her journey, she has always identified as a drag queen, and has never vocalized a dilemma whether to identify as a drag king or drag queen (Observations). The drag performers in the community have also automatically labelled her as a drag queen, and I have never observed any labelling of her as a drag king (ibidem).

Trafika described the drag persona as "Trafika is a hyper feminine bimbo, has been self-described before as a clown core hooker. She's fun, she's hypersexual I would say. She mostly deals with comedy in a way, I would say" (Trafika). And added "Very bimbo sex doll, sometimes clowny. Exaggerated blond kind of thing, usually. But now maybe moving more into ditzy, maybe" (Trafika). Adding to this my own observations, she usually wears corsets, tight revealing clothing, dresses and skirts to accentuate her "female" body (Observations). Her make-up is "really exaggerated, like the makeup is really clown-ish /.../ I shave off my eyebrows for drag, I have a lot more space to work with" (Trafika). Trafika's look can also be observed in Figure 10. She went on to say: "For me, I exaggerated some of my own characteristics, my own gender expression that I do day to day but it is very very exaggerated here" (Trafika), therefore, as is visible from her comment, Trafika performs a hyper exaggerated version of her femininity or hyper femininity, meaning doing drag is an expression of herself, as was the case with other interviewed drag performers thus far. She said she exaggerated it to the point of a caricature, using the aesthetic of camp (Trafika), which is in line with the presentation of camp in the literature review as an exaggerated, humorous, parodic expression of femininity (Newton, 1972, p. 103).

Figure 10 Trafika Čik Kunt



(Source: Trafika Čik Kunt's Instagram Profile Page)

By Trafika being a cis woman out of drag and performing a hyper exaggerated version of her own femininity, she consequently vividly exposes femininity as a performance and a construction, as being able to be recreated and performed. This falls in line with Butler's and Shapiro's claims on gender and particularly femininity as a performance (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990; Shapiro, 2007, p. 263). The artificiality of femininity is also visible in Trafika's ability to exaggerate it and make a "clowny" caricature out of it due to its performative nature, therefore, showcasing there is no "original" or "true" femininity, it can be moulded into whatever shape the performer chooses. It once again reaffirms gender as a personal narrative and dynamic subjectivity.

Trafika spoke about her decision to perform (hyper)femininity, and not masculinity as would be the automatic assumption for a cis woman going into drag performance. She said Trafika was born out of her past self:

I think it is very much in combination with me being a grown up now and imitating something I was doing a few years back. I think it is very much in combination with me maturing as a person. I think drag helped put things into perspective. I was basically always doing this "hooker" thing out of drag when I was younger, and now doing it as a caricature puts things into perspective. And it's in combination that at the time I was a much younger person, so, that is so weird that I was a kid doing that, and now I'm an adult doing it as a form of performance (Trafika).

She explained that she "developed" this character, this persona before she started doing drag, she was performing it when she was pursuing a person sexually (Trafika). Trafika as a drag persona, as above-mentioned, is hypersexual, which is a reflection of her hypersexualizing herself as a teenager. The process of doing drag helped her reflect on her past self and the past

version of femininity she was displaying in her interactions. Therefore, Trafika's process is in line with Shapiro's statements on drag affecting the drag performer's perceptions of their gender and gender in general.

She went on to put forward her own realizations, to which she came to during the process of performing or caricaturing herself and a trait of her femininity in the past, and that is "A product of a society hypersexualizing young women and socializing them in this way, so they internalize it" (Trafika). Trafika is trying to shed light on the element of hyper sexualization being attached to femininity and to womanhood, and how young women internalize it and perform it, often to the point of self-harm, from which they often need to heal as adults. In this manner, femininity can be viewed as oppressive and harmful to women, as liberal and radical feminists, particularly Janice Raymond and Marilyn Frye claimed in the literature review (MacKinnon, 200, Raymond, 1994, p. 28; Frye, 1983, p. 137).

Trafika also disclosed her disinterest for men, manhood and masculinity: "I think it is more common or usual the other way around where cis women would be drag kings. But for me that just seems very boring, why would I want to be a man?" (Trafika). When asked to expand on her statement, she said:

It is embarrassing. It is just so boring. Even if you exaggerate what is typically perceived as male presenting, if you were imitating masculinity, it would only be fun if it was some sort of a subversion of it. But otherwise, it is so boring, because men have played themselves into this corner, where masculinity is just so boring to me, I could never. I would struggle to find ways to make it fun for myself. I think with womanhood you can do a lot more. I mean with femininity, you can do a lot more, everything is more elaborate, and I admire it more and I appreciate it more (Trafika).

From her above quote, we can observe a reflection of Halberstam's argument on the non-performativity of normative masculinity (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 234-235). It is viewed as non-performative due to the anchoring of normative masculinity in society as the default, as natural, and, therefore, not being able to be performed (*ibidem*). This sentiment is mirrored in Trafika's claims that masculinity is "boring", and can only be fun when there is subversion to it, meaning in the form of non-normative masculinities. It is in line with Halberstam (*ibidem*) saying that non-normative masculinities have not been perceived as non-performative since they diverge from the normative masculinity and exist in relation to it, just like femininity. At the same time, they are also being perceived as more feminine, closer to femininity, and that is perceived as artificial and, therefore, able to be performed.

Trafika’s perception of normative masculinity as “embarrassing” and “boring”, while she perceived femininity with admiration and appreciation directly opposes the previous argument of radical feminists on the oppression and harm of femininity for women, and furthermore, that the solution lies in adopting a more masculine or androgynous manner as a road to empowerment (MacKinnon, 2001). As was evident before, Trafika offered a critique of characteristics usually attached to femininity and reproduced in socialization, but those aren’t the characteristics that need to continue defining femininity, they can be healed and replaced with or transformed into many other versions, femininity can be reclaimed. Normative masculinity and its performance, on the other hand, did not appear as a source of power and strength for Trafika, it was seen as embarrassment, she refused to be connected to it in any way.

