# **Interview with Amoura Teese**

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Interviewer: Hello

Amoura Teese: Hello

Interviewer: Can you hear me, sorry?

Amoura Teese: Yeah, I can.

Interviewer: How are you doing today?

Amoura Teese: I'm doing good thank you, finally awake and fed and my face doesn't feel like I'm sinking in.

Interviewer: Before I begin, did you get a chance to look at that participation form I sent you?

Amoura Teese: Let me just look back it over again, I just kind of skimmed it. I figure you know, we’ll just kind of like talking in and out.

Interviewer: Yeah

Amoura Teese: I'm sorry. Where did you send it to me?

Interviewer: Your email.

Amoura Teese: Here it is, okay got it - oh yeah

Interviewer: Did you have any questions or anything about it?

Amoura Teese: No, not really. I've had an interview about drag research before. I mean, I'm pretty open. I'm pretty vocal on social media too, so I'm very open to answering whatever questions you may have to ask

Interviewer: Okay, I'll go ahead and get started then. My first question is, When was the first time that you heard about drag?

Amoura Teese: The first time I heard about drag I was probably like 18-19 years old go back in like 2008/2009, like right after high school.

Interviewer: What was your initial reaction to it? Do you remember?

Amoura Teese: Initially, I was like really excited about performers, you know, you know, being LGBT and like, everyone around them was just so supportive and it was just a party always and it wasn't actually until 2016 that I ended up going to like a drag brunch here in San Francisco. And I made friends with a lot of people in the community and I said to myself ‘I could do this too’ like, I have always been a performer in high school and out and, and it just really interested and just having the whole support of the community and then, you know, being able to express myself as an artist, and as a dancer and a singer and just being able to get involved with, like, more than just say, your group of friends, you know, at the bar. So, that's what really drew me in was the community involvement and the performance aspects.

Interviewer: Yeah, so then did you start performing then in 2016?

Amoura Teese: Yeah, 2016.

Interviewer: How did your family, your friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Amoura Teese: My friends were all very, very supportive. My family, my - my immediate family like my mother and my father were a little thrown off of it. You know, obviously you know, drag isn’t a very familiar culture and you know, heterosexuals that grew up during a time where, you know, like my parents grew up like during like the 50s and 60s, so they just definitely still had a little bit of conservative - a conservative mindset for, for even like 2010. But eventually, like they saw how this, like, artistry and me being actual professional in here in the Bay Area and being an entertainer has actually like not just, you know, not just been a way of expressing myself, but it's also been able to support myself financially and in the community too. So it took them a while, like, maybe like a year for my mom to come to my first drag show and she did, and she got up out of the audience while I was performing and came all the way up to the stage and gave me a hug and it was like, the best moment ever so yeah.

Interviewer: That's awesome. So, who or what has influenced your drag?

Amoura Teese: I always think back to all of the, like, strong women in my family and how much they help, like, support the community aspect in, in our family. My mom and my aunts and my grandmothers have always been role models to me and they've always, because they I was always being looked at look like - like looked out for as a child you know, by all the female figures in my life. And I really like to incorporate their - their confidence and humor and just the overall general like, you know, powerful woman essence of a woman attitude into my drag. And then when it comes to actual performing and like music choice and my musical influences comes from all the pop divas and R&B divas, all the divas in pop culture pretty much. I know some queens are like more inspired by fashion and stuff like that but I'm a lot more inspired by performers and live singers.

Interviewer: So, where does your personal drag name come from?

Amoura Teese: My personal drag name? Well my last name Teese is actually a house name. and I got it from my drag mother, who is a trans woman here in the community who is helping pave the way for other trans women in San Francisco and she does a lot of social work as well too, for trans people of color. And she kind of took me under her wing and introduced me to a lot of people here in the community in San Francisco, and I was adopted in the family and I became House of Teese and then Amoura actually came from a friend who was helping me decide a name, because I wasn't really into like all like the, you know, catchy names and like, you know, being kind of like an innuendo. I just thought that was - it wasn't me because, I'm not really like a comedy queen or a funny queen like that. But they were like, “Well, this is going to be something that you love because I know you love performing so why not call yourself Amoura like love?” I’m like “Oh that’s nice, that’s beautiful I love that,” so Amoura Teese just kind of stuck with me this whole time.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. So, you mentioned comedy queen. You know, there's all kinds of different styles and types of drag. How would you classify or characterize your drags?

