



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

Fulfilling and defying the established gender norms:
The experience of five Swedish drag artists

Camila Fonseca

GNVM03 Gender Studies: Master Thesis

Spring 2019

Department of Gender Studies

Lund University

Supervisor: Maja Sager

Abstract

Both in the media and academic circles there have been a proliferation of interest in drag queens. While the female impersonator has a long recorded history, our contemporary society's quite public and sustained preoccupation about the subject seems to be unprecedented. Even though drag can be considered part of the Swedish pop culture, to see a man dressed in clothes that are typically attributed to female/feminine expression may not always be free from controversy, depending on the space and context.

For this thesis, I have interviewed five people in Sweden that identify as men who are female impersonators, drag queens or drag artists. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to try to understand the social phenomena from the actors' own perspective and describe the world as it is experienced by them.

The material was analysed according to drag as reproduction and subversion of gender, the drag scene in Sweden and drag queens historical role, as a way to answer the research questions related to masculinities, bodies and mainstreaming. The study aims to add up to a broader comprehension of the practice of drag as an important part of gender expression.

Keywords: drag queens, performativity, bodies, masculinities, mainstreaming

Number of words: 21 210

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Aim and research questions.....	6
3. Research field.....	7
3.1 Previous research.....	7
3.2 Theory	11
4. Methodology	17
4.1 Method	18
4.2 Material	19
5. Analysis	21
5.1 Drag as reproduction and subversion of gender	21
5.2 The drag scene in Sweden	35
5.3 Drag queens historical role.....	43
6. Conclusions	47
7. References	50
8. Appendixes.....	53
8.1 Interview guide.....	53
8.2 Information to participant.....	54
8.3 Informed Consent	55
8.4 Interviews	56

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my informants for taking your time to meet me, letting me in your art form and teaching me some make-up secrets I will for always treasure.

Thanks to my supervisor Maja, for giving me honest and encouraging feedback throughout the whole process.

Finally, thanks to my family and friends for making sure that I ate, slept and did not drop of school during this semester.

1. Introduction

On February 24, 2019 Billy Porter attended the 91st Annual Academy Awards at Hollywood and Highland in Hollywood, California. Not only was he the first person to step out onto the red carpet, but he did it in a custom creation by designer Christian Siriano that included a sharply tailored tuxedo jacket over a full-skirted strapless velvet gown. By playing on masculinity and femininity, the look challenged the Hollywood dress code and pushed the boundaries across racial lines and gender divisions. Porter himself told magazine *Vogue* (2019; np) “my goal is to be a walking piece of political art every time I show up. To challenge expectations. What is masculinity? What does that mean? Women show up every day in pants, but the minute a man wears a dress, the seas part.” And the actor definitely provoked a reaction. He was both praised and disapproved, especially on social media where the outrage concerned the notion that an African American man in a dress was a threat to black masculinity.

But Billy Porter is not the first man in television to be seen in a dress. During 2018, the tv channel FX showed Ryan Murphy’s drama “Pose” about voguing and the world of underground ballroom and drag has been featured in popular culture for decades. Movies like “Kinky Boots,” “Tootsie,” “The Birdcage” and even “Mrs. Doubtfire” have showcased men who dress and perform as women.

A drag queen, or female impersonator, is most typically a gay cisgender man who dresses in clothes that can be associated with the female gender, with the goal of performing in front of an audience. RFSL defines a drag queen as “a person who uses gender roles, social attributes and symbols to challenge the boundaries between male and female. Often an exaggerated performance with the purpose of entertaining an audience, or in a playful way to express part of their identity.” (2015; np)

In Sweden, year 2004, the already established drag performers “After Dark” took another step in showbiz and competed in “Melodifestivalen” with the song "La dolce Vita" and conquered a new generation of fans. “After Dark” had already been making a name for themselves in Sweden and other parts of the world since the ’70s and performed for full houses everywhere they decided to take their show. In the spring of 2007, they competed again on “Melodifestivalen” with the song "(åh), När ni tar saken i egna händer" and in 2016 with “Kom ut som en stjärna”, all songs that have reached the top lists in Swedish radios.

But nothing has hit the critical mass quite like the TV-show “RuPaul’s Drag

Race”. 2009 marked a turning point for drag queens in pop culture and media as “RuPaul’s Drag Race” first aired in The United States on VH-1. With eleven seasons with over 140 competing drag queens, two spinoffs and more seasons to come, the show is aired in countries all over the world.

Even though drag can be considered something that is part of the pop culture in a lot of contexts, to see a man dressed in clothes that are typically attributed to female/feminine expression may not always be free from controversy. For this study I interviewed five Swedish men to explore their experience as drag queens and their vision on bending the gender boundaries through their art form.

2. Aim and research questions

The purpose of this study is to contribute in theoretical debates on gender expression and bodies, focusing on drag as an important contribution to bending the normative gender expressions. The study is likely to add up to a broader comprehension of the practice of drag, contributing to the analysis of aspects such as gender, performance and mainstreaming, among others. To achieve this purpose I have selected the following research questions:

- How do my informants experience the drag scene in Sweden?
- In which ways are the informants relating to hegemonic masculinity?
- How do my informants experience and describe the physical oscillation between stereotypical male and female expression in order to create their notion and knowledge of themselves?
- How do my informants experience the possible expansion of drag in popular culture?

3. Research field

3.1 Previous research

The image of drag queens can be found long back in time, even though they were not defined that way. McClintock (1995, p. 656) describes how “cross-dressing is not only a personal fetish; it is also a historical phenomenon”. Her investigation goes back all the way to the 1800’s and showed that the boundaries over clothing erupt most intensely during periods of social turbulence, and in our modern period, as spices from the slave plantations and silver and other precious metals from the slave mines engendered new possibilities for mercantile consumption, new forms of money and consumption that were no longer dependent on land and aristocratic power began to interfere in the traditional forms of political distinction. These changes were of course not welcomed by the higher society and led to the promulgation of sumptuary laws all over Europe, restricting the wearing of certain furs, fabrics and styles to members of particular social and economic classes. Clothing became a central issue to the social boundaries, making visible the distinctions of wealth and ranks within a society that was undergoing changes that threaten the traditional social distinctions (McClintock, 1995, pp. 656 - 657)

According to McClintock (1995, p. 656) the “sumptuary laws contain an internal paradox, for the fact that class and rank are made legible by the wearing, or not wearing, of ‘cloth of gold, silk or purple’ reveals the invented nature of social distinction, throwing into visibility the question of both the origins and the legitimacy of rank and power. The bits and pieces of coloured cloth that are the legible insignia of degree are also permanently subject to disarrangement and symbolic theft. For this reason, the historical figure of the cross-dresser becomes invested with a potent and subversive power.”

Both in the media and academic circles there have been a proliferation of interest in drag queens. While the female impersonator is in many ways a very old cultural form with a long recorded history, our contemporary society’s quite public and sustained preoccupation with the drag queen very much seems to be unprecedented (Underwood, 2004). Some descriptions in literary sources place the first manifestations of drag queens in England of the early 1700s. At that time, gay sexual activities were illegal, systematically prosecuted and could result in capital punishment. Performances were illegal and carefully restricted to

male gay audience in places called “molly houses”. According to Moncreiff & Lienard (2017) mostly of what is known about these drag queens was discovered from raids on molly houses and court proceedings.

In United States, the picture of gay female impersonator (registered in literature) appeared in masquerade balls held in New York City in the early 20th century. Those masquerades were a possibility for the individuals to connect, engage and court another person of same sex without being directly exposed to social sanctions. Later in the century, gay-only communities were on their way to consolidation and the gay bars in those neighbourhoods became the locations to find not only sexual and/or romantic same-sex partners, but also to build a sense of community and social support. It was during the post-war period that drag queens emerged as significant actors in the gay community (Moncreiff & Lienard , 2017). At that time, an inquiry into government agencies led to dismissals of federal and military personnel suspected of homosexuality. Cross-dressing was an offense and should be punished; in New York, men wearing fewer than three pieces of clothing that were considered according to their gender could be arrested (Wortham, 2018). But with the end of the government of McCarthy and the beginning of the sexual revolution, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, United States was home to about 500 regularly performing drag queens.

Nowadays we can find drag queens primarily performing at gay bars, nightclubs and organized competitions where theatrics, dance and lip-syncing to popular musical numbers are part of the queens’ shows. A qualitative study conducted by Knutson, Koch, Sneed & Lee (2018) showed that drag as expressive art is an important way for drag queens to express their broad range of talents. The expressions that comes with a drag performance (lip-syncing, dance/movement, listening to music, applying makeup, painting fingernails costume design and the sometimes improvisational stand-up comedy) may open up a sort of affirmative space that not only is hold for drag queens but for the LGBT+ community in general to consolidate a positive sense of self. Drag can be freeing, cathartic, empowering, and/or a way to express and get rid of negative emotions. The female persona also may highlight aspects of the male persona that the performer may not feel comfortable expressing as a male and drag serves in that way as a conduit for personal expression (Hopkins, 2004). Many drag queens can also by their performance, gain significant social capital in the gay community, becoming role models for upcoming queens, earn greater respect and might even make enough money from different bookings to support a full-time career (Moncreiff & Lienard, 2017).

This can be endorsed by the images shown in the award-winning documentary “Paris is Burning” (1990) which chronicles the ball culture of New York City and the African-American, Latino, gay, and transgender communities involved in it, in the mid-to-late 1980s. The ball culture can be described as an underground LGBTQ+ subculture that originated in the United States; in which people “walk” (compete) for trophies, prizes, and glory at events known as balls. For Bailey (2009, p. 260) two features sustain the community: flamboyant competitive ball rituals and houses, and the anchoring family-like structures that produce these rituals of performance. Ballroom subjectivities and familial roles are based on an egalitarian gender-sexual identity system that offers more gender and sexual identities from which to choose than available to members in the “outside” world. The “balls” of Harlem’s Black and Latino gay communities of the 1980s were a platform for cultural innovation, launching the careers of many of the world’s most famous drag queens and gay icons and also an inspiration for Madonna’s hit single and video “Vogue”. Because gender performance is central to self-identification and can imply a whole range of sexual identities in Ballroom culture, the system reflects how the members define themselves largely based on the categories that they “walk”. The intensely competitive performances at the ball events create a space of celebration, affirmation, critique, and reconstitution (Bailey, 2009). In that sense, the ballroom scene (in which drag queens has a big representation) creates community, but can also be considered as a subversion to the established gender system due to the race, gender and sexual identities they (re)claim and the socially transgressive practices in which they engage (Bailey, 2013).

Some drag queens have expanded their job from night clubs to libraries during day time. In United States and Canada, some libraries have designed their children’s library programs with LGBTQ+ themes and content that includes drag queen story time. This initiative has been replicated in Sweden, for example in some libraries in Stockholm and Malmö, where children in ages from 2 to 7 can hear stories performed by drag queens.

Even though we can observe these entering of drag into our culture and daily life, in an interview for the magazine *Vulture*, RuPaul¹ (2016) declared that drag culture “will never be mainstream. It’s the antithesis of mainstream. And listen, what you’re witnessing with drag is the most mainstream it will get. But it will never be mainstream, because it is completely opposed to fitting in.” (n.p) Yet, after the interview, RuPaul and his crew have won a lot awards related to popular culture such as Emmy Awards and Critics' Choice

¹ RuPaul: American drag queen, actor, model, singer, songwriter and television personality.