5.3.7 Vera Vulva

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Years of doing drag
Vera Vulva	23, cis man, queer	Drag queen, drag thing	4

Vera Vulva described herself as a drag queen, but pointed out that drag thing could also be applied for what she did in drag (Vera). She elaborated her identification by saying: “I will say that my drag character, how I feel in drag is more feminine, more extra and flamboyant than I usually do, but I don’t perceive that as feeling female or feeling womanly. It’s just this alien femininity, if that makes sense, it’s more this non-binary femininity” (Vera). Vera also added that she felt more like a thing in drag than a woman, “it’s not that I would want to feel like a woman, like a cis woman. It’s more of the feminine idea that surrounds an alien” (Vera).

Similarly, to Iza Kunt, Vera’s intentions are also to be perceived as inhuman. Egner and Maloney (2016, p. 886) pointed out the perception of drag performers as inhuman by people due to their extreme gender deviance, but for Vera, as with Iza before, it is not a by-product, but a conscious intention. It is also a reclamation of being perceived as inhuman, the reclamation speaks to it not being an inherently bad thing, but an encouragement towards further gender deviance and boundary breaking. Vera identifying as both drag queen and drag thing in connection with the “non-binary femininity” she wishes to portray is in line with a

mash-up of definitions of a drag queen and drag thing presented in this thesis, the former connected to the expression of femininity and the latter connected to non-binary drag. The term “non-binary femininity” also appears contradictory at first glance, and reveals a complex identity on the spectrum of masculinity and femininity as well as beyond. It is somewhat similar to Shapiro’s drag kings articulating complex and particular identities, which sometimes appeared contradictory, such as “genderqueer femme” (Shapiro, 2007, p. 258).

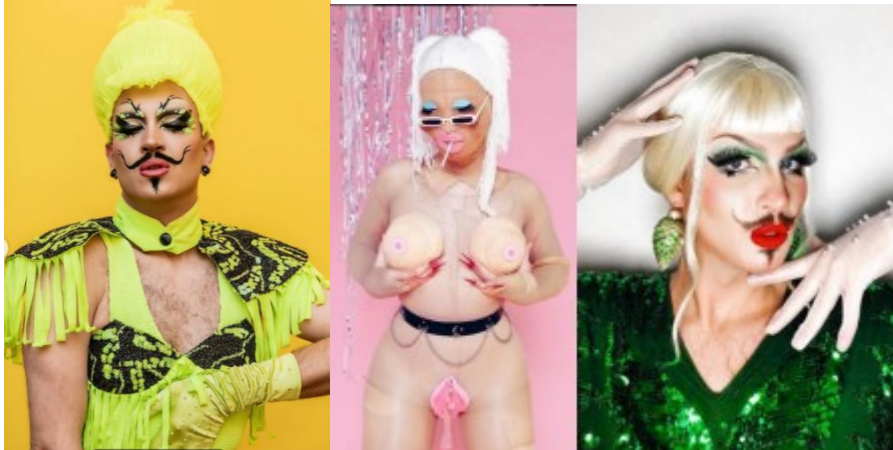
Outside of drag, Vera is a cis man, and recounted her gender identity as: “I feel like a man, or like a boy. I use he/him pronouns. I was never encumbered by gender since I was a child. It always like “Okay, I’m a boy, whatever”. It was never really like a thing that would define everything that I do. I’m more of a man, but I do think that everything is fluid. It’s more how you’re feeling in the moment type of situation” (Vera). Vera revealed her perception of the fluidity of gender, as well as gender being dependant on the moment and on the person, therefore, again awarding agency and individuality to the dynamic construction and expression of gender, as per Hausman’s theory.

The drag persona was described as “So, my drag character, although I see her as an alien non-binary creature, she is a she. I think Vera fluctuates, either this glamorous hairy lady or madame, but then she goes to a hot, leathery stripper moment. I guess Vera is multiple different women, who all share one thing, the moustache” (Vera). As per my own observations of Vera’s look, she also has visible chest hair and body hair in general, wears feminine make-up, and does not wear breast plates or hip pads (Observations). Her look is also visible in Figure 11. She also frequently uses a headpiece, which is a “pumpkin of fake hair and yarn in neon yellow”, visible in Figure 11 as well (Observations; Vera). Vera is presenting her own version of femininity, alien or non-binary, as she termed it. She is mixing “male” features, such as wearing her signature moustache, showing chest hair, with a feminine expression, as well as using unconventional, “alien” like headpieces. Vera is, thus, expressing a non-normative femininity or rather non-normative femininities, since she portrays multiple different women.

Furthermore, like Karmen, Mentalika and Eric Dagger, she is letting her “male” body be shown, contributing to a fluidity and permeability of gender, as well as gender confusion and ambiguity. Vera also does so when sometimes performing as her second character, Ančka U01, “a sex puppet raggedy doll” (Vera), visible in the middle of Figure 11. Although she is completely covered, and wears hip pads in this character, as well as has breasts and a vagina, it is done so

in a deconstructed “cartoonish” way. It is not done in a way where it would imitate a woman, and it fuels gender confusion and questioning who and what gender is underneath due to the full coverage.