Amoura Teese: Um, oh my goodness. I have kind of been like, naming myself like a drag diva extraordinaire, because I don't know I do a little bit of everything. Like I sing, I dance, I do a little - I do some comedy numbers, but it's not like stand-up comedy. It's more like, you know, like lip sync over the track and over like, you know, funny anecdotes, and I sew costumes and I - and I do like other queens’ makeup all the time. So, I don't know, I like to just kind of think of myself as a well-rounded entertainer than categorize myself into like, you know, a pattern. because I've also done a pageant too, you know, so and I'm very active in that life. So, I'm not just a nightlife queen, or a pageant queen, or a comedy queen, or a dancing queen. I'm kind of amalgamation of all of them.

Interviewer: And then you spoke a little bit about your drag mom, do you want to talk a little bit more about maybe like the benefits to being in a house or collective that you've experienced?

Amoura Teese: Yeah, a lot of, I want to say, members in other communities who are still being like you know, grandfathered in little by little, and they’re, you know, just starting out and having a house or a group of friends, you know, as a resource to, you know, not - not just for you know, the LGBT community but have people like, you know, that have your back, you know, pretty much, not just a group of friends you meet at the club all the time, it’s an actual support system, It's like a - it's like a family. And it's, it's not something that I was trying to seek out initially, it just kind of happened to me. So, I think that that was that was kind of like the best way. But to have that support behind you, especially in the LGBT community is, is, really a privilege because a lot of our individuals I know get lost and they turn to dark times or dark ventures that aren’t always beneficial for them, because there are a lot of dark roads you can go down in the community if you don't, you know, respect yourself and treat yourself right. So, I think it's good to have, you know, that support system, that house as you know, kind of like a refuge for, for, yourself when you need that, you know, help whether it's with a mental or, you know, emotional health or if you just needed a friend so I think having a house is super beneficial to being not only a drag queen, but just a member of the LGBT community.

Interviewer: And then, how often would you say that you perform?

Amoura Teese: Before quarantine?

Interviewer: Of course, before everything going on right now.

Amoura Teese: I was performing four of - four days out of the week pretty much - So I was gonna say I just I consider myself a full time queen I perform, usually Thursday through Sunday. And a couple of other couple days of the week either take time for myself or I'm working on costumes or costume orders or hair, or something like that, or social media.

Interviewer: And then do you perform at like the same place consistently? Or do you go to different venues, anything like that?

Amoura Teese: Both, I have consistent gigs at a few like a handful of venues here in the Bay Area, and then every now and then I get asked to, to, like come and join the show that I may have not been in like a few weeks or I'll get asked to do, like, a private event for like the private individual for a birthday or something like that. Or, like even a company party like I've definitely done multiple corporate events, you know, for like pride and pride bingo and stuff like that.

Interviewer: What goes into getting ready for a performance for you?

Amoura Teese: Well, thankfully at this point, I've been able to catalog a whole bunch of different types of performances in my repertoire. So I kind of, if I know the gig and I know what I you know what they call for, then I know like, I'll pull out that one outfit that suits that theme, or I'll pull out that one hair that fits that theme. But I generally start with a nice hot shower. And, you know, just kind of get in the zone by doing a lot of self-care. Like with my skin and with you know, my body and like prepping my mind getting some good music on. Sometimes it's good to have friends around too because you have that you know, positive supporting energy. And also, it's always good to have a prepared drag bag, so that's one of the things I also prepare to, to feel, you know, confident that I'm going to get this done so

Interviewer: And then what would you say are some of the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist that you face?