Television Award. His drag-persona also got a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and in May 2017, the 3rd Annual DragCon (the world's largest drag culture convention, organized by RuPaul) had more than 40,000 attendees, which is triple the number from the previous years. Even other popular tv-shows in United States has taken concepts from the drag world, such as lip-syncing and turned it in to big hits. In the same interview with Vulture Magazine, RuPaul (2016) claims that "Regular, straight pop culture has liberally lifted things from gay culture as long as I can remember. And that's fine, because guess what? We have so much more where that comes from...But its funny how that works, even in gay culture. There's a certain "gay shame." Gay people will accept a straight pop star over a gay pop star, or they will accept a straight version of a gay thing, because there's still so much self-loathing, you know?" (n.p).

According to Berbary & Johnson (2017) even though there is a growing popularisation of drag in the American culture, this mainstreaming often ignores the ability to "do drag differently" than how it is showed in media, the complexities of identities and how drag re-creates spaces, notion of gender, performance and masculinities. By studying drag from the perspective of gender studies, we may recognize that through drag (among other expressions) gender "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler, 1990; p. 136). To establish drag as an art form, the external production of gender through signs and discourse was made legible to an audience and the constant repetition of those signs and discourses showed that the performances rather than show an "inner truth", showed that gender is "simply a fabrication of power articulated onto the body through forms of corporeal repetition" (Berbary & Johnson 2017; p. 314).

Butler (1990) through the study of drag theorized that gender is a notion of an original instead of the actual original, emphasizing the fiction of gender through the imitation art that drag is. Drag reconsiders relationships between sex, gender and self, as well as the absolute binaries of male and female, opening up the possibilities of doing gender differently, but "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms" (Butler, 1993; p. 125).

3.2 Theory

This chapter presents a theoretical approach to the three elements that will guide this study: performativity, corporeality and masculinities. Each section will present theories with concepts and dimensions that will contribute to comprehend and develop the research questions presented in the earlier chapter.

3.2.1 The performative body according to Butler

As a corporal and social practice, drag is influenced by the gender system that establishes social parameters of behaviour, identification and relationship, defying ideal models. That is why we must take into consideration sociocultural contexts, since men are part of that construction and are being shaped and governed by the social structure. Seemingly coherent identity categories, such as straight woman or gay man, hide a more complex process in which individuals perform and re/produce their gender and sexuality on a daily basis in the cultural contexts of leisure (Johnson & Dunlap, 2011). Whether it is a question of doing masculinity or doing femininity, the meanings attached to these social constructs can only be comprehended when they are considered as relational contrasts of existence (Schacht, 2000). To acknowledge what it means to be a “woman” or a “man” in a particular setting or in the whole of society not only requires a specific presentation of self but also that it is being pursued equally to its antithesis, serving as an frame for the gendered behaviours undertaken. From that point of view, “male” and “female” does not have a meaning until they are measured against what the dominant culture says they cannot be (Schacht 2000).

Judith Butler develops through her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988), that a social action requires a repeated performance, since it is the reactivation and re-experience of a set of meanings and socially established. Gender has to be understood as an identity instituted by a symbolic repetition of acts. It must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and norms of all kinds constitute the illusion of a permanently generated self, displacing gender towards a constitution of constituted social temporality, where the body is a historical situation and a way of doing, dramatizing and reproducing this same situation, resulting in a performative act carried out in such a way that the social audience, and the actors themselves, believe and act as a belief. At the moment of breaking this stylization and finding different ways of repetition, rupture or subversive repetition of these

acts, gender can be transformed (Butler, 1988, p. 526).

As a performative act, gender is neither a radical choice nor a completely individual choice, since the body is prescribed by cultural codes, but not necessarily the prescribed norms mean the bodies; the sexed body acts its part in the culturally restricted corporal space and carries out the interpretations within the already existing directives. A performance can be applauded above a stage, but that same act will not necessarily be accepted within the daily life, and it must be clear that the reality of gender is performative means that it is real only to the extent that it is acted. According to Butler (1988, p.531) “gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds”. From this point of view, the individual is not only a body but they makes its own body in a different way than its ancestors did, just as other individuals in the present and future will do, since our behaviours and actions have the power to build our own reality of bodies.

3.2.2 Body and corporeality

According to Sandoval (2018), drag is an expression to appropriate and theatricalize the characteristics of a specific gender that is different from its own. Drag allows wearing and appropriating gender and impersonation, becoming a performance of gender rather than an imitation of what is considered the “original” gender. The alteration of the body with colours, shapes, and form through costume, hair, and makeup, brings the body into a state where gender naturalization occurs as the body goes through a transforming process, rendering the body into an ideal space where the imitation itself becomes the original.

Every individual manifests themselves with and through the body, being not only the movements that give the shape to the body, but also the emotions, thoughts and feelings, giving the body its own language. Through these channels it becomes a “living body” through its corporeality. The corporeality is the experience of doing, feeling, thinking and loving (García, 2012). We are all born with a body that is transformed and adapted to build its corporeality and the life experiences provided by the environment in which the human being develops, and in the way he perceives them, create new structures of reference, as well as adapting and accommodating those that he already has internalized. This is to continue in constant contribution to the creation of our corporeality. Only once we die, we stop building corporeality, and there remains only the body. The body is only the beginning

and death, while the corporeality is the whole process of life in constant construction. Through this corporeality personality is configured, since the relationship between being, thinking and feeling with our body is building our individual structure which defines how to act in the world and makes us unique as individuals, despite being able to be in a group of biologically equal pairs.

According to Dicaprio (1989), personality has peripheral components such as habits and tastes, and central components such as attitudes and behaviours. Corporeality is then analysed as the physical, mental and social manifestation: while the personality is the moving, thinking and feeling of a certain way in a specific context, the analysis lies in the particularity of the manifestation. The body is where corporeality is generated and this manifests itself through movement with intention. That intention shapes the character of the individual, which transforms into its personality. The human corporeity must be studied as a social and cultural phenomenon, as a symbolic subject, object of representations and imaginaries. The actions that form the daily life, from the most trivial and those that we are least aware of, even those that occur in the public scene, imply the intervention of corporeality. At the same time as the body is spoken, it becomes a psychosocial event, since the corporal development is can be understood as the result of the relationship of the organism with the environment.

The discussion of the body has become a central problem for contemporary social theory, especially thanks to the development of feminist theories that establish a critique of the traditional masculine-feminine differentiation of the body. Likewise, the market has tended to make the body its main target, transforming it into a commodity and into a medium for the manufacture and distribution of goods. The human body went from being a material reality given biologically at birth, to a modifiable reality, both external and internal, constituting the foundation of identity and personal projects. This implies the control and modification of the own body in diverse aspects, imposing the human being on its own biological evolution and being able to even influence the rest of the biodiversity. The body can be transformed into a changing virtual reality, into an available reality that can be modified according to the criteria chosen to be followed, such as health, beauty, well-being, social success, etc. These criteria to follow indicate the new cultural needs of society, creating the images of one's own body to some ideals of social success. These needs are expanded through mass media, producing a motivating force to demand the new body technologies available in the markets (Ruíz, 2010).

From Sandoval's (2018, p. 111) perspective, the body is decontextualized and disseminated specially by social media. Some drag queens who have a big representation on these platforms and have made their path into mainstream parts of the society, create a "hyperbolic imagery perpetuates the dominant gender binary in western societies and revives the narrative of bodies being commodified". In that case, from the perspective of Sandoval (2018), their bodies may have lost their power of resistance and may no longer hold the power to create a narrative of dissent.

3.2.3 Masculinities according to Connell

The products of popular culture not only provide pleasure in recreational context, but also have the capacity to impart information about gendered and sexual identities through the transmission of cultural values and social norms, especially during times of social identity development (Johnson & Dunlap, 2011). According to the authors, these products may convey normative social expectations and those expectations continue to reinforce power relations that encourage domination and marginalization, influencing the development of sexual identity and masculinities in gay men as well as the influence of gay male identity on the creation of new media. Much of the media consumed by gay men is characterized as delaying or reversing the course of gay male identity development, internalizing the heterosexist stereotypes presented. There is also tendency of mass media to portray gay men as effeminate, positioning them as inferior to heterosexual men, exploiting men by a model of masculinity and by their identification or not with a hegemonic masculinity that functions as a mechanism of inclusion or exclusion (Connell, 1995).

Connell, through her work "Masculinities" (1995) introduces the concept of gender as a hierarchized system of the social practice, sustained on the privileges that the men possess in terms of prestige, honour, power and authority. These privileges lead them to also have material advantages in the possession of economic resources and creates masculinities and femininities as a configuration of gender practice, which through the man and women commit to the gender position and the effects these practices has on the culture, personality and corporal experience. However, Connell rectifies herself in 2003, acknowledging that talking about the "configuration of gender practice" can be a very static term to define gender and by adopting a more dynamic vision of the organisation of the practice, we can understand masculinities and femininities as projects of gender. While digging deeper into the topic of different masculinities, Connell finds that masculinity is a social, historical and contradicted

construction that is normalized through certain patterns of behaviour. These patterns highlight the power relations that construct the different masculinities and visualize a hierarchy that defines one type of masculinity as hegemonic. This hegemonic masculinity does not correlate with the masculinities that can be seen in everyday life; those given in the social practice, and because there is no relation between the ideal of masculinity and the practice of it, the hegemonic masculinity sees itself forced to be modified. But is not the practice of the masculinity that modifies, it is the idea of masculinity and the norms to legitimize itself as hegemonic.

Hegemonic masculinity, as it is defined by Connell (2003) is not a fixed type of character, but it is masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given model of gender relations. Hegemony refers to cultural domination in society as a whole. Within that general context there are specific gender relations of domination and subordination between groups of men. The masculine hegemonic model operating in our western society is of the white man, heterosexual, middle class, with values such as being a provider, having and exercising power, honour, but above all, not looking like a woman. A non-masculine person would be peaceful instead of violent, conciliatory instead of dominant, unable to play football, indifferent in sexual conquest, etc. The man feels the obligation to be morally accepted by his peers who legitimize his person and his actions. In order to create bonds with his peers, for the development of his identity and emotionality, he must follow established patterns and avoid "deviations".

In our current society it is possible to observe the domination of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men as more than a cultural stigmatization of homosexuality or gay identity. Gay men are subordinated to heterosexual men by a set of quasi-material practices that includes "political and cultural exclusion, cultural abuse, legal violence (imprisonment by prevailing legislation on sodomy), street violence (ranging from intimidation to murder), economic discrimination and personal boycotts" (Connell, 2003, p. 13). This oppression places homosexual masculinities lowest in a gender hierarchy among men. Homosexuality, in the patriarchal ideology, contains everything that is symbolically detached from hegemonic masculinity, thus associating itself with femininity. But even though the prevalence and privilege of the hegemonic masculinity, many men choose to openly challenge it. According to Johnson & Dunlap (2011) gender is performed and understood by individuals in the realm of public that exists in peer groups, schools, workplaces, sports organizations and media, among others, as opposed to only an academic

abstraction. The drag queen subculture involves non-normative gender presentation, including cross-dressing and the adoption of what is considered a stereotypical feminine style and presence. Drag queens often publicly present themselves as “women” and they typically identify as gay men, even though the subculture is not limited to only that sexual orientation or gender (Barrett, 2017).

As we could observe in earlier chapters, cross-dressing has been part of many societies and shaping the body into a different representation of the self has been part of many cultures throughout history (Sandoval, 2018). Drag presents an ability to cause diverse reactions in different contexts, with different audiences, It can be used as “of misogyny and even homophobia while in other contexts drag may serve to question the rigidity of prescriptive gender roles, acting as a tool of liberation” (Barrett, 2017, p. 39). It exposes the disjuncture between the performed identity and the “authentic” identity, challenging the audience in their individual attempts to accommodate their physical perception of the performances with their assumptions about gender categories and social identity.