Figure 11 Vera Vulva



(Source: Vera Vulva’s Instagram Profile Page)

Vera also explained her choice of she/her pronouns when in drag: “For Vera I always use she/her pronouns, because I feel like it doesn’t matter the gender. I think she/her pronouns, they are for everybody, gender neutral. It’s not about what gender you are, everyone is a she, the default” (Vera). My own observations yielded the same conclusion, in the drag community (but also sometimes in the queer community more broadly) pronouns she/her are used for everyone the majority of the time, unless the person emphasizes otherwise (Observations). Vera highlighted that it could sometimes be perceived as offensive by trans men, and she respected their pronouns, but she said that the trans men close to her in the drag community embrace she/her as default as well (Vera). This opposes the man and masculinity as default, natural, superior, unquestioned, and woman and femininity existing in relation to it, the derivate, artificial, and inferior (Beauvoir, 2009, pp. 5-6). In the drag community, it is reversed, she/her is the default, natural and unquestioned, but also perceived as gender neutral, therefore, encompassing the whole gender spectrum without affording either superiority or inferiority, because it is being applied to everyone.

She pointed out that “I realize my drag character is not a completely alien idea, of course it is a part of me, it is a part of my character” (Vera), therefore, embracing the connection between her own gender identity and her drag persona. Her drag persona is also a manifestation of a part

of her gender, as was the case with other drag performers thus far, as well as her gender being comprised of multiple different parts. But interestingly, Vera continued to say “Both of these are a costume at the end of the day, how you present” (Vera). She was referring to herself out of drag and in drag, she perceived both as costumes, she elaborated that both are a performance of a version of yourself. Egner and Maloney also mentioned that some of the drag performers in their study also perceived not only their drag character as a persona, but also themselves out of drag as a persona, but both being a part of them (Egner and Maloney, 2016, pp. 894-895).

This is one of the conclusions she had come during her time doing drag. Another way in which she proved Shapiro’s point on the effect of drag on gender perception of the drag performer is through: “But doing drag has relaxed the strict rules on gender, what you’re supposed to say, how you’re supposed to be perceived. I really don’t care as much about masculinity or trying to be masculine ever since I started doing drag because I don’t find it relevant anymore. I also don’t even find it relevant to be as super feminine drag as I can be” (Vera). She embraced gender fluidity, and moving away from being obligated to perform normative masculinity and femininity, to more doing as she pleased.

5.3.8 Glupa Pupa Kunt

Drag performer	Age, gender, sexuality	Drag identity	Years of doing drag
Glupa Pupa Kunt	24, trans woman*, queer	Drag queen	1

Glupa Pupa Kunt identifies as a drag queen. Outside of drag, she described her gender identity as: “I am transitioning a bit. I’m more and more comfortable with she/her pronouns, but I don’t want to define myself specifically yet. I’m still finding myself” (Glupa). She went on to elaborate: “Basically, since I was little, I always wanted to be a woman, but I guess it was an impossible thought for me, that this could even come true. And also, that people would look at me a little more normally, if I was a woman, because I liked boys” (Glupa). She added: “I guess I finally accepted the fact that I like boys and that boys can also be together, but I guess I didn’t feel the best, I didn’t feel comfortable. /.../ And the more and more I went towards the feminine, the more and more I was comfortable, the more and more comfortable I felt. It was more me than ever, I guess” (Glupa).

In the time that has passed since my interview with Glupa Pupa, she started identifying as a trans woman (Observations). Taylor and Rupp in their drag queen study also pointed out some of the drag queens recounting their gender journey through doing drag, and have come to identify as trans women, if only for a while, due to being more comfortable with a feminine expression and presentation, as well as it being connected to their attraction to men, and their discomfort with being perceived as a gay man attracted to other men (Rupp and Taylor, 2004, p. 121).

Glupa Pupa as a drag persona was described as “naughty, naive and very stupid, but very beautiful”, and uses she/her pronouns (Glupa). She continued “I actually have two specific looks. One is very cute, just as you would imagine a stupid doll, very pink, very baby blue, very cute cute cute, and one persona is a bit wild, such a dominatrix, so dark, black colors” (Glupa). Her looks can also be seen in Figure 12. She pointed to her figure and physical expression of her drag persona: “Yes, I use a corset to snitch me a little, because we like a skinny waist, on me of course. Everyone has their own preferences. Well, I like to use hip pads, I really like hip pads. Not many of our drag queens use it. I also like what it does to my body /.../ Maybe one day it won't just be hip pads, maybe they will be real (Glupa). And added “I don't like wearing boobs because they emphasize the masculine shape of my male shoulders and my man body” (Glupa). This is also visible from Figure 12. From my own observations, she always shaves her chest, facial hair, hands and legs (Observations).

Therefore, it can be deduced that Glupa Pupa is expressing two different types of femininities through her presentation and performances, and is trying to emulate the “female” body and the rules put on it by society to an extent through the usage of hip pads and shaving. By creating a more “female” figure with hip pads and not using breast plates due to them emphasizing her “male body”, as she put it, she is able to cure her body dysmorphia to an extent and affirm her gender, just as we were able to see with Dorijan Mavrični. This also goes hand in hand with Glupa Pupa’s view on drag and her drag journey, which is “Drag for me, it basically changed my life, I like myself a little better since then and I know myself better. It's basically playing a character, but you're also playing yourself” (Glupa). She confirmed the connections between the drag performer’s gender identity outside of drag and their drag persona, being able to express your gender or a part of your gender through drag, as well as confirmed the influence drag has on the gender of the drag performer, as per Shapiro’s claims.

Figure 12 Glupa Pupa Kunt



(Source: Glupa Pupa Kunt's Instagram Profile Page)

5.3.9 Common Denominators on the Connection Between Gender and Drag

After the analysis of separate individual drag performer's perceptions and expressions of gender and drag, and connections between their gender identity and their drag persona, this section will be dedicated towards drawing common denominators between them in order to come to broader, more structural conclusions about gender through the lens of performing drag.