Amoura Teese: The first challenge is financial stability. I would say that as much as I love performing, and I love being part of the community, which I still will after I talk about this even after maybe after I'm 30 years old after I'm 40 years old, I will still love to be a performer and love to be part of the community. But um yeah drag doesn't pay as well as people might think being an entertainer might be and how glamorous it might look financially, and that is one of the struggles, like this is a hustle, you know in order for me to like make all my ends meet and still have an extra level for myself like I have the exhaust myself to perform. So, and I've definitely done my fair share of piling gigs like three gigs in a day and just being in drag all day. Another struggle with drag is having to be in drag as often and like worrying about like your skin and like your body health and physicality like you know, like, “is my knee hurting do I gotta ice it today from being in heels all day?” And then the physical aspect because you are in like, you know this whole other body and also in heels all day. And then lastly, it's kind of like a stigma there's a stigma kind of in the community about dating a drag queen, so my love life has definitely been not as consistent as I would like it to be. But, because of there are still like stigmas and misogyny in even our - in the gay community where it's not always seen as a positive thing - not a positive thing, but not a sought after thing to date a drag queen unless like you like really, like, love drag and you know want to support this person you can overlook all the other aspects of like coming home late, going to the bars, you know and performing until 2am in the morning and so my love life has kind of been a roller coaster ride which I wish would be more stable because I am getting in my 30s and a lot of other queens my age will tell you, dating as a drag queen is not the easiest, easiest thing to do.

Interviewer: Yeah definitely, that makes sense. Would you consider your drag to be political?

Amoura Teese: I consider all drag to be political. I think drag itself is a political movement. It's, it's, it's basically like, you know, you know, it's not just an expression. It's an expression of art, of course. But it goes against, like all the conservative traditions in general. And I think that especially with the political climate that we're in right now, where there's like, half and half going on with Republicans and our independent and Democratic parties and like, like the Republican Party will always try to instill that conservative, all American experience for all Americans, you know, all around, you know, in the United States. And I think anything that is anti-that is definitely a political movement. I definitely have made some, you know, political statements, you know, on social media before and I've done performances where I have, you know, spoken about, like, for example, when -the whole healthcare thing that, oh yeah I totally forgot. Oh gosh, anyway, I've definitely done performances where they've been a little bit more politically driven, but I also include comedy and just in general and you know, being entertaining in general. But I - like I said, I think drag in general is making a political statement against conservative and, and trying to move towards a future to bring more acceptance to our expression and human expression and, and, empowering the LGBT community and also the trans community as well too.

Interviewer: and then is there anything unique to the drag scene in the Bay area where you live compared to other places in the country or world that you've seen?

Amoura Teese: You know, I think the drag scene here in SF is really underrated. I think that everybody in Los Angeles is really all about the hype and like in the Hollywood aspect of it and the like I got to make it in LA, I got to make it in West Hollywood and I got to you know, be social with all these you know, like people who want to be famous, because I want to be famous kind of thing. So, I feel like it's really superficial in LA. But they have some of the most dedicated hard-working queens that have kind of set the bar. And I think that in places like in the south, like in Texas, in the Midwest where they have a lot of people pageant queens like they don't have a lot of different diverse drag that we have here in San Francisco. We don't just have like pretty female impersonators, like we have drag kings, and we have trans performers, and we have performers who don't do the regular top 40 songs, we have performers who do those cool numbers, performers that do horror numbers, you know, gore and suspense and people who you know, work with prosthetics and costuming, and special effects. And so, I think San Francisco's drag scene is really underrated and we have a lot of different types of drag here across the board and yeah, that’s it.

Interviewer: What pronouns do you use inside of and outside of drag?

Amoura Teese: I'm actually very open to all my pronouns. So, I have my friends who - all my friends, they say he or she, they/them. I'm pretty much comfortable with it all along the spectrum. I wouldn't consider myself - I mean, I kind of have considered myself non-binary in a way because I am - I'm naturally comfortable expressing myself in a way that's neither feminine or masculine and I've kind of I can also I can, like, - I have this duality about my personality and my, my drag that I can go from one end of the spectrum to the other. So, I'm, I'm all the way around.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced how you think about gender at all?