4. Methodology

I'm interested in two feminist epistemologies that combined can give me ways to approach the aim of this study. A feminist standpoint theory allows studying this phenomenon by taking the drag queens' everyday experience as ground for knowledge. By studying their experience directly, I can explore their self-definition of their identity, challenging the stereotype of the identity of a drag queen imposed by conventional stereotype that forms part of the hegemonic western domination. Experience gives direct access to the social character of people's worlds, it is how we talk, which categories we use, the relations that is posited among us, and also what we take for granted in the talk as how we talk about something (Smith, 1997). But even through the exploration of everyday experience, the standpoint theory place less emphasis on individual experiences within socially constructed groups than on the social conditions that constructs those groups. In that case, categories such as class, gender, sexuality, age and religion are not classifications of identity applied to an individual, but elements of a social structure as "fundamental devices that foster inequality resulting in groups" (Collins, 1997, p. 376).

On other hand, from a poststructuralist approach I could get a notion of how agency and subjectivity are constructed by the discursive power formations that are not simply possessed by one group; it is throughout whole society. From the theoretical perspective of Haraway (1988) there is no possibility to claim objectivity when it comes to portraying a truth. Mainly because the definition of objectivity comes from a person, or group, of the society that are privileged, participating of the norm that is considered "normal". Haraway (1988) calls them "unmarked bodies" while the people that breaks the norm are "marked bodies", constituting women, members of the LGBT community, ethnic, social, religious, economic and intellectual minorities whom cannot have their points of view dissociated from who they are. Objectivity is only a privilege to the rich, white male demographic where the technology and sciences are dedicated to a country with a colonialist, capitalist, militaristic and supremacist mind-set, and to battle the relationship with objectivity, Haraway (1988) proposes the situated knowledge, a knowledge placed within a socioeconomic, intellectual, historic or cultural context, creating a richer point of view in content as it takes in accounts numerous information that constitutes the context and environment of that point of view. Additionally, it promotes and encourages the exchange of ideas between humans with limited points of view, permitting a sharing and understanding of

different context that can permit the knowledge to be more comprehensive. The objective points of views does not permit such interaction, creating and authoritarian and binary view of the world, and one can only be led to believe such points of view because what we have been told through the language.

4.1 Method

I used interviews as a research method. The benefit of using interviews is that the interviewing situation in itself can bring more information than the words themselves. The inflexion, face- and -corporal expression of a person can be used as indicators to conduct the interview, but also to give a clearer picture to the reader if it is described with precision and details.

The phenomenological interviews in qualitative studies try to understand social phenomena from the actors' own perspective and describe the world as it is experienced by them. This assumes that the relevant reality is what people perceive as being and focusing on the structure and variation of the structure of the consciousness for which every thing, event or person emerges. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the goal of the phenomenological method is to arrive at a being-conscious by not only focusing on individual phenomena without their common being. At the same time, the researcher should not make any judgment about the existence or non-existence of the content of an experience, but put the scientific knowledge aside to discover the unconditional description of the being.

From a feminist methodological point of view, talking about “experience” is more complex than focusing only on everyday life. Interpretations of experience are ways of claiming connections between the informants’ experiences, the theory, language, ideas that makes sense of the told experience and the realities that are experienced (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The fact that the experiences are expressed in some kind of language (both spoken and corporally) means that there exists a previous way of thinking in and about a specific a phenomenon, culture, period and location and therefore the importance to be aware and deconstruct how we think about the connection of experience with reality and instead focus on the power of language and the performativity to constitute social realities. To represent others we have to conceptualize relationships, social locations and boundaries to interpret meanings and make sense of the experience that the informants may not have had in the same way. According to Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002, 125) “these conceptualizations and meanings are shaped by the researcher’s language, theory and ontology”.

The qualitative research interview is semi-structured and requires a balance that is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire. It focuses on certain themes and has a script that contains suggestions for questions that lead the conversation. Based on the material that the interviews provide, the object of analysis takes shape. During the interview, the interviewees will develop dimensions they find important for their story and therefore it is important that researchers do not come up with early definite opinions about these themes.

It is important that the interviewer pay attention to what is said and has the ability to interpret not only the words but how it is said. To be able to do that, the interviewer must have knowledge of the interview topic and be able to interpret facial expressions, tone of voice and other bodily expressions. It is necessary to listen to the explicit descriptions but also the opinions that come up and what is said between the lines to obtain nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the informants' story, since the qualitative research does not work with number but with words.

4.2 Material

I have interviewed five people in Sweden that identify themselves as men who are female impersonators, drag queens or drag artists. They were all located in Skåne and are between twenty and sixty years old. Two of them were directly asked through their public email if they wanted to participate in the study and they agreed, and the other three informants were contacted through the snowball effect. I let my informants decide where they wanted to meet up and I met two of them in a public coffee shop, while the other three in their personal lounge where they rehearse and keep their clothes and materials. I decided to let my informants make that decision so I could assure that they were in a place where they felt comfortable and increase the possibility to have an open and fluid conversation. The interviews lasted about one hour each and were led by the interview guide presented in appendix 8.1. By not having structured questions the conversation became friendlier and my informants could delve into what was important to them and their experience.

I presented to them a document where the purpose of the investigation was laid out, how it is structured and about the risks and benefits that may be related to the participation in the investigation. The document presented made sure that nobody was forcing the informant to participate on the interview, and that they could stop or pull out of the process whenever they liked. On a more detailed level, it is important according to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009)

that the informed consent assure the confidentiality of the interviewed, who is going to have access to the interview or other material related, the researchers right to publish the whole or parts of the interview, and when and how the interviewees are going to have access to the study when it is done. The confidentiality implies that all information that can facilitate the identification of the participants in a research will not be revealed. This is to protect the participants, but can be conflicted by the basic principle for scientific research, where the material and information must be available for an intersubjective control and for the possibility for others researchers to verify and repeat the study. That is why as researcher we must be aware of the consequences of our research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It can also be complicated by the fact that I used the snow-ball effect to get access to my informants; there is a bigger chance that they could identify other informants' quotes since they might know each other. To prevent that, I must be aware of every detail that might reveal my informants identity and keep that away from the transcriptions.

Once the interviews were done, I proceeded to transcribe them using transcription software and analyse the material based on certain themes I observed were recurrent during the interviews. The interviews were made in Swedish and processed as verbatim transcripts that transferred everything on the audio file exactly the way it's delivered. For purpose of the analysis, the material was translated to English and edited for clarity, trying to remain close to the spoken material as possible, maintain the cadence and meaning of the language but excluding for example stutters, false starts, repetitions, etc. After analysing the material in the themes, I connected it back to my research questions for the conclusions.

5. Analysis

In this part, the results of the field work will be presented through the transcriptions of the interviews made to five people in Sweden that identify themselves as men that work as drag queens. I have selected and divided the chapter in themes that were recurrent during the interviews, related and based on the research questions, background and theoretical approach developed in earlier chapters.

There are cases, such as the theme “Drag scene in Sweden” for example, where there was not enough information about the subject in previous researches. To understand and be able to go further in my analysis I had to ask and describe the Swedish scene as my informants portrayed it.

To conclude, I will specifically return to the research questions in the conclusions based on what the material has showed.

5.1 Drag as reproduction and subversion of gender

As we could observe in earlier chapters, drag is an expression to theatricalize the characteristics of a specific gender, the female gender in the case of my five informants.

In a study conducted by Hopkins (2004, p.140) drag queens present several different motivations for becoming involved in female impersonation. One motivation is the individual’s increased involvement in the gay community by making a further identification with the group beyond that of just homosexual. This represents the opportunity to experience a second “coming out” while others claim that drag offers a chance to be involved in entertaining and receive attention for performing.

5.1.1 Drag as an expression

When it comes to the motivations why my informants are drag performers, they have diverse reasons. But no one could point out exactly one particular and clear motivation. It seems to be many different variables that blend together, among them a possibility to get a voice out:

Monique: In the beginning I do not think that there were more thoughts than I like to do comedy. And with humour, you can also get through different messages and tell about their own background and put perspective on things [...] Through humour you actually say things and show

different perspectives. As long as you do it the right way in the right context, there are ways to get things out.

The use of the humour as a tool may be a way to face life and things that happens with joy, but also maybe convert something painful to laugh as a way of self-defence. With humour an important message may be received in a better way, a typical characteristic of drag queens according to the definition from RFSL, to be able to entertain an audience in a playful way. Besides the humour, it may also be a way to explore and express feelings in a way that maybe the norm does not allow them in their everyday life. Behind a persona and makeup, there may be permitted another way to self-explore and create the person they want to be.

Monique: Although it is a character, an artistic expression with makeup, hair. Clothes, scene expressions or whatever it may be, it is all so interconnected with yourself that it able you to open up some sides of you that you might not have done in the same way if you had not done drag.

Göran: When you are on stage you will get a lot of attention. Quite frankly you can look how ugly you want and everybody will think it is really interesting because you have done drag, you have done your own thing. You have done something to make people look at you.

The attention the informants gets, can be related the extravagant looks where the intention is to break the norm by exaggerating what the stereotypical norm teaches us is correct. In doing so, these drag queens create their own interpretation of gender through the constant repetition of signs and discourses (Berbary & Johnson, 2017).

Monique: One is breaking the norm because it is humour, it is entertainment and it is an art, but it is still a man in women's clothes in the end who makes it extravagant and you challenge a lot by being a stereotype of how the woman might be expected to look.

Polly Gami: Drag is about creating dimensions. We do not want to be a “female woman”, but we may want to be a parody of the “female woman”

Monique: You want to challenge the stereotypical image of how women should be and then you use humour and show that "Ha! It may not have to be like this! It can be like this too"

For Polly, even though they may create their own representation of what a “female woman” should be, they take some distance to the female anatomy, claiming that they do drag to

access to an alternative reality they can't achieve for different reasons rather than a different gender.

Polly Gami: I like the elegance and the old gleaming that one cannot afford to live in all the time [...] I like fashion and stuff, but that's it. I often forget (to use) the breasts and stuff. It has nothing to do with the female; it is rather the silhouette that inspires me.

Drag brings also joy and a sense of safe space. They are the one who controls their environment, what they present or hide in front of the audience.

Krickan: Simply joy. Joy to get on a stage and perform a show and when the audience shows their appreciation the joy becomes even greater

For Polly, it is not only the applause that motivate they to do drag, but mainly to take a break from themselves. Just as other people find other activities to focus their energy on, Polly feels that drag allows them to look and feel like the way they want at the moment, without taking a complete distance of their own self off-stage.

Polly Gami: Why do I do this? I think sometimes you need a fucking break from yourself. That's why we go to the hairdresser, that's why we use makeup, because sometimes you need it [...] You need a break from yourself, and this is so far from me but still coming from myself.

For my informant Marcus, there have been moments when the motivation to do drag has lost its path and transformed into something they have not enjoyed. But they soon realized that they cannot live without drag, so they started over, now with their own rules and conditions on how their drag was going to be.

Marcus: I actually stopped once. We started a show group that was very big but after a few years I just felt it was not worth it, the person I noticed that I was not worth keeping it. [...] But we quickly came together (with other three drag queens), because you quickly noticed that you can't manage without it (drag). It's like a poison. So we started our own thing.

The purposes of the show numbers have also change throughout the years for some of my informants, this attributed to a learning process that comes with time, maturity and comprehension of the art form. The experience with the audience has put in perspective what it takes to be "memorable".