But firstly, I will briefly share some of my own reflections on doing drag and gender. Participating as a drag queen myself, my own gender identity also presented a base for my drag expression (Observations). I identify as a woman, and at the time when I started doing drag, which was a year and a half ago, I was more androgynous presenting (ibidem). Through my drag, I wanted to express an even more exaggerated androgynous look, because I wanted to amplify and theatricalize my day-to-day gender expression (ibidem). Through the process of doing drag, I have, however, been able to experiment with many different gender presentations, mixing them or flowing from one to the other (ibidem). Along the way, I have found a new found appreciation and respect for expressing femininity, and I have also been encouraged to explore femininity again in my day-to-day life, which I have previously abandoned due to internalizing society's negative views on femininity (ibidem). Drag helped me realize the complexity of my gender make-up and that gender is not set in stone, it can change and flow, it can exist in variations of my own choosing (ibidem).

To sum up this section of analyses thus far, drag performers identified with and expressed a vast range of genders and complex gender identities out of drag as well as through their drag characters. Some interviewed performers identified as being on the spectrum between man and woman, between masculinity and femininity, beyond it, sometimes with multiple overlapping genders, and for some it was closer to either ends of the spectrum, either male or female, masculine or feminine. This kind of diversity and variety was also detected by Egner and Maloney, as well as by Halberstam, Taylor, Rupp and Shapiro in their studies. For the interview participants, drag meant being able to portray the fluidity of gender and being able to exercise gender play, since gender was perceived as a non-fixed, unstable and incoherent category by them. This also goes in line with conclusions made in previously mentioned studies. For most of the interview participants, gender was perceived as a complex entity, comprised of various different parts and versions, and able to be portrayed in various different versions. Drag performers showcase their gender fluidity and gender complexity via expressing mostly non-normative versions of gender, non-normative versions of femininity and masculinity through drag performance, therefore, expressing hybrid or minority genders, as Taylor and Rupp put it (Taylor and Rupp, 2004, pp. 130-131). Furthermore, they are expressing their own versions of gender, they are constructing and presenting gender in many different ways they wish, and affording other people the agency to do so as well, which is in agreement with Hausman's gender as narrative theory.

Taylor and Rupp, as well as Garber theorize drag queens, but we can also say drag performers more broadly, as a third gender option or another gender option, however, my research does not agree completely with it. It is in agreement that drag performers construct and express their own versions of gender, but that does not mean that they are creating a "third" or "another" gender category. First of all, that statement tends to homogenize the diversity and variety of gender identifications and portrayals done by the drag performers. And secondly, it defeats the point of fluidity of gender, the drag performers wished to tear down rigid gender boundaries, norms and rules, and encourage various versions of gender, but not in strict terms such as adding whole new categories of gender as that would add permanence, rigidness and new rules. It is partially in agreement with Taylor and Rupp saying gender needs to be expanded beyond the possibilities in which it exists today, but not by adding new categories, but by allowing gender to exist in its fluidity, impermanence, variety, transformation, and change.

All the interviewed drag performers had in common a layered relationship to their drag persona. As was visible from drag performer's descriptions of their drag personas, they were all describing them in the third person. Furthermore, they not only described the look and gender presentation of their drag character, but also the drag persona's personality, pronouns, backstory, wishes, aspirations and intentions. They presented their drag characters as separate persons, making it seem like they were not connected to them. This was also pointed out by Egner and Maloney in the literature review portion, where their participating drag performers presented their drag personas in a similar manner as separate individuals (Egner and Maloney, 2016, p. 894). But at the same time, they all acknowledged a connection between themselves, their gender identity and their drag character. That either took the form of the drag persona being an extension or a hyper exaggerated version of their everyday gender expression, or them expressing a part of their gender identity through their drag character, for some it is even the part, which "completes" the full picture of their gender make-up. Both the gender they express outside of drag and in drag comprises a part of them, it represents them and their gender identity, which resonates with Egner and Maloney's conclusions about the complementarity of the drag performer's genders in and outside of drag (Egner and Maloney, 2016, pp. 894-895).

There is also a degree of gender fluidity detected between their day-to-day gender and their gender in drag, since they both comprise a part of them, and are flowing in and out of each other, mixing, sometimes opposing. This also stands in line with Egner and Maloney's point of gender fluidity not only being visible through drag performers' portrayal of a wide array and multiplicity of genders, but also lying in their fluidity between their everyday self and their drag (ibidem). They said some drag performers outside of drag were more feminine, and more masculine in drag or vice versa, for some it was a hyper version of their gender (ibidem), and this was also proven with my sample of drag performers. Some were more masculine in their day-to-day, and more feminine in drag, for some it was a mixture, and for some it was an exaggeration of their day-to-day. In any case they did it, they were portraying the nature of gender, which is that it is performative, artificial, and able to be replicated in any way we choose.

The fluidity between their everyday self, their bodies and their drag persona adds another layer to the equation, as many drag performers included stripping, layering, exposing their body as part of their performance. As Halberstam put it "In this manner, both drag kings and queens are exposing their many ambiguities and the "permeable boundaries between acting and being"

since they are all displaying their queerness and the unnaturalness of gender roles” (Halberstam, 1997, p. 261). They exposed that there are not automatic “natural” connections between sex in terms of biology and gender, and that gender is inherently a performance, being able to exist in many versions and expressions.

That drag performers came to their perceptions and new findings about their own gender identity and gender in general as non-rigid, fluid, and complex was due to the gendered process of doing drag. Again, echoing Shapiro and her claim on the effect of drag on the gender and the perception of the drag performer, all interview participants acknowledged the effect of doing drag on them. It confirms Shapiro’s argument “Doing drag cultivated negotiations between identities they were living and those they were performing, which permitted them to personify and identify with a variety of gender identities, perhaps even at once, that can overlap, contradict, and flow in and out (Shapiro, 2007, p. 261). Through being able to experiment with gender and various gender presentations and expressions through drag, if they so chose, they were able to decode gender as performative and able to be fluid, move away from perceiving gender strictly in the binary with rigid rules attached to them, playing within and beyond the gender binary, and also got more familiar with their own complex gender make-up, which does not need to be confined and can also change and transform.