Amoura Teese: Yes, I mean, I really didn't know too much about the trans community until I did drag and that's when I started learning more about pronouns and like, you know, the correct way to, to approach somebody who is like trans or non-binary. And like also learning the term when I came to me during the term genderqueer, or gender, you know, you know, genderfuck or stuff like that. but it's definitely helped, like, raise awareness and acceptance and then like, you know, being a community leader. I know one I've set a good standard for all the younger queens that come after me to realize that, hey, you know, this is a safe space for everybody and so I think that it's good to educate people on those pronouns.

Interviewer: And then has drag influenced your personal gender identity at all?

Amoura Teese: No, not at all because I think I think even looking back, and when I was really young, and I could, I mean, I always kind of had a little bit more of a feminine than masculine expression when it came to me, my personality as a child. And I think that also might have also come with just me being very comfortable and very supported by a lot of the female figures in my family so I'm kind of like, I just kind of wanted to be like them. But I'm sorry, I kinda got lost. What was the question again?

Interviewer: Oh, you’re fine, I just was asking if there was ways that drag has influenced your personal gender identity?

Amoura Teese: Oh, um, I would say drag has made me more comfortable with my personal gender identity, and it's made me more fluid with my gender identity.

Interviewer: And then has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're outside of drag at all?

Amoura Teese: Yes, definitely, my drag, when in drag, gives me so much power and out of drag, I know that I am still that same person. I may just not have the makeup and the body and the outfit on, but I know that this is me on the inside projecting it and so every time I get out of drag kind of always trying to like take a little piece of myself, like I’m Amoura, so like Amoura gave you this confidence now reinsert it back into your own self and you know, make shit happen.

Interviewer: Right, I love that. Is there any other ways you can think of how drag has impacted or changed you?

Amoura Teese: I definitely never thought I would experience support from a community as I did when I started drag and it's made a huge impact on my life because when I moved to San Francisco, I was kind of moving away from all of my immediate and close family. And I knew I wanted to live here in the city versus in like the suburbs around the Bay Area. And the community here has just been, they've seen the hard work I want to put in and the person that I am and that I want to support the community. I was Miss Gay San Francisco last year and I and I got to raise money for causes that I never thought existed or even, you know, needed help and as more and more as I learned, I started more and more as I learned, I’m sorry, the more I dived into the community, the more I learned about how much good they do and how much impact that I can have on it and so yeah, drag has definitely changed my life in a way that is just giving me more sense of self and more sense of community and being more aware of the problems that I want to help be a part of to solve them. It just uplifts me, and I know that it uplifts everyone else.

Interviewer: I'm curious as to how like different social identities have impacted your experience with drag or you know, vice versa, how drag has impacted your identity, such as you know, your gender, your race, your class, age, anything like that. Do you have anything to talk about in that?

Amoura Teese: Can you rephrase the question again?

Interviewer: Yeah I know it’s kind of a long question, so has maybe like one or more of your social identities so you know your gender, your race, your class, age, religion, anything like that impacted your experience of drag? You know, for example, sometimes people of color will have different experiences to talk about or you know, different classes, you know, if you're working or lower class something like that.

Amoura Teese: You know, it's funny because I'm around so many different people all the time, and I am around POC community, trans community, and you know your regular, you know, butch gay couple in the community so I don't know, I just, I kind of take it all in as one but I mean, to get so specific, I mean the situations are so like specific, like I couldn’t just name one it’s so hard. I mean, yeah, I’ve definitely done my best to help represent for my younger, Latino and Latinx community here, but I don’t know, I’m just not that kind of - I've never been that person to like, take negativity and let it bring me down. So, I've always, you know, wanted to uplift others and support others, so I don’t know, I've always wanted to have a positive impact no matter what community I’ve touched on here in San Francisco, and our community. Yeah, as far as facing adversities, so far besides just conservative people, there’s nothing else I really face.

Interviewer: And then if you could go back in time to you know, your younger self, do you have any advice you'd give to yourself?

Amoura Teese: I tell myself to go to school for music, I’d totally tell myself to do that - oh my goodness no -

Interviewer: You could still go to school for that!

Amoura Teese: Oh I know. I mean, like, I know, I know. Everybody always says that you can always go back to school for all kinds of stuff and I’m like it's so different when you're like 30 years old versus like, you want to come right out of first out of high school and you want to like, do it from the start, but I'm just thinking to myself like, I should have listened to my counselor [laughs]. But what would I tell myself? I would tell myself to just be strong and be patient. Don't let all those negative voices hold you back from achieving your dreams

Interviewer: And then how would you personally define drag?