Marcus: When you start (doing drag) you just want to look good, have fun and lip-sync to ones favourite songs [...] When I was 16 and then started, then I did not want to be an ugly old lady on ugly numbers, I just wanted to be glamorous, nice, stand on the stage and get applause. You didn't realize that the numbers that people remember and like, they are the ones you have to fight for, the numbers that are really fun, raw, ugly ... they are the ones that I fight for today.

But was a common denominator of for the most of my informants was drag as an opportunity to express themselves. This expression comes in different ways depending on the informant, but it seeped into all the interviews as a motivation. The fact that my informants considered drag as a multifaceted expression, allowed them to explore different creatives sides of themselves, instead of being limited or classified in one discipline.

Krickan: I like theatre and I like to make clothes. I sew and design. And I like music. Can you connect all this? That's what we talked about earlier: joy. And then I have the audience in front of me who likes me too: double joy. I just see it as a theatre or a way that I can get...

Camila: Expression?

Krickan: Expression! Express myself! To get express myself in a way

Camila: What does drag mean to you?

Göran: Expression! Possibility to express oneself in some way

5.1.2 Fulfilling and defying the norm

But even though they may be men who defy gender norms by doing drag, most of my informants have had some period during their lifetime where they tried to adapt to what the norm establish as a “normal behaviour” for boys or men. Often those periods where during the childhood or youth, stages in life where one explore ones identity

Monique: I have always loved glitter and sparkles. But then one falls into certain norms of what is expected to be a guy. And that part (of glitter and sparkles) fell away a bit.

Polly Gami: During high school I had begun to tone myself down a bit because you don't have the fun hour² when you went in ninth grade. So then I tinted myself down a bit. I directed a lot of the stuff the school did, likes musical and shows, but I took less and less space and ended up enjoying being an outward type.

² “Roliga timmen”: Commonly a lesson once a week in Swedish schools where the students can entertain each other or participate in a common activity.

In that way, drag can be seen as an escape to the norm, where each one defines their own rules of what is accepted or not in their drag persona.

Monique: some things are pushed away because it cannot be welcomed in certain contexts or it did not fit the norm. And then when you explore in drag and see that you have no limits, you do just you, because you define everything

By setting their own rules, my informants may defy or reinforce normative social expectations, but for Polly integrating normative masculine traits in their drag, allows separate themselves from other drag queens and in doing so, may also challenge the audience that is watching them, in their own perceptions how gender should be represented (Barrett, 2017).

Polly Gami: It is also where it becomes precisely this cleavage that drag show cannot just be about dressing up to an opposite gender, but it must be something more. And for my personal part, it may be to blend in my male attributes in that I am portrayed as a woman so that I almost try to parody on drag queens that are really girly, because I am not.

For Marcus, not fitting in in the hegemonic masculine norm may have helped them to take the step into the drag world, something that according to them, they may not have done as a heterosexual man. They identify homosexuality as a norm inside the drag community, in opposition to the outside society, where heterosexuality is the norm. That can be considered a subversion to the established gender system but it can also be interpreted as a reidealization of heterosexual norms (Butler, 1993), where in order to be a drag queen, you have to be a cis-gender homosexual man and darken the existence of other gender expression in the scene.

Marcus: For me, it is not gender, it's more about the homosexual part. It has been easier for me than it would have been for my brother to even dare to make a drag show. I do not know many drag queens, I do not know any drag queen in Sweden who is a heterosexual man. Then maybe there is, but I have never heard of it and I have been on (the scene) for quite a few years. And I think it's still about the fact that it is a taboo thing to wear in dress [...] the gender part is that I'm queer³, it has helped me take the step of making a drag show, but it stays there for me. For me it is to stand on the stage and glitter and make people laugh and get myself to be an artist, nothing else.

Marcus believes that the lack of heterosexual men that explore the drag world could be attributed by the undervaluation of the women in our society and the shame in putting a garment on that is associated with female attributes. This undermines their masculinity and

³ Informant uses the Swedish word "fikus", word to describe a homosexual man.. May be considered derogatory in today's society.

makes them a blank for scoff and mockery, highlighting how the hegemonic masculinity that prevails in western still takes a distance from looking like a woman (Connell, 2003).

Marcus: As I said, ask my brother if he could imagine doing theatre in dress, that's is not on the map. He would not play theatre at all, but he would do it for his children in some school play in an ordinary role as a man. But he would NEVER dare to take the step and play a drag show artist. It is because we hate women, the woman is less worthy, so it is degrading to a man to adopt properties associated with a woman. [...] A garment associated with a woman, why is it shameful? It is not that people reacts in school if a girl had dressed as male figure. But if you as a 17-year-old in high school dresses up as a girl in some context, then it is outrageous. Because then you are weak, queer⁴ gay, transvestite, blablabla.

The norms of male and female has also marked Monique throughout time, and they decided to take drag as a platform to explore and maybe defy the norm that rules our behaviours.

Monique: I have always wanted to dance and it has been the "feminine" dance forms as ballet, jazz and latin ballroom. Then it is easier to express it in a character that imitates some stereotype of what a woman is and all the norms that one can work through.

Even though the explorations outside the norm, this search and bending of the norm can only be made of certain people with certain privilege or status in the society, creating differences of the norm not only depending on gender or sexual identity, but also on social status that involves economic and cultural capital, among others.

Marcus: In order to have skirt or dress in Sweden for example, you have to be someone. Peter Siepen⁵ gets away. Everyone knows who he is and is known from TV, he can get away with being a little odd bird, while Göran who is going to the factory cannot come to work in the same skirt that Peter Siepen has when he works. It does not work that way.

In the case of my informants, they were all open about it if they were approached and asked about their role in the drag scene. But for some it took longer time than others, and they had more difficulties to express it to their closest. One of the reasons could be the need of separation or distance some informant enjoyed, while others could just be afraid to let anyone down.

⁴ Informant uses the Swedish word "bögg", word that has evolved from being a derogatory to being used by homosexuals to describe themselves, although context dictates if the word is considered derogatory or acceptable.

⁵ Peter Siepen: Swedish TV-host and disc jockey.

Marcus: I mean people in my vicinity knew before my parents that I was doing drag. It was a little shameful because I was so young and I felt that "not only is he queer⁶ and has broken wrists, but now he does this and goes in dress and skirt that everyone believes that all gays do" and that was exactly what I was doing.

But even though they were open about drag identity, some of my informants have closed or do not have social media accounts. Some of them preferred to only have a public drag persona, while others only a private profile not related to their drag persona. This also maybe to have a clear differentiation between them both personas and avoid intruders in their parts of their life they do not want to share public. I could also observe a big influence from my informant's workplaces, where many of them have the freedom to put up posters when they have a show or come in drag in the company's annual parties

Marcus: I am so grateful that...because my father passed away when I was twenty-five, he was very young when he died, had a chance to see me doing a show live. He was very proud of it and that has made me strong. I have always had my parents behind me and I have had good managers. I work at (workplace), where diversity is one of our building blocks. Equality: women, men, gays, immigrants, our whole business is based on it, our HR policy is based on it

While talking to Göran, even though they recognize there is a wider acceptance of drag queens in the society, they remind me that there are many other groups that are not accepted and have fought for many years to earn their right to be who they are in the public space.

Göran: I do not think it is the drag queen who has the right to say "it is because of us" because it is not. It is something that has happened thanks to things like research, but then also many people who have struggled to get to express their own identity and be themselves [...] If I look back at the question of the drag queen being something you are and not something you do, it is very much like you are the drag queen to get an outlet for something, and it is to be yourself. Then to sit and say that it is thanks to drag queens that we have disrupted the male gender roles, blablabla, no, the women have done it themselves. You should not give too much attention to men because they have dressed up in women's clothes, danced around on a stage and lip-synced!

5.1.3 The drag persona

For some of my informants, drag means a way to be notice in different way than in their everyday life. Often are that attention positive and the peoples response can be one of the reasons why they keep doing it for a longer period.

⁶ Informant uses the Swedish word "fikus", word to describe a homosexual man.. May be considered derogatory in today's society.

Marcus: So suddenly you were somebody [...] we were the first in (city) to go to regular taverns when we didn't have shows but wanted to go out and did it in full drag make-up. There wasn't anyone who had seen this in town, so it was like standing on a scene anyway, you still got this kick of the audience, even though it was in a different way.

On the other hand, having a drag persona may be a way to distance themselves from their reality and creating a barrier between their “real” world and their drag world, putting out what a situation requires through their drag persona (Barrett, 2017). For example a party situation where their drag persona is considered to be “more fun” than their own identity, creating a diverse reaction that it would have been if Polly would have gone to the party out of drag.

Polly Gami: If I am a little tired of myself and need a break but have to go out and party or have a job that night, I would never go and mingle at (night club) without being in drag. Because how fucking cool am I? Not very much, probably.

For Göran, becoming Göran has a purpose that comes with the drag persona, a purpose more related to a community more than maybe personal interest, even though being in drag brings out qualities that they may not be that present otherwise

Göran: If you look at Göran it will be look at me, I am the biggest, best and most beautiful. But when you are near me you will be the biggest, best and most beautiful. Then I always been quick in the mouth and that doesn't hurt when you are in full drag and have a little extra courage

Even though Monique keeps strong boundaries between their drag persona and their everyday life, it is very difficult for those two to not melt together in some way and strengthen each other.

Monique: There again comes back to the idea of doing and being ... because my self-confidence has become much stronger and strengthened the role of the character that as well [...] you are also affected as a person, you see your own skills and shortcomings or development areas.

For some of my informants, their drag persona may be an extension of themselves while for others it is something that they have practiced on and have learned to do. Just like we teach our bodies to behave certain ways according to the norm, my informants adapt their bodies to the role they are in at the moment without necessarily going through a whole physical transformation. Their personality is moving, thinking and feeling a certain way in a specific context in relationship to the environment, reinforcing DiCaprio's (1989) theory about corporeality.

Polly Gami: Sure I go into a role, though still not. I just make a little effort, but it's something I've been training to and that I've achieved. It is not that the case that "Polly lives inside me", it is something that I have found, so it is more like a product that I have created and then I can choose and pick out from there because I have the whole repertoire in my head [...] but I also know that a click foundation on the nose on us we are a thousand times more unpleasant and everyone is sitting with the legs cross with a stick in the ass. We sit and squeeze on the breasts that we do not have and touch us like whole ladies and only you step inside the door here I think it is so [...] but go into the role I can do anytime, I like to have one to fall into.

Göran: Thus, it is a fictional character that is an extension of my own ego or my own personality. And it's kind of nice to get something out of it as well. If you think my relationship with Göran, she is a part of me just as I am part of her. But it is not directly that I feel "she is here". I won't miss her if she's gone but I would still miss her because she's gone, if you understand what I mean? That it is a part of me, but I can develop it in other ways too [...] Even if I have taken a break in it, I come back to it. Maybe some evening when I'm are not doing anything, then I can get an idea of how I should do my make-up. And then I stand in front of a mirror and do make-up one evening just for myself. The persona Göran is not so important to me, but the important is everything around it (Göran).

In that same way, some of my informants can invite in their drag persona in their personal lives if they feel the need to. Often in situations they may not be that comfortable in, shaping their character according to a specific context.

Polly Gami: I think I dare to be myself through both and that I can borrow from Polly into my private life when I need it. You know when you need strength or need to be a bit funny so you have to invite her. But I make drag less often now because I do not do it privately, such as in parties. Partly because the lack energy and life that puts an end to it. But it is also because I also have a slightly more mature relation to it (drag).

By borrowing their drag persona in situations they need strength for example, they have strengthened themselves in their everyday lives and can oscillate maybe smother through their personas depending on social context and situation. If their drag persona were just a fictional character, it may be harder to keep developing and growing with it.