5.4 Gendered Dynamics in the Drag Community in Slovenia

All interview participants expressed that the drag community in Slovenia was very inclusive, and that the drag performers were very supportive among themselves (All interview participants). From my personal account of entering the scene as a drag queen, as well as of my drag house in general, the other drag performers on the scene were generally very excited about new performers entering the scene, and offered support and information, if asked for advice (Observations). Drag performers also showed enthusiasm in terms of the drag community in Slovenia becoming more diverse and varied with drag queens, kings and things on the scene performing a wide arrange of genders and identifying with a variety of genders outside of drag (All interview participants; Observations).

It was mentioned in the literature review in the study by Berbary and Johnson (2017, p. 8), that bio queens were not seen as valid, as well as drag kings being seen as less by drag queens, but all the interview participants treated all the different types of drag and persons doing drag as

equal and valid (All interview participants), which has also been my observation of the dynamics within the drag community (Observations). The drag performers also said that they never received comments from other drag performers telling them how they “should” portray their character, they never commented on their expression and presentation of gender when in drag (All interview participants). From my own observations, I have also never witnessed it and have never received such type of commentary (Observations).

The drag scene, is, however, still largely a “boy’s club” as Iza Kunt described it (Iza). Iza Kunt, Dorijan Mavrični, Eric Dagger, Karmen Daš and Trafika Čik Kunt (Dorijan, Karmen, Iza, Eric, Trafika) all pointed out that although the community is diversifying, it is still “overwhelmingly a cis gay man community. The drag as we know it, is mostly focused around gay men, the gay scene. If you are assigned female at birth, it’s not really what interests them” as Dorijan pointed out (Dorijan, Karmen, Iza). Karmen emphasized that cis gay men who perform as drag queens usually receive more hype, which was echoed by Iza, Eric and Dorijan (Dorijan, Karmen, Iza, Eric). Their statements parallel Janice Raymond’s and Marilyn Frye’s arguments on cis gay men performing as drag queens, having an idolized status and holding more power and prestige in the community due to being idolized (Frye, 1983, p. 137; Raymond, 1994, p. 28).

Performers assigned female at birth, Iza, Eric, Trafika and Dorijan, pointed to receiving a lower status from the audience and people connected to the drag community, like for example club owners and event organizers, but they had not detected it within the drag community from cis gay men or males assigned at birth performing as drag queens (Dorijan, Iza, Eric). They elaborated that it was due to misogyny and sexism still prevalent in society (ibidem). Furthermore, “there are less drag kings due to misogyny and sexism. There is a lesser opportunity for this type of drag to exist, and also a lesser interest because of that, for people to go for it and do it” (Observations). As drag kings are usually persons assigned female at birth, Dorijan said they were overlooked because of that, which coincided with Halberstam’s argument on drag kings being less mainstream and known largely due to their gender or sex (Halberstam, 1998, p. 233).

Furthermore, Iza emphasized “I think it’s a lot harder to get into the community and perform, and they put a lot of pressure on you to be better, to be different, and you’re not as well received also by the audience” (Iza). From my own observations, I have also experienced being indirectly told by event organizers that what I bring to the table must be very unique and different, just

like Iza pointed out, while I have not observed this kind of commentary towards gay male drag queens when booking performances (Observations). The ambiance of sexism and misogyny is reflected in the audience to an extent, as was previously mentioned via drag performers assigned female at birth receiving a lower status from the audience, but mainly the problem cited lies in event organizers and club owners.

Eric and Iza pointed to a specific example:

For the Slovenian drag community, it, at times, in general it's very supportive, and very, very loving, and I honestly don't have any problems with anybody, the only issue I honestly have, is with the clubs. Not the queens themselves, but the clubs. Because Ljubljana is the epicenter of queer night life, and the only queer places are, you know, Tiffany, K4, we all somehow have to like, always uhm...not fight, but we always have to be ready if we're gonna be performing or not. And I see that and it kind of bothers me that queer clubs, especially those two, only hire certain drag queens to perform, not acknowledging there's a whole, that there are a lot of drag queens who also would love to perform /.../ I would love for, I would love that, when it comes to like, femme presenting drag queens, like drag divas, like drag queens that are similar to me or Iza Kunt, I would love that, when it comes to a performance, that we can like perform in the same lineup. I don't wanna be like "we have 5 drag queens in the performance, and then one drag diva". I would love that if it's a lineup, it's like "Me! Iza! You! Trafika!". That it'd be more like, diverse. 'Coz I remember like last year, for this Koper show, Iza went to the Koper show, and this year I went to the Koper show, and it was very like "why couldn't we both just gotten in, why couldn't we both be in the lineup", I honestly really, really would love like that we as femme presenting drag queens or drag divas, are not like, you know, token in every drag show that we do (Eric).

Trafika and Eric also highlighted another recent event:

And now there is also a new venue for drag shows which is called Sauna District which is basically a gay sauna, a space exclusively for gay men, which is fine. Again, I can't speak on that, I don't have the nuances of living a life as a gay man. So, it is maybe a safe space for men who are closeted, for example. And now there is a debate because the venue itself has put a warning that the Eurovision drag show, taking place in the sauna, is meant explicitly for a male audience. So, female or non-binary audience members are not allowed to attend. Basically, only biologically male people are allowed to attend the event. I think it is kind of a step backwards, this kind of segregation (Trafika).