Amoura Teese: We're gonna be here for a minute - because you know a lot of people still think that drag is restricted to just gay men. So, I don’t know, drag is - drag is anything you want it to be. I mean when you're in like, say you're in a play or a musical you're putting on a character, or movie that's kind of like getting yourself into drag for getting yourself into a different mindset. And you're performing you know, so I feel like drag is any form of physical performance, expression that you want to put on this character that, you know, makes you more powerful. And it’s - yeah, I guess I mean, that's kind of how I feel about drag is it can be any type of art form or expression as long as you're, as long as you're doing it in front of people, you know, like your physical expression.

Interviewer: What do you think personally is the purpose of drag?

Amoura Teese: To fight that tradition, to fight that misogynistic you know, mindset to go against you know, any type of anti-expression. I've just seen drag free a lot of people from their demons as well, too. I just feel like drag is kinda like a - it’s almost a method of savior, you know we used to call like drag brunch on Sunday “church,” but kind of related to that.

Interviewer: And then, do you think that drag is sexual?

Amoura Teese: It can be it's not directly sexual. I know people, you know, it's a whole it's a whole ‘nother research paper about sex work and drag. But um, it can be anything, but you know, drag, like in general, is it sexually driven? No. Entertainment? Yes. Can the entertainment be sexually driven? Yes. It doesn't mean that you know, the person is trying to have sex with you when they're coming off the stage.

Interviewer: And then, how do you personally feel about RuPaul’s Drag Race?

Amoura Teese: I think RuPaul’s Drag Race has offered an amazing platform for our communities to come into pop culture and into the limelight, and showcase that, you know, this is an actual serious job, you know, and I mean, not just as an entertainer, you know, which can be fun in freelancing and whatnot, but it can be a full time job. You know, like, I think RuPaul's Drag Race is actually one of the hardest television shows in existence, because you have to sing, you have to dance, you have to make costumes. You have to learn lines, you have to perform, then you get critiqued, you have to be on live television, and then you have to deal with the reality of it when you come out of the TV show and you have to deal with everybody coming out at you. So, it's not like, you know, you're just one-faceted person reciting a few lines, you know, like a movie or you know, a movie actor. You're doing everything from the ground up. So I think that they've offered a great platform for drag, and then there's the other side of it, where people say that RuPaul's Drag Race has ruined drag because it puts other queens on a pedestal that may - that other queens feel like you know, they would rather deserve the opportunity. But I think when it comes to that, to each its own, and everybody has different experiences, and frankly, I think if you put enough hard work you can be - excuse me, be a drag entertainer that can be celebrated by not - by your community and not just because you're on TV show, but that’s how I feel about RuPaul’s Drag Race.

Interviewer: And then if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would that be?

Amoura Teese: I got a list, girl - you say one thing or just like -

Interviewer: If you’ve got a couple things tied you can list a couple, I mean, it doesn’t have to be one thing.

Amoura Teese: I wish drag performers were taken this seriously, so that we could actually get paid as actual entertainers and not just, you know, some just some homosexual coming into the bar crossdressing for 50 bucks. Because that's a lot of the base fees for a lot of shows around the US. So, I wish that drag would be taken more seriously as an entertainment industry, and that community should invest in that if you see that the product is actually like well driven and well-oiled as they would say. A lot of it's about just kind of changing people's minds and I also wish that more people would just be more open to embracing their community, because I like I said before how a lot of younger performers and younger people in the community who are just kind of coming in they feel ostracized and I mean obviously because you know, maybe they weren't accepted you know, with their family or their friends back home and why they need to be with you know, you know, their LGBT community. I wish people would just be a little bit more patient and open to expressing themselves in drag and that drag is for everybody.

Interviewer: What do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag? And where do you think they come from?

Amoura Teese: Well, the obvious one about how all drag queens are men who want to be women. And obviously, I mean that I think that just comes from, you know, being, you know, uneducated and not understanding - not wanting to understand because it's different. That was the question right, misconceptions?