Krickan: Krickan and I we enjoy each other. I've got many new acquaintances through Krickan, because I dare to talk more with people. On the other side ... yes it may be thanks to Krickan that I later, privately as (name) have become more open and dare to talk more with people

Polly Gami: My relationship to drag...I have got more distance but at the same time it has flowed together more. Now I can be myself 24 hours a day and when I am in drag I am myself, I can choose what I to emphasize and what I want to pick away.

When I ask Göran if they think that they could get rid of their drag persona someday, it became rather difficult because the drag persona is the “real” persona and vice versa.

Göran: Absolutely, but then I must have another place I can get rid of creativity. But the character itself, I can put it on the shelf. Because she is not so different to me, it is like saying to put (name) on the shelf, and that it is not possible. Göran is just a little louder.

Looking at how my informants can oscillate and melt their different personas, the boundary of that the society has established between male and female is constantly being transformed (Butler, 1988). These men do not need make up or clothes to become their persona that is a female, but they need those traits to be recognized by the society as a women, more specifically a drag queen which is a performance of certain type of woman in a certain context, restricting the body to a corporal space and on existing directives (Butler, 1988)

Monique: Being hours from myself as a man to transform into what people see as a woman ... then it becomes quite clear that one can create gender, even if it takes a long time

For my informant Marcus, drag gave them something that other art forms did not and they were seen in a way that had not occurred before. It was not only the body that gave Marcus the “cred” that they talk about, but also the emotion and feelings behind an act, making the whole body have a language (García, 2012) that they did not had explore in other disciplines

Marcus: It turned out that I was very good (at drag), I got a different kind of creed, (people) saw me in another way. I had been a very exposed child, extremely overweight, and that did not showed on stage. I was so good and moved like a fairy.

While Polly had been on several other stages, it still was a bit challenge to adapt to the drag form that is the predominant and requires certain abilities that maybe are not very explored in other art forms. The physical alteration of the body also goes in hand with a transformation process where persona has to become itself in a certain level (Sandoval, 2018).

Polly Gami: It was a bit of a problem to be a funny in the beginning because you get nervous in a different way. I have probably always been good at being funny, but it was to be fun in full makeup, heels, dance and lip-sync [...] The visual part has been the biggest challenge I think for me, because dance, to be fun and improvise has always been part of my personality [...] And then I also think when I worked at (nightclub) the need to mingle and have some kind of personality was a bit challenging because I just really wanted to make drag and stand on stage and make a script. I was not just used to improvise and be quick and funny so others could have fun.

But just like any other art form, according to my informants it requires practices and hard work to perform on a stage as a drag queen and it can be considered a job.

Krickan: Of course it is a lot of work but an artist, a singer or an actor too has a lot of work. Even though we run most of the 95% playback, we still have to read all the lyrics to be able to articulate and mimic exactly so it looks like we are singing. One has to study and choreography, dance steps...

Monique: Basically, it is a job; I get something out of it. It is a character that I will step into and it is a performance that should be in place. It tends back and forth to myself and I dress up myself and I develop myself in the role I am, because you get to know different sides of yourself and that makes you develop with it [...] But I am very clear: when I get off the stage and talk to people afterwards, then I am (name) talking to them. Just because, now I am done, now I have done what I should do in my work as a character and can continue.

For Monique, even though there is a difference between themselves and their drag persona, to be able to provide everything they wanted as Monique, they are sometimes forced to dig in their selves to express something through Monique. In that moment the boundaries of the two personas gets blurry and contributes to the formation of the corporeality, since it becomes a manifestation in a specific context, made with an intention (DiCaprio, 1989).

Monique: I have to get a bit from myself to be able to deliver the feelings I want, but it is not (name) that is up there (on the stage), it is Monique. And right away when I get off the stage, I'm (name) with makeup. When I am no longer on the stage, then I am no longer in character. It is difficult to explain that feeling when you are up there (on stage) and sometimes quickly turn to yourself and back (in character) again.

The difference of my informants and their drag persona is not limited to their look, it has to do with what role they decide to enter, interpedently of how they are dressed. That separates the identity from the representation of the body, while it still can be connected, depending on the social situation that my informants locates themselves and how they want to portrait themselves in that moment.

Monique: I might be standing there and still look like Monique, but it's like "now I have finished working. Now I pick up and go down". When I go down to afterwards, then I'm not Monique, Monique is ready for the day. Sure she can show up sometimes, with a comment here and there, but I have nevertheless gone back in the role of (name). Maybe because of that I may have been called "fucking butch"⁷ sometimes (laugh) It is a job and a performance, so I see no sense to

⁷ Butch: An overtly/stereotypically masculine or masculine-acting woman. Can be used to denote an individual or the dominant role in a lesbian relationship.

remain in that character when I finish my job. And that is also a clear boundary for those who are there and sees that "well okay, that is a character, now it is just a man". It becomes a boundary and also clarity from both sides.

For Göran, this representation can be uncomfortable since their role as a drag queen does not have the same response as their daily role as man, while Monique are aware of their roles in the society and how they jump in to different roles depending on the social context. For them, the drag queen is one more role that they play during their lifetime.

Göran: And just generally, you treat a drag queen much more differently if you make a man. One is no longer a man, one is a thing. I am a figure that is there for your entertainment

Monique: I feel that everyone is in different roles all the time. One is my private role, then when I am at work I have a job role and when I am with the parents, it is with the parents.

5.1.4 Identity

If we go back to RFSL's definition of a drag queen as "a person who uses gender roles, social attributes and symbols to challenge the boundaries between male and female. Often an exaggerated performance with the purpose of entertaining an audience, or in a playful way to express part of their identity" (2015; np). I may assume, from an outsiders perspective, that being a drag queen may also be a part of my informants identity.

But when I ask my informants what drag means to them, most of them find it rather difficult to put words on it.

Marcus: It's who I am, it's so hard to say what that means to me

But even though drag may be who they are, some of my informant clearly points out that they do drag but they do not feel like a drag queen outside the norm of what a drag queen is to them. They alter their bodies in order to create their performance of gender (Sandoval, 2018).

Polly Gami: I feel a bit that the moment chooses what you want to be. I AM not a drag queen and I hate it in for example a job context if I had a colleague saying "and (name) over there, he is a drag queen" Because I'm not really that right now, and then they look at me and get really disappointed. [...] I do drag because you have to DO something to make it something of it. It's not really my thing. There are some who are drag queens, they are really big in the US or so, they live almost all their lives, or their whole life around drag. They are wiping away the eyebrows and all. But they

also live like that in essence. Because they look like a fucking mess out drag. And I don't work that way

There has to be a process and a separation of themselves and their drag persona to be able to call themselves drag queens, or else there are other gender identifications that would be more suiting, according to my informants.

Krickan: I mean, no drag queen really lives the drag queen all the time. Though they called themselves drag queens in this American movie, it's a bit misleading. Then it is more that they might be ... there was no one who stated that they wanted to be a woman, and then you cannot call them transsexuals either. Usually if you are a transvestite you are a heterosexual man and they were gay guys. So it's so misleading that movie in a way. There is probably no... yes, maybe some may think it anyway, but I don't think so anyway. But a drag queen, it is performativity! I think so!

For Monique, the separation of themselves and their drag persona is something needed to get lost in each other. Having similar attributes, they are never fully separated, but Monique needs to draw a clear line when they are not the persona.

Monique: The drag character is part of me and at the same time I am a part of it. But I'm not the full that one and that one is not me fully. I want to have that clarity, since I am very jokingly private, in some way I must know where I am and where the character is. But it is never completely separated.

To become a drag queen it requires physical work, and that work is what defines the limit between Polly and themselves. Even though Polly recognizes that some elements of the drag performance seep through when they are not in drag, Polly recognize the act of transforming into character as the limit of both personas. It seems that more than being a part of themselves, their drag personas is a contribution to their own selves by exploring another and then have themselves to come back to, or vice versa.

Polly Gami: I think it is for me that when I do drag, I roll up my arms, shave off everything under the eyebrows, as well as I cover and glue. It's a job, it's something I do, it's not that I am so. It is something I want pay and appreciation for doing. That I think it's fun, that is a everyday bonus. But I do not think I see it that way, that I AM a drag queen, then I still know that I am a drag queen... I mean, I have lip-synced in the shower a few times, or like when you are getting ready and drinking some wine in the bathroom while you wind your hair for 45 minutes...

On the other hand, Marcus does not identify as a drag queen, they identify themselves as artist and have a harder approach to the oscillation in and out of the drag persona. The approach that Marcus has, that differs from my other informants, may be explain by Johnson & Dunlap

(2011) where popular culture has put the gay male identity as marginalized, internalizing the heterosexist stereotypes and taking a distance from that portraying. These stereotypes are transmitted through cultural values and social norms, reinforcing the hegemonic masculinity, even though it places the gay masculinities in the lowest of the gender hierarchy among men (Connell, 2003).

Marcus: Admittedly, I am a drag queen, but I am not drag, I am an artist, which is the difference. If they are drag queens that feel that they are the persona, yes then you are well...a step under shemale⁸ ... no, that was harsh. But then they are not, then you are not a show artist, I am a show artist. I am an artist, since my artistry is drag show right now. It has been different (types) as well. But now, I'm not at home and jerking in pantyhose, I'm not sitting at home and doing makeup because "uh how good-looking I am" a bad Tuesday. I am an artist, I see myself as an artist.

On the contrary, for Polly the products of popular culture help them to find at early age pictures of drag queens in magazines as a way to identify to a group she didn't not belong yet, but felt more interesting and connected with more than some of her classmates.

Polly Gami: If my soccer-playing classmates did not have so much similar to me then I could more identify with someone I saw on a mingle picture from (night club). There was many drag queens⁹, because (nightclub) had become known for their drag queens.

Finally, both Krickan and Polly reinforce their masculine identity by comparing themselves in opposition to other gender identifications that may be sometimes confused in the conception of what a drag queen is. These gender identifications are not excluded from what a drag queen can be, but my informants that identifies themselves as men, take a distance from them during our interviews.

Krickan: If someone says tranny¹⁰ ... I mean, it can be a transvestite, it can be a transsexual or slang name for the drag queen. So you have to think about "what do you mean now?" I am a drag queen. And for the most part this is one, what do you say? A performance? No no. I do not live like a drag queen but I am the drag queen either as a mingle hostess or they a DJ or on the stage

Camila: So you wouldn't want to live on drag?

Polly Gami: No, because I don't want to ... I mean, I think I'm too little trans, I think I ... I'm ... I mean no. No, I don't need that

⁸ Informant uses the English word "shemale", derogatory term that describes a trans woman with male genitalia and female secondary sex characteristics, usually including breasts from breast augmentation or use of hormones.

⁹ Informant uses the Swedish word "drugor", an expression to denominate drag queens.

¹⁰ Informant uses the Swedish word "transa", term that may be considered derogatory for a person who wishes to dress in what is traditionally and culturally is considered the opposite sex's clothing

Krickan: No, I mean, I'm man, I'm (name)

5.2 The drag scene in Sweden

As we could observe in previous research, cross-dressing has been identified a long way back in our history, but most of the drag history documented was found in England and the United States (Moncreiff & Lienard, 2017).

In Sweden, according to Lund (n.d), John Lind was Sweden's first drag queen and was on tour all over the world in the early 1900's, mainly in England and United States. But here in Sweden he was not considered a good artist and his performance in Karlskrona in 1919 did not have the success as in other countries. Lind died in 1940 in Karlskrona. During the 70's the drag scene in Sweden started to build up, probably thanks the success the drag group After Dark.