Eric added:

But I also have some criticism for the community, like, in recent days, the debate about District 35 Saunas, it kinda is complicated, as a "drag thing", I feel certain ways, and I feel it's not fair sometimes, to be excluded from spaces, but I also have empathy towards my colleagues and organizations. I don't, it's weird for me, it's not black and white. It really irks me that a place where only men could go, only hires men, only hires normal, well "normal", ordinary drag queens, standard drag queens. And I feel like they couldn't ever hire us, drag kings, "queens/quings", things, 'coz it would go against their policy of not allowing women, trans women, non-binary people, and having like a safe space for only men and trans and bisexual men. But at the same time, I also understand queer men do need and want a safe place where they can just be themselves, and it's very understandable, but the whole debate is just very like, nobody can win. The community is divided again, unfortunately (Eric).

Interestingly enough, apart from Eric, Dorijan, Iza and Trafika, other interview participants, who are all either cis gay males or assigned male at birth performing as drag queens, said that they have not detected that gender would play a role in the dynamics of the drag community.

The gender hierarchy is, therefore, still present within the drag community with cis gay males and persons assigned male at birth performing as drag queens assuming the top spot. From the answers, it can be deduced that gay male drag queens receive more opportunities and stage time to perform, have less pressure put on them regarding their looks and performances and even have exclusive access to some spaces to perform, that being the gay-male-only sauna space, which prohibits anyone who isn't a gay male from entering or performing. This falls in line with Schacht's, Raymond's, Frye's, hooks', Berbery and Johnson's points on cis gay males as drag queens holding higher status and prestige within the community. But at the same time, it is not completely in line, because drag performers don't exercise the gender hierarchies among themselves, the drag queens are not discriminating against or putting down other performers. The gender hierarchies are, however, perpetuated by event organizers and club owners, who in turn also rely on audience's reception of drag performers, which is lower for performers assigned female at birth. Gender, therefore, still plays a role, and sexism and misogyny within the drag community can still be detected in some aspects.

5.5 Audience Perception

All of the interview participants expressed that their intentions with the audience were to entertain, as they do understand drag as first and foremost a performance or performance art (All interview participants). Most drag performers also pointed out that their intentions were also to challenge the audience, to confuse, to provoke, and to incite questioning directly or indirectly connected to gender (Karmen, Iza, Eric, Mentalika, Trafika, Vera, Glupa). The majority of the interview participants shared the belief that they were successful in their intentions with the audience, and said that they influenced the audience to foster questioning and confusion surrounding gender, whether their own or gender as a category in general (ibidem). In order to paint a better picture on audience perception and the influence of drag, this section contains more quotes from interview participants recounting their examples and stories.

Drag performers shared some of their own personal examples which point to their influence.

Karmen said:

But I feel like somehow subconsciously, and also consciously for some people, it does change the way you can see gender and how they perceive it, and maybe start questioning themselves, maybe start messing with, for example, makeup, or different things. I have witnessed audience come to me and say “Oh my god, this was so amazing, I want to try this, how do I do this?”. It affects them in a way that they want to participate or try something from it or grow in their gender point of view. Sometimes people come and we talk about gender and gender related stuff (Karmen).

She added another specific story:

So, there was a guy who came to ask me if I’m trans. And then the whole conversation went from him seeing drag queens as transgender people to seeing it what for it can be. Meaning not just people, who can also be transgender while doing drag, but also seeing the bigger spectrum. He asked a lot of questions “Why is this, why is that”. I don’t remember a lot, but it is like this sharing my experience and how I see it and some theories I have learnt, and just opening up his world and his perception of drag and gender (ibidem).

Iza recounted:

Okay, I think that drag definitely opens questions in people, definitely makes them think, and I think often, when somebody is at a drag show for the first time, they would probably get the most out of it, ‘coz it’s like “oh, this is happening, this is happening” and they realize there are like more things in life than what they’ve seen up to this point, so drag definitely changes people’s perception of gender (Iza).

I have gotten a lot of comments, like mostly if you go to like female presenting people, they are very excited, but then if you have somebody who’s more “male-ish”, specifically like gay men, we’re there again, sometimes they don’t get it, also straight men, also don’t get it, they are very negative sometimes, like “what are you? Aren’t drag queens supposed to be male?” (ibidem).

Iza said that people are often confused in general about her drag character as well as what gender she is outside of drag (Iza). From my own observations, I have seen it happen multiple times that audience members would go up to Iza and ask about her gender portrayal in drag as well as about her gender outside of drag (Observations). But not all of these interactions were negative or hostile towards Iza, with some she sparked genuine conversations on the fluidity of gender and drag (Observations).

Glupa Pupa told her example by:

G: People actually mistake me for a bio drag queen a lot of times, as if I’m a woman who deals with drag, which I kind of like, but I guess it depends where again. In Ljubljana, I think our drag community is so developed that people don’t see it as a man dressing up as a woman, while in Ptuj many people were shocked to see many girls doing drag. And we also have many girls in our house who deal with drag.

N: Mhm, what about when they find out you’re not a biological woman? I’m just a little interested in people’s reactions.

G: Usually it's only compliments, I guess. I don't have a bad example. They usually just compliment me and say I'm beautiful. They usually tell me that, but they live for everything. A lot of people don't know that they are pads and it's fascinating to them that you have foam on your ass and then I explain everything to them, I tell them (Glupa).

Drag performers also talked about the influence and effect of drag on rethinking gender in connection to sexuality through inciting and evoking sexual desire in people, particularly in people for whom it went “against” how they were identifying in terms of sexuality. It concurs with Taylor and Rupp’s findings on drag queens inciting sexual desire in straight men, women and lesbians, and Shapiro’s findings on drag kings invoking sexual desire in gay men (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 286).