Interviewer: Yeah, just like misconceptions about drag and where they come from.

Amoura Teese: That drag is sexual also, you know that people want to assume that a drag queen is not just a performer that a drag queen is also a sex worker, because we definitely get our fair share of individual men and women both that, you know, feel like they have to put their hands on somebody, because you know, they want you and they think that you’re trying to offer them sex because you just look sexy. And also that, the misconception of that all drag queens are submissive and in like a friendship or a partnership, goes back to me talking about experiencing relationships in the community as a gay man or as a non-binary mutual as an individual in general in the community, being a drag artist was kind of tough, but I would say that that, you know, that submissive misconception that, you know, drag queens are only feminine and they you know, they want to, you know, date another feminine person, or they you know, want a daddy or something like that. You know that whole misconception that drag queens have this one, you know, feminine personality that they're always like that, you know? But when in general like, I know like a slew of drag queens who out of drag you would be like, “Wow, that's totally - you could pass off as a man coming out of a tall building in the financial district” you know, in this suit, you know, so that general misconception of you know, traditional roles in society.

Interviewer: What do you think can be done to help change these misconceptions?

Amoura Teese: I mean what has helped change these misconceptions has been RuPaul’s Drag Race for sure. I just think having drag more in the media, having our younger generation to see this a lot earlier on, and experiencing drag as a form of, you know, artistic expression in a way that they could, you know, do it because I, I know that there are heterosexual men out there who like doing drag, who like entertaining people, there are definitely heterosexual men who cross dress just for themselves, that’s true, that’s a whole different conversation. But I think that, um, yeah, that people should be just open in general to educating themselves. I mean, kind of like you do or you don’t kind of situation. So we- and you know, RuPaul got really lucky with the way that you know, she worked her way through the entertainment industry and has now made drag this, you know, grand platform you know, for drag but I still feel like there’s obviously you know, you know anti- you know individualism out there and like people who want you to just follow the conservative roles.

Interviewer: And then if you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag from this interview, what would that be?

Amoura Teese: Drag isn't meant to justify your sex or your gender. Drag is for everyone. Drag can be your way to express your individualism. You don't even have to be a performer. You don't have to be a singer, you don't have to be great at makeup. I think that, you know, just like somebody who wants to sit down and write poetry, somebody who wants to sit down and you know draw an illustration, it’s the same way you know it’s to get that relief, that feeling of being creative and satisfying that, you know, part of yourself but just doing it with yourself instead of doing it on a piece of paper, I guess you could word that in a different way.

Interviewer: No - anything’s helpful, and then did you have any other experiences or stories, anything else you'd like to share?

Amoura Teese: I mean becoming a drag performer like I’ve definitely came out, you know, by myself and when I was introduced to my drag family and kind of it, you know, opened so many doors. And so I just want to I would love to encourage others out there who are you know, in the community solo, to not be afraid to make friends and now underneath me I have individuals that have joined my house, and I've kind of been like their house mother. So like, you know, I encourage all other LGBT people to acquire, and like acquire a gay family almost, you know if you need support and I think that a lot of younger gay people feel alone and like they can’t trust anybody because their immediate family or their immediate community can't accept them. So, I think that there definitely needs to be more outreach to those individuals and some – something, like there needs to be some kind of like, platform for them to, like a platform or some kind of, I don’t know, something that they can witness and view so that they don't feel as lost, you know? Because without my drag family, I would definitely be lost, and I wouldn't be where I was today.

Interviewer: Well, if there is nothing else you'd like to share, thank you so much for participating.

Amoura Teese: Of course, well, thank you so much for inquiring, did you find me on Instagram where - how'd you find me?

Interviewer: I believe Twitter is usually where I find people.

Amoura Teese: And I have like 200 followers, that’s it! Look at you! Well, you know, I definitely appreciate the interview, whenever I have done these interviews before with other students or people who just want to do research on drag, it’s always best to reflect, so I appreciate that as well.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, thank you so much and stay safe!

Amoura Teese: You too, have a good one!

Interviewer: You too, thank you! Bye**.**