5.2.1 The Swedish drag scene in 2019

Once I started to analyse how my informants described the Swedish drag scene nowadays, I could identify a substantial difference in what the drag scene in Sweden looks like, compared to the one in the United States. These differences are based on the views my informants have on what a drag show is supposed to be and include. Even though they recognize that it is possible to find different variations of drag in Sweden since drag scene not seem to be very big.

Monique: I myself have been in the USA and there it was a drag queen that appeared and performed a song for two and a half minutes, three minutes, then she went off (stage). And that is what they call show, at least the circles I was in. While here (in Sweden) it is these big shows where you gather people and there are concepts and there is food and a whole experience together with the show. That (American) way is not found so much in Sweden, not what I know of. [...] You can find some "club kids" that are very exceptional in their outfits and stuff and they like to hang out at night clubs and do drag that way. So there are some different variations of drag, absolutely. But it is not huge direct, you know most of them.

Some of my informants classified the different types of drag in "good" and "bad" according to their vision of how drag is supposed to be like. During the interviews, some role models were presented as the kind of artist or drag-style to replicate. These role models were often artist

that can be considered established in the Sweden and has participated in different instances in the Swedish popular culture.

Marcus: Today there is not much good since After Dark quitted, because they made the kind of drag show I want to watch myself. Even though I think that they had become a little too kind the last few years, because they became too mainstream. It was too much capititation with the celebrities. But at the same time it is still the closest to a show.

It is possible to recognize a critique to the mainstreaming of what they thought was an authentic drag group, show or performance. This mainstreaming is associated with appearances in media and lack of originality, or perhaps a loss of their essences.

Polly Gami: (...) in Sweden there are many good ones; those who I would say have managed to do it really popular it is After Dark. But there were many that I thought were much more interesting and which I think today are a thousand times more interesting. And maybe it´s because they didn't become so commercial, they managed to preserve what After Dark started with and what might have been the end product if After Dark had stuck to it

Maybe because of this mainstreaming of the drag world, the society puts a higher value in the level of fame the artist has, rather than the artistic quality. Because of that, according to my informants, sometimes this portraying creates a confusion of what a drag queen really do and/or is and gets put in the “wrong” category in the society.

Polly Gami: (...) just as Danes are much better at cast people to a role because they take talent and in Sweden we take the celebrity who sells most tickets.

Marcus: It is still today that best drag show artist¹¹ goes to Björn Kjellman¹² for the role when he plays trans. He is not drag show artist, he does a role, he is an actor who makes a role that is transvestite or transsexual. It's not a drag show, win a prize for actor. I think is a mockery of our art form. I think this is completely wrong; there are a lot of others! He can win the role of the best male lead, but not a drag price...

Even though there is a critic of the mainstreeting towards the Swedish drag performers' that have entered the popular culture, that type of drag that those popular drag queens do is still what is most recurrent in Sweden, replicating the inability to “do drag differently” in the Swedish drag scene (Berbary & Johnson, 2017)

¹¹ Informant refers to the prize “Årets drag” (Drag of the Year) on “QX Gaygalan”, an annual gala organized by the magazine “QX”.

¹² Björn Kjellman: Swedish actor and singer.

Göran: (...) because Sweden itself is a rather difficult scene. You should be good at a lot; in addition you should have a certain look for it to work in Sweden. Babsan¹³ has been so, and the same thing as Christer Lindarw¹⁴, he has worked his way forward and they have had tours. I also think (group) will go very far just because they have the same style as After Dark and they take over a little. There are several drag queens that have been in After Dark that does other things today. But mostly it is that you have a show, a cabaret. People get there, eat food, see the show, but they (drag queens) still can't live on it. Especially when there are two shows a year and that is all you can do

Because there are certain patterns in the type of drag that is most predominant, my informants sees the drag scene as a way (but also an obligation) to create your own opportunities to succeed, but there is always a comparison to what opportunities United States can offer in opposite to Sweden.

Monique: I know there were some drag queens who reached out to me from Norrland or somewhere like that, who wanted to know how to succeed in this whole thing. And I wrote to them to go out to night clubs where there is opportunity, participate in competitions if there are or in shows and charity ceremonies and everything like this. Then you get into the circuits and get to know people and that is the way it works, You have to create your own opportunities as well [...] I absolutely believe that if you find the market and you niche and do something that you really feel is right for yourself and you do it well there are opportunities to live on it. But I think that it may not be easy because the consumption of drag is not in the same in Sweden as it is in the USA where you see all these superstars who travel the world and are on television. It is a completely different production than it is in Sweden

Creating these opportunities may or may not be in the path with the “established” kind of drag, but some of my informants see that as a way to make a path in the drag scene. The implements of new technologies and communication channels can be a tool that facilitates the creation of that path, even though Sandoval (2018) claims that the use of social media may perpetuate the dominant gender binary and by exposing themselves, their bodies may lose their power of resistance.

Monique: Although sometimes there are some paths of what is good or real drag and stuff like that, I do not think you need to care so much about it. You can do it your own way, in a completely different way.

¹³ Babsan: Swedish fashion designer and drag show artist.

¹⁴ Christer Lindarw: Swedish clothing designer and Sweden's most famous drag show artist, leader of the drag show group After Dark.

Göran: You have to be good. But it also doesn't have to be afraid to explore. Today there are many, if you think about exactly what it is you want ... Instagram is an opportunity for example

5.2.2 Drag expressions in Sweden

Even though my informants had different perspectives on what drag was to them, the term “expression” was a common denominator throughout all the interviews:

Göran: It is a multifaceted expression. If we look back at the story you needed to be able to sew, you had to be able to fix hair, you had to be able to make up your makeup, you had to be able to wrap your knees. When it came to standing on stage you had to be able to lip-sync, and you had to be fun. There are so many competencies required that I think it is very fun. So I think it's a way of expressing yourself, just like running, singing or dancing. But you don't have to be great at anything, you can just be half-done on everything and hide the fact that you not so good at anything, “smoke and mirrors” as they say.

It is possible to observe some generational differences when it came to define what “good” or “bad” drag is, since it is an art form that is constantly evolving and shaping itself according to different times. Krickan, that belong to a older generation, sees the newer kind of drag as something very foreign for them

Krickan: I think, or maybe I imagine, that people want to recognize a little of the artist that one does on stage.

But they acknowledge that they have to renew and adapt to new times by integrating younger people or else they may not be attractive and prevailing in the drag scene. So even if it may be a certain resistance to break the traditional norms of what they considered a drag performance should be or look like, they are able to bend evolve as an art form.

Marcus: So the people I show with today, (name) is the youngest because we needed fresh blood for the show and someone who saw it from a new perspective. Because we are also framed, we have worked together for fifteen years, so we needed new blood. We were also stuck on the same type of numbers. We needed new ideas and then she came up with lots of fun ideas, new young people and we were also excited, challenged, to take it to the next level.

For Krickan, there is no “good” or “bad” drag, but rather that the kind of drag that is starting to show up is not comprehensible for their idea of what a drag show should be and look like. And that imagination of what drag should look like comes from what has been popular in the Swedish culture for many years.

Krickan: The form of drag that comes up nowadays is a lot...experimental? It's not the usual that you are used to, like After Dark or like us. They are trying to do something extra, add some twist to it. Either they look like an alien, or come out on stage without wig and shaved or the makeup is really strange sometimes, but at the same time it is pretty cool too. I do not know if I think that is drag ... it is almost more like a "performance". Sometimes I think I might be too old? (laugh) I think a drag queen should look like us

As in every art form, there are new paths to try out and experiment, and Göran finds their own way and kind of drag that fit their way to work and personal interest.

Göran: I am not quite as established perhaps, but I see a small scene that so many drag queens I think miss out or do not feel that it is really something for them. Like bachelorette parties or these little things that are special. I think it is cosy to go home to people or do something small, just celebrate or something.

Still the “traditional” way of drag is the most predominant in Sweden, and according to Krickan there still is an audience for that kind of shows

Krickan: I don't think people are completely saturated in the traditional way. I think there are many who want to see glitter and glamor, nice girls on stage.

But for Marcus, the kind of drag that has been reproduced by media and programs as RuPaul's Drag Race does not represent their idea of what a drag show is, creating a division of “good” and “bad” drag according to their own personal taste.

Marcus: I think that if you go to a nightclub, even in Sweden, in a stylish dress and you stand on a ramp, just walk around and lip-sync whatever song. That is not a drag show; it's a happening of a drag artist, possibly. That is how far I can take it to. But for me it's just “yawn”, I don't want to see it myself. That is the moment to take a bathroom break (laugh)

5.2.3 The influence of RuPaul's Drag Race

As I mention in earlier chapter, RuPaul's Drag Race is an American reality competition television series produced by World of Wonder for the TV channel VH1. The show documents RuPaul in the search for "America's next drag superstar", playing the role of host, mentor, and head judge for this series, as contestants are given different challenges each week. RuPaul's Drag Race employs a panel of judges who critique contestants' progress throughout the competition and has aired, to this date, eleven seasons and two spinoffs. The

programs format has also been replicated in their own ways in countries such as Thailand, Chile and United Kingdom. In Sweden, the TV program is broadcast by “Kanal 11” and on OUTTV and many of the drag queens from that show has performed in Sweden, both in Stockholm and other cities, like Malmö.

Having that previous knowledge, I could observe divided opinions from my informants about the program. Mostly the show was brought up by them, when it came to draw a parallel on their type of drag and the drag that is shown on TV, where the drag that is made in Sweden requires often a longer work and preparation than the one presented in the program.

Marcus: We've never made the type of drag that you see on “Drag Race”. It's not a show to go out and lip-sync to a song four minutes straight up and down in any dress. They do not even imitate artists. They are drag queens, but what they do is not drag show, for me.

At the same time, Göran acknowledges that even though “Drag Race” may not reflect the type of drag that they do, there is a thought behind it and the participants of the show has to keep on working in one or another way to stay in the business.

Göran: You have to remember that in the first place it is a television program and secondly it is a competition. And that means that the girls who compete there look have a certain aesthetic that works for tv and has some personality that works there of course. But they are hard-working girls. The ones you remember from RuPaul's drag are those who have worked their ass off afterwards and made a brand of their own [...] I would have like to be part of the competition, but I don't think that I would made it very far. Because my type of drag that is not really competition drag. I notice that the more I get to work, the less I want to look beautiful. I think I am beautiful, but I am not beautiful as a RuPaul's Drag Race-girl.

But for Marcus, drag race does not necessarily represent talent on television. They aim for more originality and relate to queens that stands out of the prototype of drag queen presented in the television program, but that also are the queens that does a drag closest to the type of drag they does. That contradicts Marcus earlier resistance to do drag differently, putting an emphasis on the possibility to do drag differently, as long it showcases a talent that is considered related to a drag show, such as comedy, singing or acting.

Marcus: That's why I don't like drag race, because for me it's just drag queens that are fucking good at makeup and talented at paying a seamstress who can sew their clothes. But there are some talented [...] I like the little odd birds maybe.

Polly on the other hand seem to see RuPaul's Drag Race as a pure entertainment show that has its hype on during a certain period but will soon decrease. The program has expanded drag to other platforms with wider access and can, according to Polly, feature other elements that does not necessarily is related to drag per se.

Polly Gami: I would like to say that Drag Race is like "Bonde Söker Fru"¹⁵. People haven't understood it's a reality show. Because if "Bonde Söker Fru" is true love, let's see how fucking good it holds in real life [...] It's still about how many followers you have or what you do on Youtube. You have to entertain your audience in a lot of way, which makes it a full-time job. It is amazing that you can have it. But it does not always lift that talent that has to do with drag shows.

From Marcus perspective, what is represented on television does not go in line to what they think as a drag show, and does not necessarily recognize the work behind it as Göran sees it.