Mentalika shared her story showcasing it:

I specifically remember this one guy, I was looking crazy, I was still Petra HD¹⁴, so I looked even more crazy than I do right now, I was very female presenting, I had a nice wig on, I had a skirt on, I had nice boots on, you know? And he was very sexually attracted to me, but he was really confused, why do I have a hairy chest? Why do I have hairy arms? And he was very like “why do you have this? You are so beautiful, why do you have this?” you know? And very intrigued to have that conversation, and I remember then feeling blessed, to even be able to have that conversation with a person who hasn’t come in touch with drag or different gender identities to begin with, and you know he wasn’t being disrespectful, but he was lowkey being curious because, you know, just didn’t understand it. And I was able to have a conversation with him and explain to him “why not? Are you not attracted to me?” (Mentalika).

Vera painted a comparable picture:

Because I figured that a lot of people find Vera as a drag queen very sexy or actually attractive. It’s very interesting because I do look very feminine and painted and long hair and so on, but at the same time there’s a moustache and chest hair. They’re attracted and confused at the same time, which I love. Confused about why it is there, if I want it to be there, if it was a conscious decision or a mistake, and sometimes they don’t get it. But I think that’s the point, I don’t want everyone to get me immediately, that would be boring. And confusion is also good, because it gets the person thinking (Vera).

Eric Dagger similarly shared:

E: Yeah, to challenge them, and give them more of like, uhm, represent-, not representation, representation of non-toxic and safe masculinity and femininity. And also to challenge gender norms.

N: In what way do you think you do that?

E: By making gay people fall in love with me! (both laugh) And by making...uhm...just by showing that women, non-binaries and other people of other genders, and transgender people, can also...uhm...have a place in drag. ‘Coz I see that a lot of fans are mostly men (Vera)

¹⁴ Mentalika's former drag persona was named Petra HD, before she reinvented herself as Mentalika.

Trafika Čik particularly mentioned that she intentionally wanted to invoke sexual desire in the audience, but also the challenge the audience's perception of gender:

I also do it to be adored so I encourage adoration from my audience. I want you to think I'm hot, I want to turn you on, I want to entertain you. As a side effect, I think it can challenge how my audience perceives gender. Because for me personally, maybe it is a bit jarring to see a cis woman doing female drag. It invokes questions like "Why is she doing that? Why is she not doing male drag? How is she doing drag femininity any different from her everyday femininity?". It inspires some thoughts in that direction (Trafika).

She particularly pointed out these kinds of questions happened more outside of Ljubljana, though also in Ljubljana, usually outside of queer spaces, but not necessarily:

They maybe have this perception that men do female drag, and then they see me and they ask "Oh, aren't men dressing up as women?". It's not coming from a place of malicious ignorance, it's more of a neutral ignorance. But asking questions is correcting that ignorance, so that is good. I would encourage any kind of questioning as long as it is not with ill intent. It's just a lot of "Oh, but what are you? How come you are doing female drag?" (Trafika).

Glupa Pupa also pointed to the difference between Ljubljana and outside of Ljubljana regarding commentary she received:

G: Yes, in Ptuj, drunk people say to you "Where are you putting it" "Are you a man or a woman" just like that, while in LJ they are more respectful, because we go to queer spaces, unlike in Ptuj, where there are no queer spaces and we also get dressed up and have makeup up and have disrespectful questions that aren't questions at all but comments (Glupa).

The differences between the audience outside of Ljubljana, which is usually a more mixed audience, and the audience in Ljubljana, which is usually a predominantly queer audience due to performances mainly taking place in queer spaces, often resulted in the drag performers having to adjust their performance and presentation to the audience and the venue. Mostly, drag performers were in agreement that when performing in non-queer spaces in and outside of Ljubljana with a mixed audience, they usually performed a more toned-down version of their drag, some said they reverted closer to more "classic" or "traditional" drag, and did not include stripping in their performances usually.

Trafika said the following on performing in the Slovenian outskirts and altering performances:

Whereas when we were performing in Ptuj, it was the first drag show in Ptuj ever. We had to, all of us, I know I can speak for my fellow house members, that we had to alter the content a lot because there was a lot of people in the audience for whom it was the first time seeing drag, maybe don't

even know what it is, people who have not been within our circle, they don't know anything about us (Trafika).

Iza provided additional reasoning for altering performances: "because it would be too risky, too shocking for them, I don't think that area of Slovenia is ready to see something like that. (Iza).

Vera pointed to adjusting her performances as well, but she touched upon performing in non-queer spaces in Ljubljana:

Because right now, I'm deciding what to perform for Queen of May for the final. I know that the final is in bar Zorica, which is a mixed audience in the sense of there is probably a separate straight event happening there as well and you never know who might see your performance or just you in general. Not in the sense that I want to censor myself but I just want to show the "draggiest" version of myself. The most most (Vera)

Building on previous quotes, Dorijan presented a comparison of his performances in queer spaces in Ljubljana and outside of it:

D: Less stripping in a more rural area. I wouldn't be throwing out my tits for Luka Bassi. If it's a mixed age show, of course, you would be doing something tame and not something sexual. Also, for the queer club I might be doing a bit more feminine, a bit shinier, maybe I would wear a skirt. But if it was a more mixed audience, I would be presenting more masculine, perhaps some pants, a waist-coat. It would change the way I dress. In a mixed audience, I would definitely be more masculine. It is still the same character, I wouldn't suddenly be a straight man, I would still be a fun gay uncle. But I would perhaps be a bit tamer with the "faggotry".

N: So, you feel that in queer spaces you are allowed to release your feminine side out more?

D: Yeah, feminine masculinity or just straight up femininity. Because it's a queer space, we understand that gender is mostly meaningless. I don't want to say mostly meaningless, but it is a thing you take and you sculpt and you make to your own liking. It doesn't have to be constricted (Dorijan).