Marcus: So now there are many such kids, RuPaul's Drag Show-kids, which I do not think is drag show at all. They are drag show artists, yes they are and they make makeups that are stunning. Their clothes can be amazing. But what they do is not drag show, for me. I think it takes a little more, it requires a number, it takes a thought, it requires an idea not only that you are good at makeup.

Göran attribute this difference to a generational difference and appreciation of what drag is and who it is supposed to look. They point out how the times have changed and how the society has evolved, just like all the other art forms and our historical judgment of right and wrong. Just as Lind was not recognize as an good artist while we was still alive and now is considered Sweden's first drag queen, the judgment of what is considered drag or not is constantly evolving.

Göran: Firstly, I do not like when you have that view of other drag queens, because it is not up to you to say what is drag or not, even if you do it yourself. The majority of drag queens today, and specially the younger ones who are raised with RuPaul's Drag Race, they will think it is drag. The older generation, I can imagine, may be a little hesitant. But they are also more aware, hopefully, of that have called themselves for "tranny"¹⁶ for a long period, for 20-30 years. And today it is people who become very, very upset if you call yourself tranny as a drag queen because it is not really ethical. So it is just like all new, all art and all entertainment, it develops.

¹⁵ Bonde Söker Fru: Swedish adaptation of the reality TV-show "Farmer Wants a Wife", were farmers meets different potential partners to find "the right one".

¹⁶ Informant uses the Swedish word "transa", term that may be considered derogatory for a person who wishes to dress in what is traditionally and culturally is considered the opposite sex's clothing

And as times has changed, also has the access to drag for the audience but also for my informants. In the 90's, when Marcus started engaging with the drag scene, the access to clothes and shoes was different from now, making the process harder and probably more painful. There were a lot of barriers then that today may not exist, or that are easier to pass by.

Marcus: It was travel to Copenhagen, buy the fabric, paste the sequin, try to get some shoes in my size, then there was no internet and my size is 44-45. I have a little widened feet so it was very difficult. The first shows I showed with two sizes small shoes, I could barely move. One had to cut up shoes and stuff because there was nothing in that size. So it was a bigger challenge then, and it was usual to use normal makeup, not like now.

One of the key element that may has contributed to a broader access is media, broadcasting drag in different ways than earlier and not focusing on a specific audience, but opening it up for the public.

Monique: There have been men in women's clothing on stage far, far behind in time, but I now believe is more mainstream and ... it becomes more visibly. There is much more on TV and you see it in completely different context than you did before. It is not just an SVT¹⁷ documentary or something like that. Now it is visible on different channels, different forums and contexts. Also on clubs in a completely different way. And above all, media makes it spread quickly.

Another factor that has made drag more accessible is the free access we have to internet here in Sweden. This has allowed that my informants can find products that they need and fits them easier and also to a more accessible price

Marcus: Now it is from the internet [...] theatre make-up and that kind of stuff. I order Wish¹⁸ shoes now, perfect size, no money ... so it has changed significantly. It has made it easier. The Internet has been good, as long as it works.

This wider access only was presented as positive for my informants, but it may have changed the level of commitment that may existed earlier in the drag world. The access and the immediacy of it all make it easier to see drag as a product rather than a creational process and a part of their identity.

Göran: You have to remember that after RuPaul it suddenly became possible to buy everything online. There were sequins, there were shoes and everything, and all this was in your size in just one click! "Oh, what simple! Now I can have plastic breasts or buy this, or have this. I can buy sequin boots in size 43 with 20 cm high heels". You couldn't really do that ... I was fortunate to

¹⁷ SVT: Sveriges Television AB, the Swedish national public television broadcaster.

¹⁸ Wish: referred to wish.com, an online marketplace.

come just when it was cheap in the beginning and then it became difficult. So imagine that for the older generation, or those who have been doing drag longer than RuPaul's Drag Race, it is a big commitment, because you have to sew your clothes, you have to be able to sew your clothes if you do not have a body shape as a girl. And you put so much of yourself into your art or your creation and in your drag performance that it becomes a part of yourself and not something you do. Then I can think that today it can be something I do in my spare time, you can have it, and it is possible to do "spare time-drag" in a completely different way. You can also buy a wardrobe that will sit perfectly on you because you can order by your measure, and you can buy shoes that fit. You can buy yourself for your drag.

5.3 Drag queens historical role

Drag not only consist on creating an own identity or gender performance. Historically drag queen have been important actors in the gay community, and in United States there is a strong drag ball culture where most participants in culture belong to groups known as "houses" that mimic a family structure and offer similar support.

5.3.1 Drag as a community

Here in Sweden it is not possible to find that same structure and culture, but still for my informants, drag constitutes a possibility of creating community and sharing experience. At the same time, they are aware of the prejudices that can be heard about the drag world, but makes a difference between what happens while they are in character and of stage.

Monique: I think that many times the drag world is held up by (the myth of) being very big rivals. On stage absolutely, when you enter the character it is part of the charm in some way. But behind the scene I have never noticed it, on the contrary.

To have a supportive community may help to reinforce and be open with whom you are in the society. Just as an in the early 20th century, the gay communities were on their way to consolidation and the gay bars where a chance to build a sense of community and social support, Krickan became active in the organization RFSL from an early age, finding their way of community.

Krickan: I have been very active in RFSL and then one cannot be gay in the closet. If you are not out (from the closet) from the beginning, you have to force yourself out. You have to talk to

authorities and you may need to figure in newspapers and talk to reporters, among others. I had the whole association in the back, I was not alone and I think it meant a lot.

The interaction with different people also gives an opportunity to find inspiration and knowledge in others that can contribute to their own art performance.

Monique: You meet many very different people with different backgrounds who look at different things and you learn constantly. Everything from humour to sewing, as well as self-discipline. You learn a lot about yourself and who you are.

For some of my informants, the process around drag becomes a routine they do together. In that way, they do not only progress in their artistically numbers but also bond as friends or colleagues. That gives drag a bigger meaning than just standing on stage, it is creating something with your friends.

Krickan: Sometimes, for various reasons when you come here, it can be like "sigh, I'll go down there". But then you come down and meet (name) and immediately you feel full of energy and almost don't want to leave.

For Göran, who does not integrate a drag show group the possibility of creating community inside the drag scene does not fall so naturally and aims for a space that is more inclusive in our culture.

Göran: I would like a place where there is actually a possibility, where there is not so much of this "animals in the cage", but that there is a chance for people to create community because it is important, for me it is important [...] I would like to create something like that, but I would like to see more culture. You have a culture that is emerging as very gender-neutral and I think that is very interesting. There could be more room for drag queens. It is a way to focus on something else in their everyday life and have fun.

5.3.2 Drag as political platform

Even though in Mc Clintock (2003) historical layout of cross-dressing, the historical figure of the cross-dresser becomes invested with a potent and subversive power, it contradicts with Butler (1993) theory that claims that "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms" (p. 125). Based on those two visions, I decided to ask my informants about their thought on drag as a political platform, and I could

observe a certain resistance to the topic. It could be mainly because my informants consider drag as an art form and as part of themselves, rather than a platform for political speech. But I could identify a consensus that it is possible to make drag political, as long as it doesn't become politics.

Polly Gami: It is allowed to be political but you have to do it correctly. Just as you are allowed to joke about a Russian maid, as long as you do it right. And it is so damn ambiguous because it is the man's greatest zeal in life, being able to put everything in boxes [...] Have you understood the other partner and respected it, it becomes easier to take a stand and reflect on something, joke about something or make fun of something. When drag is politically, I think is good, but when you make politics to drag I think is terrible. Because then, it has not been treated correctly.

Drag can be politically loaded depending on the person behind the persona, but according to Göran, in the drag scene the drag-kings have a stronger political message than drag queens, at least in Sweden.

Göran: I do not think drag per se is a political statement, it is an art form and like all art forms it is usually get people to react, see something or think of something. And it is always the person behind the art form who is politically loaded. Or who thoughts behind it. Just as my drag is about love or feeling seen, there are those who have a hard political thought behind their drag [...] And that's why I think it is boring in Sweden, because we lack a large part of the drag community that is women who portray men. That drag is usually more political and more fun to watch. Because there you are joking wildly about the establishment.

This may be attributed to the fact that the drag-king scene is a platform for women to a take place that they don't have in their everyday life's, while men already have a position of privilege over the woman and does not feel the need to take that opportunity in drag. According to Polly, it also is important who the delivery of the message, the position and insight it has in the drag world to avoid misreading of what is exposed on the stage.

Polly Gami: What might be politics, for example is to joke about something that may not be okay. If I stand there as (name) on stage and express myself about something that it is not okay and I have already lowered my level by dress me in women's clothes and look a little crazy, since I have no direct sender, then maybe you can make a reflection and it gets okay because we pay attention

When I brought up the possibility to drag queens to use drag as a political platform, just like the drag-kings to highlight some of the social and gender injustices it was received as an idea that required a certain type of drag queen to manage in a way that reaches the audience and the drag scene in Sweden right now.

Göran: It is necessary a good stand up drag queen to be able to take that discussion [...] right now in Sweden is very focused on show, glamor, fun and everything is very exciting. If you invest in doing a different drag in Sweden perhaps that is what one should go into.

In other words, to do political drag in a proper way, according to my informants, it has to be an acknowledgement of and connection to the community you are representing, and not a personal aim to gain something for your own profit, reinforcing the idea of drag as a community developed earlier.

Polly Gami: What I do not buy is when you use drag as a political tool to assert yourself or your personal opinions, because it is not a drag. Drag stands for man dressed as girl in the form of a theatre play or a presentation of something. And what I see among those who are perhaps told "you are not drag queens", those that are not accepted by the community, they are the ones who try to do something else, the ones who are trying to make money on us [...] No, it is not politically on your terms, you have to take care of your community too and know your story. [...] So I absolutely think you can be it (political drag queen), but you should do as well as anyone else and I don't think you can be the drag queen just because you are a transman who then becomes a drag queen. You can't build yourself on that, because we can't build ourselves just on that we are men in women's clothing.

But there is a possibility that the Swedish drag scene can become more political if the political climate moves towards more conservative wings that may try to deny the rights that the LGBTQ+ community has earned throughout the years.

Göran: We'll see what happens. If the climate in Europe changes to the negative I think that it would be a factor.

While my informants may take a distance from politics, they consider drag as a subculture where one must be inserted in to have a voice about it that is considered legit. During the interview with Polly for example, they pointed out how a person had written an analysis about After Darks show numbers that did not even represent what the intention of drag is. That was considered just a way to make money out of the drag artist, without a real an acknowledgement. By creating community and legitimizing each other, they can get out a political message, but as it was said throughout all the interviews, it has to be done in the right time and in the right context. That drag is not considered political per se by my informants contradicts the visions of Billy Porter for example, or RuPaul (2018) when he claims that "at its core drag is a social statement and a big f-you to male-dominated culture."

6. Conclusions

When I relate back to my research questions, I can observe that some of my informants experience the Swedish drag scene as a pretty rigid platform where you have to fit into the norm to be able to do drag, even though they recognize a possibility to go outside the norm but not without difficulty. On the other hand, some of my informants claim to be comfortable in those norms that fit in with their perceptions of what is a correct way to do drag, even though they might sometimes contradict themselves and reveal some admiration for those artists that breaks the norm. But independently on what they think about each other, they agreed on that mostly drag queens in Sweden know who the other is, given that is not a very big scene and they experience the drag scene as a community: a way to express themselves in ways that may not be accepted in their everyday life and to have fun. As one of my informant expressed, it is their safe space in the society.

There is a constant comparison to United States and how it works in the different countries, mainly because the big influence United States has in mainstream media and the portraying of drag this media report, having ambivalent opinions about in the expansion of drag in popular culture. Most of my informants already considers drag as a part of the Swedish popular culture since the 70's, but recognises what "RuPaul's Drag Race" has contributed to opening up the drag scene, not only by highlighting it but also by making it easier to access items that was harder a couple of years ago (for example shoes). On the other hand, my informants feel that the drag that is becoming mainstream is not representative of what they considered a proper drag or what predominates in the Swedish scene until this day. The type of drag that is being consumed nowadays demands that the drag queens expands to other areas besides only their drag shows, like social media and networking in general to "put out their name" in the scene and maybe create something that makes them stand out among the others, because thanks to the mainstreaming, the number of drag queens has increased and can now be related more to occasional gigs more than the traditional Swedish concept of a drag show. This can mean that the drag scene that was considered correct and traditional during many years, may be chancing and even though there might be some resistance from the older generation of drag queens, they understand that they must adapt and include the younger generation to stay current and attractive to the audience that may be consuming the art form in a different way than earlier. Not only have it helped to access shoes in their correct size, but also to connect, and for inspiration and reinvention.

But even though they experience drag as a way to express themselves outside the gender norms, I could observe a constant tension between their relation to the hegemonic masculinity and the rupture of the norm. During many times under the interviews, my informants reinforced the idea that they are men that are artist and that they use their manly privileges in their daily lives while at the same time they do not only interrupt the norm during their performance, but also in their daily lives. For start, only by being homosexual men they defy the norm that the hegemonic masculinity has imposed (Connell, 2003) but then some of them recreate the mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion that is characteristic for the hegemonic masculinity by putting down or taking very big and clear distance of other gender identity and expression, such as transgender or transvestites. On the other hand, Göran for example expressed a desire the abolish all the gender norms by claiming that “male and female; they are two expressions I hope will disappear soon”, but still hesitates when it comes to take actions as a drag queen to make that happen and hands over the political fight over to drag kings, a group that is recognised for being explicitly more political and subversive that drag queens may be, specially here in Sweden. Still, there is no deny that even though drag queens may reaffirm the gender norms in their performances, just by being men in women’s clothing, they are already defying it in one way or another.

The oscillation between the gender binary is described by my informants as something that have to put their effort in to do, and something they experiment with throughout their time as drag artist. By straightening their personal side with life experience, but also experimenting with their drag persona, my informants finds a balance in the relationship between their “real self” and their “persona” and being able to, expressed in their words, pick some traits they want to incorporate in either their personal life or their drag persona. How that process looks and are developed depends on the informant, but I could interpret certain patterns that made a difference, specially related to age. I interpreted certain resistance in my older informants to experimenting with their persona, maybe because they belong to a generation where it was shameful to be something that was considered deviant from the norm, in difference to my younger informants that have grown up in an era and a culture that has incorporated drag in the popular culture, both with influences from United States, but also Swedish. But they still agreed on a certain level that creating their drag persona is through experimenting and evolving, challenging themselves and looking around what is presented in the world. By creating and recreating, they rupture the established gender norms, transforming the gender (Butler, 1988). This search and rupture with the norm

does not necessarily start by creating a drag persona, most of my informants experimented other art forms that finally led them to drag but that they recognize where a start to their drag persona, such as theatre, dancing or spex¹⁹. Through all these previous experience, their bodies builds its corporeality creating new structures of reference, as well as adapting and accommodating those that he already has internalized (García, 2012).

For further studies, it would be interesting to follow up specifically on the Swedish drag scene and drag queens to see if there has been an actual change in their ways of thinking and/or doing drag. Since the drag scene was latent during so many decades and changes do not always happens fast, this follow up could be interesting to implement in at least ten years. It would also be interesting to investigate the intersectional identities that may include the drag scene, which my informants have taking distance from. An example of that is the Canadian drag queen “Victoria Sin” that identifies themselves as a non-binary femme, celebrating femininity divorced from womanhood, essentialism, patriarchal and colonial expectations, and not fitting the norm of “traditional” drag queens as gay cis-male.

¹⁹ Spex: An interactive theatre form mainly found at Swedish universities and colleges. The participants in spex are usually students or younger graduates.

7. References

- Allaire, C. 2019, February 24,-last update, *Billy Porter on Why He Wore a Gown, Not a Tuxedo, to the Oscars*. Available: <https://www.vogue.com/article/billy-porter-oscars-red-carpet-gown-christian-siriano> [2019, -04-16].
- Anne McClintock 1995, *Imperial Leather*, Routledge Ltd, GB.
- Bailey, M.M. 2014, "Engendering space: Ballroom culture and the spatial practice of possibility in Detroit", *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 489-507.
- Bailey, M.M. 2009, "Performance as Invention: Ballroom Culture and the Politics of HIV/AIDS in Detroit", *Souls*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 253-274.
- Barrett, R. 2017, *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language, Gender, and Gay Male Subcultures*, Oxford University Press, United States of America.
- Berbary, L.A. & Johnson, C.W. 2017, "En/Activist Drag: Kings Reflect on Queerness, Queens, and Questionable Masculinities", *Leisure Sciences*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 305-318.
- Butler, J. 1993, *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*, Routledge, Great Britain.
- Butler, J. 1990, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, Great Britain.
- Butler, J. 1988, "Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory", *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, pp. 519-531.
- Collins, P. 1997, "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Where's the Power?", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 22, pp. 375-381.
- Connell, R. 2003, *Masculinities*, 0002nd edn, University of California Press, United States of America.
- Connell, R. 1995, *Masculinities*, University of California Press, United States of America.
- Dicaprio, N. 1989, *Teorías de la Personalidad*, Mc Graw Hill, Mexico.

Donna Haraway 1988, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 575-599.

García, M. 2012, "Análisis metafísico-noológico de la corporeidad desde el pensamiento de Xavier Zubiri: La Apertura Corporal", *Thémata. Revista de Filosofía*, vol. 46, pp. 599-606.

Haider, A. 2018, 20 august-last update, *How drag balls went mainstream*. Available: <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180810-drag-balls-the-glamorous-performances-that-mean-resistance>[2019, -02-18].

Hopkins, S.J. 2004, ""Let the Drag Race Begin"", *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 46, no. 3-4, pp. 135-149.

Johnson, C.W. & Dunlap, R. 2011, ""They were not drag queens, they were playboy models and bodybuilders': media, masculinities and gay sexual identity", *Annals of Leisure Research*, vol. 14, no. 2-3, pp. 209-223.

Jung, A. 2016, 23 march-last update, *Real Talk With RuPaul*. Available: <https://www.vulture.com/2016/03/rupaul-drag-race-interview.html> [2019, -02-05].

Knutson, D., Koch, J.M., Sneed, J. & Lee, A. 2018, "The Emotional and Psychological Experiences of Drag Performers: A Qualitative Study", *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 32-50.

Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, Svend 2009, *Den Kvalitative Forskningsintervjun*; 2:2 edn, Studentlitteratur AB, Lund.

Lund, S. (No Date), *John Lind – Sveriges första dragqueen*. Available: <http://www.saralund.se/transvestit/artiklar/john-lind-sveriges-forsta-dragqueen/> [2019, May 21].

Mapstone, L. 2018, Mar 3,-last update, *RuPaul: Drag is political and combats male-dominated culture*. Available: <https://www.independent.ie/style/celebrity/celebrity-news/rupaul-drag-is-political-and-combats-maledominated-culture-36665612.html> [2019, -05-29].

Moncrieff, M. & Lienard, P. 2017, "A Natural History of the Drag Queen Phenomenon", *Evolutionary Psychology*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 1-14.

Ramazanoglu, Caroline & Holland, Janet 2002, *Feminist Methodology*, SAGE Publications LTD, London.

RFSL 2015, -10-26-last update, *Glossary*. Available: <https://www.rfsl.se/en/lgbtq-facts/lgbtq/glossary/> [2019, -04-06].

Ruiz Calvente, M. 2010, "El cuerpo humano como objeto estético", *A Parte Rei: revista de filosofía*, , no. 72.

Sandoval, J. 2018, "The RuPaul Effect: The Exploration of the Costuming Rituals of Drag Culture in Social Media and the Theatrical Performativity of the Male Body in the Ambit of the Everyday", *Theatre Symposium*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 100-117.

Schacht, S. 2000, "Gay Female Impersonators and the Masculine Construction of "other"" in *Gay masculinities* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, pp. 247-268.

Schacht, S.P. & Underwood, L. 2004, "The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators", *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 46, no. 3-4, pp. 1-17.

Smith, D. 1997, "Comment on Hekman's "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited"", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 22, pp. 392-398.

Wortham, J. 2018, Jan 24,-last update, *Is 'RuPaul's Drag Race' the Most Radical Show on TV?* [Homepage of New York Times Company], [Online]. Available: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1990371169>.

8. Appendixes

8.1 Interview guide

1. Can you tell me about your experience with drag in general throughout your life?
2. Tell me about your process of when you started to create your drag until today?
3. Can you tell me about your experience of the drag scene in Sweden?
4. What does drag mean to you?
5. How has your relation to your drag persona been during your lifetime?
6. Sometimes it is possible to hear/read through some drag queens platforms the discussion about that drag is not something you DO, but something you ARE. Have you had that discussion during your time as drag? Tell me about it and what you think about that.
7. In a simplifies way, we can say that Judith Butler built her theory of gender and gender as social construction based on observations in she did in the drag world. What do think about that gender is social constructed, and that drag has such an important role in gender studies?

8.2 Information to participant

I am Camila Fonseca, student of the Master program Gender, Migration and Social Justice at Lund University. I am doing my master thesis where I try to explore some aspects of the practice of drag.

In this document I will try to explain the purpose of the interview, and also your rights as a part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether you want to participate in the research or not. Take the time you need and feel free to discuss it with someone else if you want or need to. If this document contains anything that you do not understand, please ask me and I will explain. You can also ask me if questions come up later.

This research will involve your participation in an interview that will take about one hour. You are being invited to take part in this research because I feel that your experience with drag can contribute to my understanding and knowledge of the subject. The purpose of this study is to contribute in the field of gender studies, focusing on drag as an important part of gender expression. Your interview is likely to give me a broader comprehension of the practice of drag, providing the tools to analyse aspects of gender, performance and mainstreaming, among others.

It is possible that during the interview you may feel that some questions or topics are very personal and if you don't feel comfortable you can choose to not answer, without having to give me further explanations. Likewise, you can withdraw from the project at any time without it harming you in any way. The project is following the ethical guidelines as outlines by Swedish Research Council (<https://www.vr.se/english/analysis-and-assignments/ethics/ethics-in-research.html>) and for these ethical reasons, any information about you will be replaced with another name instead of your real name. Only I will know what your real information and it will not be shared with or given to anyone. The audio, transcription and informed consent will be saved safely in a folder where only I will have access.

Even though I can't offer any economical compensation for the interview, if we meet in person I will offer coffee and some biscuit.

As I mentioned before, if you have any questions you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you can contact me on following: camilafonseca0922@gmail.com and/or + 46 76 280 99 49.

8.3 Informed Consent

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and any questions that have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

I, Camila Fonseca, have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands what will be done.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this informed consent has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher _____

Signature of Researcher _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

8.4 Interviews

The transcribed interviews are available for review.

Interview 1

Date: 19th March 2019

Length: 1.03:04

Interview 2

Date: 27th March 2019

Length: 0.50:30

Interview 3

Date: 27th March 2019

Length: 1.09:48

Interview 4

Date: 27th March 2019

Length: 1.06:19

Interview 5

Date: 28th March 2019

Length: 1.25:50