Similarly, to Dorijan's view on performing in queer spaces, Mentalika pointed out: In the queer spaces I feel like I always stay very true to myself, and I'm doing very weird things (Mentalika).

All of the interview participants were directly or indirectly in agreement with the presented opinions of Dorijan and Mentalika.

As the outside of Ljubljana is, speaking in generalized terms based off on my own experiences and based off of the perceptions of drag performers, more stuck in the traditional view of gender and the gender binary, as well as still perceive drag as impersonation of the "opposite" gender, adjusting the performance and look is often times a necessary step, but even performing watered down versions of their drag personas incites questioning. Many of the audience members in the outskirts do not have contact or regular contact with drag performers, therefore, sometimes seeing them can evoke gender questioning for the first time or more intensely. On the other

hand, performing in Ljubljana in queer spaces, the audience is mostly queer and often familiar with questioning gender, as well as have more contact or even regular contact with drag performers. Drag performers said that in queer spaces, they felt freer to do whatever they wanted, to experiment, to go more out of the box and push boundaries of gender more in order to be able to incite questioning in the audience. Egner and Maloney (2016) in the literature review also came to the same conclusions stating that less gender boundary breaking was presented in rural areas by drag performers, but also less was needed to get the intended effect of questioning and confusion from the audience. On the other hand, drag performers tend to do more out of the box gender portrayals and experimentation in queer spaces to invoke the same aura of confusion and questioning from the audience.

What we are able to observe from drag performers' personal stories and examples of their interactions with audience members, drag invokes curiosity and confusion in people, which encourages them to think and ask questions about gender. As the Slovenian audience is faced with a wide array of gender identities and presentations of drag performers in and out of drag, it broadens their thinking about what is possible in relation to gender expression, and that it is a complex concept which offers many possibilities within and beyond the rigid gender binary. As we were able to deduce from the examples, it can invoke experimentation with their own gender presentation. But most importantly, prior to the experimentation, it shows people that it is allowed to experiment with gender, with different gender expressions, to fluctuate between genders and gender expressions, to mix them up in their own way. The drag performers showed through their performances and their conversations with audience members that there are no strict rules or boundaries which cannot be crossed when it comes to gender, they are free to be drawn in whichever way they personally see fit. Rigid rules on gender are being broken down and renegotiated also through audience members' attraction to drag performers. It most potently illuminates that the rigid gender binary is too narrow to encompass the complexity and nuance of gender. Drag can, therefore, invoke unlearning of stern artificial gender rules and a re-evaluation towards a less sternly bounded understanding of gender.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, my research on gender and drag done through the prism of the drag community in Slovenia yielded the following results. The local context of Slovenia provided the basis for how gender and drag were understood and perceived. The interviewed drag performers said the

understanding of gender was still very binary with prominent gender roles, but pointed to differences between Ljubljana and outside of Ljubljana, whereas in Ljubljana the perception is less strict. Similarly, goes for drag, if people were aware of its existence, they more or less accepted it, but there was still some backlash, particularly in the rural areas and on the internet. Drag is, however, still overwhelmingly understood as impersonation of the opposite gender and comedic relief by non-queer audiences.

Drag performers interviewed attempted to challenge these perceptions. They are composed of a variety of gender identities and expressions in and outside of drag, and are not bound by traditional understandings of drag as performing the “opposite” gender. Drag, in the sense that the interviewed participants understand it, has evolved from performance of opposite gender into persons being able to perform gender whichever one and way they please. Their perception of gender is not one bounded by rules and restrictions, it is not fixed or stable. It has the ability to be fluid, it can move within the gender binary and beyond. Persons are able to express multiple genders at once, they can move from one to the other, exaggerate their gender identity or express just a part of it. Gender is understood as a dynamic process in the hands of individuals, who have agency and power over their own gender, and can, therefore, express it in their own numerous and various ways. Through the process of drag, interview participants as well as myself were able to come to these conclusions, because drag offers a space for experimentation, questioning and thinking about gender.

Through these conclusions, I partially answer my research questions: How does the evolution of drag challenge the gender binary system, and move beyond just uncovering the performativity of gender? Could it potentially contribute to a different, disruptive understanding of gender? Another part of the answer lies in drag’s influence on the audience and their perception of gender.

In a similar vein, it also has effects on the audience and their perception of gender. By going to see diverse drag performances, it fuels confusion and questioning about gender in audience members. It shows the audience that there are possibilities beyond traditional gender binary identities and presentations. Such a display of gender boundary bending firstly uncovers the performativity of gender, and then invites people to participate in gender boundary breaking. Drag performances even encouraged some audience members to start questioning their own

gender and started experimenting with their gender presentation. It paints a picture that gender rules do not need to be obeyed, and that persons can play with their own gender as they see fit. It shows gender as personal agency, therefore, less dependent on rigid patriarchal structures. It allows room for change, examination, transformation, more fluidity.

My conclusions are in line with my second and third block of feminist perspectives on drag discussed in the literature review. They fall in line with the second block, which discusses drag as uncovering the performativity of gender, but then also move beyond just uncovering it, as the third block suggests, and which I have described above. The first block, which highlights drag as proliferation of the gender hierarchies, was only applicable to a smaller extent. That being, that gender and the gender hierarchy still play a role within the drag community because cis gay male and persons assigned male at birth performing as drag queens still hold higher status, are more idolized and receive more opportunities and praise from club owners, event organizers and the audience.

In order to comprehensively sum up my research, I also need to acknowledge the limitations of my research. I picked a sample of 8 interview participants, which can be regarded as a limitation due to the small size of the sample. But the small sample allowed me to analyse more in depth and in detail the answers given, and dedicate more time to individual cases. Perhaps, I can turn this limitation into further research in the future, including a wider and larger sample, and then comparing the results with the sample I have chosen for this thesis.

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